Different Ways of Being Educator: A Sociocultural Exploration of Educator Identity and Development in Practice, in a System of Non-traditional Flexi Schools

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ABSTRACT

Engagement in conventional schooling is untenable for some young Australians due to complex social, emotional and intellectual needs and past experiences of failure and exclusion. An alternative for engaging disenfranchised young people in education is through a system of non-traditional flexible schools. This research explores educator identity and development in practice in five ‘flexi schools’ in Queensland that reengage young people with complex needs. In the exploration of educator identity and development in practice, this study seeks to explore one overarching research issue: how practice in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development. Two questions have been formulated to inform the overarching research issue and relate to two specific domains of practice. The first question asks: How do ways of working in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice? The second research question asks: How do ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice?

Using a sociocultural theoretical lens and design experiment methodology, educators’ ways of working and professional learning have been explored. This occurred through analysis of questionnaire data incorporating descriptive statistics, and through thematic analysis of questionnaires (N=32), interviews (N=16), and reflective practice group (RPG) data. Reflective practice data included written evaluations from participants (N= 20) and researcher journal entries (N=13) on the experience of co-facilitating RPG sessions across five sites.

The analysis reveals the influence of the flexi schools’ context on educator identity and development in practice through three overarching themes that are a synthesis of practice in two domains: ways of working and ways of professional learning. These themes include: the primacy of relationships; an emphasis on being and becoming a critically reflective
practitioner; and the art of holding complexity. Educators’ perspectives of their work with young people and colleagues in the context, and the ways they engage in professional learning, reveal three main shifts in their sense of identity and development. The first movement is from task orientation to greater people orientation, highlighting responsiveness to learners’ needs. The second movement is from doing and knowing with an emphasis on knowledge transmission, towards knowledge creation to become co-learners with young people and colleagues. The third movement is from managed outcomes to more emergent outcomes, shaped by emphasising learner’s interests. These three movements are supported by educators being relational, critically reflective, and able to hold complexity by balancing flexibility, multidisciplinary practice and relational dynamics in highly complex settings.

The implications of this study are that further preparation and professional learning is required for multidisciplinary staff, including teachers, working in these unique contexts to develop the necessary skills and dispositions for working with principles that guide relationships and promote a democratic learning community. These principles include respect, participation, safe and legal, and honesty. Using principles as tools of negotiation rather than rules, requires educators to prioritise relationships so as to understand the complex needs of young people and be able to work collaboratively with colleagues. Engaging in critical reflective practice supports adults to become co-learners with the young people they walk with, and to challenge their own assumptions, beliefs and values about the purpose of education and the nature of learners. The capacity to hold complexity involves adults listening to understand young people’s needs and interests and to recognise their agency, as they become self-directed learners. In this context professional learning occurs through situated learning, informal mentoring and being guided by more experienced colleagues, as educators engage relationally with young people and other workers to negotiate and co-construct their educator identity and development in practice.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)_____________________________

Ann Morgan
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his legacy. When I completed my first degree, he reminded me that it was ‘a ticket to learn’.
This has grounded me in the value of lifelong learning, within and beyond the privilege of formal education. Let the learning journey continue!
STATEMENT ACKNOWLEDGING EXTENT AND NATURE OF ASSISTANCE RECEIVED IN PURSUIT OF THE RESEARCH AND PREPARATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis was completed by the PhD Candidate with assistance from her supervisors in their supervisory role as per the Griffith University Code of Practice for Supervision of Higher Degree Research Students. Assistance was provided from the ARC Project Research Assistant and an independent researcher on three occasions during data analysis when co-analysis with peer researchers for inter-rater authenticity was required. Apart from input from supervisors, no external editorial assistance was received.
WORK PUBLISHED IN THE COURSE OF THE RESEARCH


CONFERENCE PAPERS AND WORK IN PROGRESS SEMINARS


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<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

The Research Issue

For some young Australians, participation in conventional schooling is unsustainable due to a variety of complex factors and past experiences of failure and marginalisation. In Queensland, Australia, a network of flexi schools provides an alternative. Flexi schools are small schools offering flexible learning programs to young people choosing to re-engage in education. Young people in these settings may be enrolled through referral from a school, an organisation, or through self-referral. An important aspect of young people’s enrolment is their active choice to attend. Many have been unable or unwilling to participate in conventional schooling due to a range of complex circumstances and adverse experiences of social exclusion.

Flexi schools are staffed by multidisciplinary teams who work to enfranchise young people with multiple complex needs. In these multidisciplinary settings, educators may include registered teachers, educational support workers, youth workers, social workers and a range of other workers supporting young people to re-engage. This research study explores the influence of the flexi schools’ context on the professional identity and development of educators who work to enfranchise young people.

Throughout the study, the term disenfranchised young people has been used, rather than disengaged or at-risk young people, in an attempt to acknowledge contributing social factors to young people not participating in, or being excluded from, conventional schooling. Education is recognised as a right for all children (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) and the responsibility of governments to provide educational options that are inclusive of those who have been disenfranchised from conventional education for a variety of complex reasons is acknowledged. For the
purpose of this research, the term ‘child’ will be replaced with the term ‘young person’ which better reflects the ages of the young people in this study, who are generally aged from 13 to 18 years, with some instances of young people in their early 20s.

Educators who work to enfranchise young people in this context, find ways of being and becoming educator that are different to what they may have experienced in conventional school settings. The flexi schools’ context influences the ways educators co-construct and negotiate their professional identity and development in practice. This study seeks to provide insights into the various ways that this occurs through addressing the research questions.

**The research questions.**

In the exploration of educator identity and development in practice in the network of flexi schools, this study seeks to explore one overarching research issue: how practice in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development. Two questions have been formulated to inform the overarching research issue and relate to two specific domains of practice, viz:

- How do ways of working in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice?
- How do ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice?

The research adds value to the field in that understanding the influence of the flexi schools’ context on educator identity and development in practice may provide insights into how educators can more effectively support young people who are choosing to re-engage in education. Additionally, this research may inform the kinds of professional development and learning that would meet the professional learning needs
of educators who work in a range of learning choices programs to re-enfranchise young people.

Chapter Overview

This introductory chapter presents the background and rationale for the research. It points to national trends that highlight the need for alternative models of education that are capable of re-engaging disenfranchised young people to create greater social inclusion and social justice. Australian trends in education and employment are briefly presented in order to consider how they impact on initiatives designed for the re-engagement of disenfranchised young people. Alternative education or learning choices programs are briefly defined. Educator professional identity and development in practice are explained in terms of how these ideas are understood in this study and the details of the research setting are described. The theoretical lens adopted, and the research methodology implemented in this study, are introduced. Possible implications and significance of this study exploring the influence of the flexi schools’ context on educator identity and development in practice are considered and the potential contribution to knowledge about professional learning needs of educators working in the field of alternative education is explored. Finally, the structure of the thesis is outlined and a brief chapter summary provided.

Background to the Research Investigation

Despite the increased challenges of recent global economic, social and political instability, the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), (2011), reports that unemployment and non-completion of schooling for young people have been issues of concern for a number of decades in Australia. Since the mid-1990s, figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2010) indicate that the rates of school completion in Australia have remained fairly stable at around 75%. As reported by the
Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF) (2007), there has been no significant shift in these figures for the last 15 years. For Indigenous young people, the school retention rate in 2011 was significantly lower at 48.7% (ABS, 2011). One aspect of concern in these figures is that of the 20% who do not finish year 12 or its equivalent, there is an over-representation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (DSF, 2007; FYA, 2008; McGaw, 2008).

**Alternative education and learning choices programs.**

Contemporary economic, social and cultural shifts require that new ways of understanding and providing education are vital and overdue (Wyn, 2008), particularly for those who are disenfranchised, if they are to experience social inclusion (FYA, 2011) and social justice. The use of the term *alternative education* in this sector is somewhat controversial and disagreement is common (Aron & Zweig, 2003; te Riele, 2012). This term is widely used in the literature to denote a range of different kinds of programs designed to meet the needs of disenfranchised young people. Despite the inconsistencies in its understanding and application, the term alternative education denotes a range of learning and engagement options beyond conventional schooling.

Another term, *learning choices programs* was adopted by te Riele (2012) in the mapping of the diverse range of programs on offer nationally in this sector. For this research, the terms alternative education and learning choices programs are used interchangeably to denote the wider sector incorporating non-school and school programs. The terms *flexi schools’ context, network of flexi schools* and *flexi schools*, are terms that are used to refer to the network of schools in which this research was conducted.

Importantly, the literature on alternative education or learning choices programs indicates that the experience of disenfranchised young people who re-engage in education through these options is significantly different to, and generally more positive
than what was previously experienced in conventional schooling (Fraser, Davis, & Singh, 1997; Mills & McGregor, 2010; Smyth, 2006). It is for this reason that the study is based in this network of schools, where positive experiences are reportedly more likely for disenfranchised students returning to schooling.

**Professional identity and development of educators.**

This research study explores the professional identity and development of educators who work to enfranchise young people in a system of flexi schools in Queensland, Australia. The study aims to develop a greater understanding and appreciation of how the ways of working and ways of professional learning within the research context influence educators’ identity and development in practice. Increased understanding and appreciation of how the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development in practice may provide future directions for enhanced professional learning both at pre-service and in-service levels. Such enhancements may ultimately prove beneficial for young peoples’ learning outcomes as they choose to re-engage in learning choices programs or in flexi schools, staffed by well-trained, quality educators who are sufficiently prepared for working in this context.

**The research setting.**

This research is situated within a network of flexi schools located across Queensland, Australia. The flexi schools promote an approach to education that is consistent with the features of alternative education that will be explored in greater depth in the literature review in Chapter Two. At the time this research was conducted, the network of flexi schools consisted of five school sites that supported early school leavers between the ages of 12 and 20, who had decided to re-engage with schooling. A school site consisted of between 50 and 85 young people and was staffed by a multidisciplinary team. These teams may have included a combination of educators from a range of disciplines including registered teachers, education support workers,
youth workers, social workers, health workers, counsellors, community development workers, job placement workers, chaplains, creative arts workers, outdoor education workers, and administrative support staff. There were approximately 80 staff working in the network of flexi schools when the research was conducted.

Four of the five school sites had one or more outreaches connected to them. An outreach consisted of up to 15 young people between the ages of 12 -15 working with a youth worker and a teacher. The outreaches offered a high degree of flexibility: they were mobile, operating with a van, working within community spaces including community centres, parks and libraries. At times outreaches visited and interacted with the main school community for whole school activities or to access specific learning spaces (e.g., art, music or manual arts). The outreach students were enrolled at the main school site, but operated as a smaller mobile learning group. In many instances young people in outreaches had been absent from formal schooling for long periods and the outreach context provided an opportunity for safe and flexible re-engagement and transition. Students may transition to the main school site for the senior phase of learning, to training or employment, or in some instances, return to conventional schooling. Because of the nature of the flexi schools’ context as outlined, the role of educators was different to the role of educators in conventional settings. These differences related to context impacted on the identity and development of educators and the kinds of practice frameworks with which they engaged.

**Theoretical lens.**

The theoretical lens adopted for this research is a sociocultural theoretical framework. This approach draws on social theories of learning and the notion of identity and development in practice, and the idea of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Vygotskian sociocultural theories of mental functioning mediated through social relations incorporating the concept of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) also
influence this study. The researchers’ own theoretical construct of \textit{relational dynamics} was developed specifically for this context. This sociocultural lens was adopted because other theoretical paradigms are limited in their capacity to address the multiple and complex issues that relate to the learning relationships experienced in the flexi school context. Sociocultural theories provide one way of conceptualising these theories within a relational model that assists in the exploration of the research questions of this study. Chapter Three presents details of the theoretical perspectives that have informed this research.

\textbf{Research methodology.}

The research questions were investigated using Design Experiment methodology that involved three stages – exploration, enactment and evaluation – and incorporated iterative cycles of reflection with key participants in the research context (Bannan-Ritland, 2003). Details of the methodology are provided in Chapter Four.

\textbf{Significance of the Study}

Whilst this sector of education and field of research is relatively new in Australia and despite having a somewhat longer history internationally, research in this sector has been sporadic and fragmented (te Riele, 2012). The focus of some research in this field has been on the perspectives and experiences of young people who participate in flexible learning choices programs and flexi schools. Other research has emphasised various typologies of programs and features of best practice. Another body of research has taken a perspective related to sociological, ideological, political and policy issues impacting on disenfranchised young people and their access to education.

This research study is significant in three main ways. First, in the rapidly expanding alternative education sector and emerging field of research, research on educator identity and development in practice is almost non-existent. This study offers
a profile of practice describing educators’ perceptions of effective ways of working with young people and staff in multidisciplinary settings. It subsequently demonstrates how these ways of working influence educator identity and development in practice.

Second, the study offers some markers and pathways for being and becoming educator in the flexi schools context by exploring and prototyping some specific strategies for professional learning that have been perceived by practitioners to be effective.

Many teacher educators in the network of flexi schools recognised that their pre-service teacher education and professional development throughout their career, did not necessarily equip them with the skills and expertise to work effectively with this group of young people (Hanson-Peterson, 2012; Myconos, 2011; Reimer & Cash, 2003). As educators were supported to negotiate and co-construct their professional identities and development in practice in new and different ways, they perceived that their work with young people was frequently enhanced.

**Structure of the Thesis**

A review of the literature of alternative education is presented in Chapter Two. Aspects of the national Australian educational context that are relevant to disenfranchised young people, features of best practice of alternative education, literature on identity and specifically on teacher professional identity, as well as literature related to the foci of the two research questions including ways of working and ways of professional learning are reviewed. Gaps in the literature and the ways this study contributes to new knowledge of the sector of alternative education and this field of research are highlighted.

The sociocultural theoretical perspective underpinning this study is presented in Chapter Three. Drawing on social theories of learning and the notion of identity and development in practice (Wenger, 1998), Vygotskian sociocultural theories of mental
functioning mediated through social relations and his concept of the ZPD, and the researchers’ own theoretical construct of relational dynamics, the place of theory in the research design, implementation and synthesis of findings are outlined.

Design experiment methodology was used in this study and an overview of this methodology is presented and justified in Chapter Four: Methodology. The consonance of this methodology with sociocultural theory is elaborated and the details regarding the design and implementation of data collection methods, participant recruitment, and data analysis are explained and justified.

In Chapters Five, Six and Seven findings and discussion of the research have been organised according to the two research questions. Chapter Five presents a profile of ways of working with young people and Chapter Six presents ways of working with staff. These ways of working were significantly influenced by the operation by principles model incorporating respect, participation, safe and legal, and honesty that applied equally to adults and young people in the flexi schools. The term operation by principles refers to the foundational philosophy that guides practice in the flexi schools. Operation by principles implies that in all relationships, people try to be guided and influenced by using or operating within the four principles. Operation by principles shapes ways of working with young people and staff and contrasts rule-based ways of working and relating. It involves negotiation and dialogue, rather than the imposition and application of rules.

In Chapter Seven, findings and discussion regarding ways of professional learning in the flexi schools are presented. These findings not only include educator perceptions captured through the questionnaire and interview data, but they were explored through prototyping a series of reflective practice groups (RPGs) designed to enhance staff induction processes across five flexi school sites.
The discussion and implications of findings presented in Chapter Eight elaborate how the findings from the data analysis address the main research question regarding how professional practice in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development. The theoretical contributions of the study are outlined in relation to Wenger’s social theory of learning and Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of mediated action and the concept of the ZPD. The researcher’s own theoretical construct of relational dynamics, including further modifications that were made to the model as a direct result of iterative cycles of reflection embedded in the implementation of the research design and data analysis, are presented. Contributions of this theory to the field are made evident. Limitations of the research study and options for further research are elaborated at the end of Chapter Eight. The conclusion of the final chapter incorporates a summary of the research study using a spatial metaphor of a learning community in which educator identity and development in practice were negotiated and co-constructed through dialogue and relationship with young people and staff in the flexi schools’ context.

Chapter Summary

This introductory chapter has outlined the overarching research issue and the research questions. The background to the research investigation was briefly presented. Alternative education and flexible learning choices programs were defined and the notion of professional identity and development of educators was outlined. Specific details of the research setting, theoretical lens used, research methodology adopted, and significance of this study were introduced and the structure of the thesis was overviewed. The next chapter of this thesis presents a review of the literature informing this research study.
Chapter 2  
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This thesis explores the identity and development of educators in a system of flexi schools in Queensland, Australia. A review of the literature was conducted in order to explore previous research on this topic and to map the research field in order to identify how this study contributes a new perspective on educator identity and development for this sector. The chapter commences with an overview of how the literature review has been structured, hence, positioning the research questions in the research literature.

Chapter Overview

This literature review informs the sociocultural exploration of educator identity and development in practice in the flexi schools’ context by reviewing the key areas of research that intersect in this project. The literature review is comprised of six sections. First, an overview of the national Australian context in relation to education and employment and disenfranchised young people will be reviewed. Second, common features of best practice of alternative education captured in national and international literature will be reviewed. Third, using a sociocultural lens, the literature on the nature of identity and self will be considered in order to establish the meaning attributed to this concept in this study. Fourth, the notion of educator professional identity will be defined using a sociocultural lens and then teacher professional identity (TPI) literature will be reviewed. Three specific aspects of TPI will be emphasised including the influence of particular educational contexts on TPI, the emotional dimension of TPI – teacher as carer, and the impact of educational reform agendas on TPI.

The last two sections of the literature review relate directly to the two research questions that informed this study. The main research issue sought to understand how
practice in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development. The research questions explored two specific domains of practice and the literature around some aspects of these areas will be reviewed. The first domain of practice of ways of working will be covered in the fifth section of the literature review with a focus on one of the unique features of alternative education contexts – multidisciplinary practice. Multidisciplinary practice involves working across professional boundaries and will be discussed in relation to literature on informal education that has influenced youth work practice.

The final section of the literature review is connected to the second research sub-question which considered how professional learning and development in the flexi schools’ context influenced educator identity and development in practice. This section of the literature review examines ways of learning or professional development that are consistent with a sociocultural perspective, for example, Wenger’s notion of learning within ‘communities of practice’ (1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) and the idea of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Other aspects of professional learning in multidisciplinary contexts, for example, reflective practice, are also reviewed in this section of the chapter.

The focus on educator identity and development in this study, explored through two dimensions of practice, is significantly different to other research previously conducted in this sector of alternative education or learning choices programs. An explanation of how this is evident is presented at the end of the literature review, highlighting the unique contribution of this study to this field of educational research.

**The National Australian Context: Education and Employment**

Across the globe, young people have been impacted in devastating ways by recent global instability (FYA, 2011). Despite Australia remaining relatively unscathed by the most recent global economic downturn, trends indicate that since 2008, “the
percentage of young Australians without a job for a year or longer has almost doubled. Teenagers in Australia have higher rates of long-term unemployment than in other OECD countries” (FYA, 2011, p. 6). Unemployment is higher for young people than in the rest of the population, and underemployment is an issue for 1 in 4 young people since the mid-1990s (DSF, 2007). Unemployment rose from 12.2% in May 2008, to 18.5% in May 2009 representing the largest annual increases for teenagers in the past two decades (FYA, 2010).

Although Australia’s economic prosperity and growth have continued in the midst of global economic instability, those young people currently looking for work are disproportionately affected by the impact of the global financial crisis and the resulting instability it has created (FYA, 2011). A decline in the number of fulltime jobs available to young people further heightens the risk of marginalisation in the workforce (DSF, 2007; FYA, 2008). Young Australians seeking employment face a range of challenges such as high mobility in the youth labour market, difficulties in transition from part-time to full-time work, and higher prospects of long-term unemployment (FYA, 2011). In 2011, more than 25% of young adults were not in full-time work or study (FYA, 2011). Of all those who are long-term unemployed in Australia, 25% are aged 15-24 (FYA, 2011).

With respect to the national educational context, of importance for this study is the knowledge that many young people without school completion or equivalent face long-term disadvantages in the labour market (DSF, 2007; FYA, 2008, 2011; te Riele, 2007). Research from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), (2007) has indicated that in Australia the connection between educational outcomes and socio-economic status is more significant than in many other comparable countries. The rate of school completion for young Australians from low socio-
economic status is significantly lower than for other young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2008).

**Reform agendas.**

In Queensland, mandatory education requirements for young people have been increasing. In 2006, the State Government mandated that young people remain at school until completing Year 10 or turning 16. Young people were also required to participate in further education, training or work until they achieved accredited certification or turned 17 (Education Queensland, 2003). This reform is in line with the knowledge that students who do not complete school are positioned for disadvantage in the labour market.

Similar trends at a national level are evident in Federal Government responses, such as The Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008), which acknowledged the need for significant improvement in educational outcomes in three areas. First, improvements for Indigenous Australians; second, improvements for young Australians from low socioeconomic backgrounds who are “under-represented among high achievers and over-represented among low-achievers”; and third, improvement in the national rate of Year 12 completion or equivalent (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5).

The National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions, and the associated Compact with Young Australians developed by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2009) had a stated goal of increasing Year 12 (or equivalent) rates of attainment to 90% by 2015. This target makes the provision of a range of education options increasingly important, particularly for those who have been disenfranchised from conventional schooling. Whilst such a goal may appear noteworthy, serious concerns around the narrow conception of education as “utilitarian and economist” in vision, and not inclusive of broader notions of “health and wellbeing” and life-long learning have been raised (Wyn, 2008, pp. 5-6).
Many aspects of this educational reform agenda are still compromised by an outmoded industrial model of education that does not meet the complex changing needs of young people in the 21st Century (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Smyth et al., 2004; Wyn, 2008). The measures put in place to meet the Year 12 attainment target of 90% by 2015, whilst intended as an incentive for young people, further marginalise those young people and their families/carers who already experience significant hardship and social exclusion (Mills & McGregor, 2010).

The multi-dimensional disadvantages of low income are the result of a range of “interconnected factors that can combine to produce cumulative, seemingly intractable problems” related to “limited economic, personal and social resources” (Saunders, 2011, pp. 75-76) that compound and create barriers to school completion. For young people who have experienced trauma, neglect or abuse, or those whose lives and school attendance have been impacted by poverty, generational unemployment, homelessness or high mobility, or the impact of substance abuse within families, or mental illness, attending school poses challenges that are seemingly insurmountable. Whilst school completion lessens the likelihood of unemployment, the reasons for non-completion of schooling are not only related to social and economic factors.

Factors related to particular school cultures such as inflexible curriculum and assessment requirements or strictly enforced rules-based behaviour management strategies, contribute to the exclusion of marginalised students who frequently exhibit challenging behaviours for a range of complex reasons. As Mills and McGregor indicate:

[R]ules that apply to uniforms, self-presentation, social interactions and assumptions of unquestioning obedience to adult power position certain students for on-going systemic conflict. The young people who live in unstable and/or unsupportive/neglectful environments will find it difficult to comply with many of the cultural expectations of mainstream, middle class schools. (2010, p. 16)
Suspension, expulsion or early school leaving and subsequent disenfranchisement of some young people may be indicative of a lack of ability of a system to accommodate the diversity of students’ life circumstances and learning needs. Identifying young people as the source of the problem (te Riele, 2007) indicates the failure of conventional school systems to at least acknowledge, or at best address the needs of marginalised young people. This problem is recognised as a limitation of a system struggling to renew and update to more contemporary pedagogies that are student-centred and responsive to the changing needs of young people in contemporary society (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005; Miller, 2005; Smyth, 2003; Whitby, 2013; Wyn, 2008).

Despite the multiple and complex reasons for disengagement and exclusion, including those attributed to the inflexible cultures within schools, Thomson and Russell, (2009) argue that education authorities have a responsibility to ensure that all children have a right to education that is of a high quality. The right to education for all children is enshrined within the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), to which Australia is a signatory. As highlighted by Morgan (2009), mandatory provision of inclusive education “for the range of ‘disabilities’ that impede young people’s engagement in education and other community activities . . . [including] challenging behaviours such as mental health and learning difficulties” (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006, p. 30) is legislated in Australia through the Disabilities Discrimination Act (1992). For those young people who have been disenfranchised from conventional schooling, some other alternatives for re-engaging in education or training are required. The flexi school model offers an alternative to conventional schooling that potentially achieves the goal of school completion for this disenfranchised group of young people (Gable, Bullock, & Evans, 2006). In these contexts, the role of educator is vital to achieve the goal of enfranchisement and the creation of lifelong learners, not merely school completers.
Common Features of Best Practice in Alternative Education

Alternative education or learning choices programs offer opportunities for re-engagement in education for those young people who have experienced multiple disadvantage (Aron, 2003; McGinty & Brader, 2005) and who cannot, for a range of complex social, emotional and intellectual needs and past experiences of failure and exclusion, engage in conventional schooling. The flexi schools featured in this study engage young people who may have experienced one or more of the following life circumstances:

- those who have had contact with the juvenile justice system;
- those in the care of the Department of Child Safety;
- those with a history of extended periods of unexplained absences;
- those who are Indigenous;
- those who are highly mobile;
- those who have had repeated difficulty conforming to the behaviour requirements of mainstream education and training;
- those with mental illness or at risk of engaging in self harming behaviours or substance abuse;
- those with chronic illness leading to extended absences;
- those who have been excluded from school;
- those who are homeless;
- those who are young parents;
- those who have repeatedly suffered from severe negative schooling experiences;
- those with a generational history of early school leaving;
- those with a generational history of unemployment; and
- those searching for a different educational experience (Edmund Rice Education Australia, 2010, p. 3).

Currently there is not one nationally or internationally recognised terminology for this kind of education provision (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006; te Riele, 2012). However, despite the lack of consistency in terminology, alternative education or
learning choices programs (te Riele, 2012). can be identified in the literature by a number of common features (Morgan, 2009; Reimer & Cash, 2003; Wilson, Stemp, & McGinty, 2011). Although the way the features are specifically named may vary, in this study they have been grouped under the following four themes:

- education of the whole person;
- young person-centred learning choices;
- supportive and highly skilled multidisciplinary staff;
- integration with quality community connections.

Table 2.1 outlines themed groups of features of best practice in alternative education extrapolated from the literature review, and lists the scholars who have validated these features in their research. Each of the themes will now be elaborated. The theme of education of the whole person describes the first group of common features of best practice in alternative education. This theme involves educators adopting an holistic approach to education that addresses young people’s social, emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual needs. It also incorporates the idea of developing safe and supportive learning environments for young people and adults alike. Another important dimension of this theme is small class sizes.

The theme of young person-centred learning choices describes the second group of common features of best practice in alternative education. Educators are required to start with the needs of the young people and develop an approach to teaching and learning that is able to offer flexible delivery of curriculum. This flexibility requires that educators engage young people in life-skills education connected to local community and local places (Wilson et al., 2011). In this way young person-centred learning choices also support young people in their transition to employment or other learning options.
### Themed Groups of Features of Best Practice in Alternative Education Summarised from the Literature Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education of the whole person</th>
<th>Young person-centred learning choices</th>
<th>Supportive and highly skilled multidisciplinary staff</th>
<th>Integration with quality community connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An holistic approach to education catering to the young person’s social, emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual needs</td>
<td>A student-centred approach to learning</td>
<td>High quality staff including those from non-teaching backgrounds</td>
<td>Family/carer involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A safe and supportive learning environment</td>
<td>Flexible delivery of curriculum</td>
<td>A strong emphasis on positive relationships rather than punitive behaviour management</td>
<td>Presence of mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small class sizes</td>
<td>Life-skills education</td>
<td>Proactive rather than reactive responses to young people</td>
<td>Interagency collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition to employment</td>
<td>Encouragement of active participation and responsibility of young people for their learning</td>
<td>Community linkages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The theme of supportive and highly skilled multidisciplinary staff, describes the third group of common features of best practice in alternative education. The features under this theme include high quality staff including those from non-teaching backgrounds. Staff have to maintain a balanced perspective between formal education and young person welfare and place a strong emphasis on positive relationships, rather than punitive behaviour management that can be demeaning for young people. This requires proactive, rather than reactive responses from staff to young people who need support and encouragement to actively participate and take responsibility for their learning. The final themed group of features of best practice in alternative education is quality community connections. This theme includes family/carer involvement, the presence of mentors, the inclusion of interagency collaboration and strong community linkages.

**Identity and Self: A View through a Sociocultural Lens**

In this exploration of educator identity and development in practice, a sociocultural understanding of these concepts has been adopted. Before considering what educator identity entails and what is understood by development in relation to professional practice, a more general overview of how the notions of identity and the self have been approached in this study will be outlined. A sociocultural lens for understanding identity privileges the negotiation of identity through social participation, which contrasts with identity formation as starting with the individual and emphasising psychological and cognitive processes (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). How one understands the self is significant when considering identity.

Significant changes with regard to the conceptualisation of notions such as identity and the self, have been highlighted in the latter part of the 20th Century. These conceptual shifts can be described as a movement from viewing the self as a separate entity, an individual “bounded being”, towards viewing and understanding the self as
constituted in relationships (Gergen, 2009, p. 7). This shift in thinking emphasising interconnectedness is evident in the field of science through the work of physicists, biologists, and environmentalists and through the ideas regarding the interconnectedness of all life evident in evolutionary processes (Capra, 1975, 1997, 2004; de Chardin, 1959; Rogers & Farson, 1957; Suzuki, with McConnell, & Mason, 2007). Interconnectedness of life and relationships is a significant feature of Indigenous knowledges and worldviews (Gair, Miles, & Thomson, 2005; Knudston & Suzuki, 1992; Matthews, Watego, Cooper, & Baturo, 2005; Sheehan & Walker, 2001). A shift towards the interconnectedness of relational ways of being and viewing the world as interconnected is evident amongst some leaders and innovators in the business world (Covey, 2011; Holman, 2010; Holman, Devane & Cady, 2007; Owen, 2008; Scharmer, 2008; Senge, 2006; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004; Wheatley, 2006). It is apparent in social psychology (Gergen, 2009), psychiatry and interpersonal/relational neurobiology (Perry, 2009; Siegel, 2006, 2007, 2012), as well as in philosophies and spiritualities in which nonviolence and nondualistic thinking are emphasised (Berry, 2006; Buber, 1987; de Chardin, 1959; Lederach, 2005; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). Similarly in education, conceptions of the self as learner have been changing, particularly through social theorists who recognised the relational nature of learning (Dewey, 2010; Freire, 2000; Noddings, 2005a, 2005b) and how human mental functioning is mediated through relationships (Bakhtin, 1981; Daniels, Cole, & Wertsch, 2007b; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, 1991).

This interconnected perspective of identity as self-in-relationship is apparent across the boundaries of scholarly disciplines and professional practice. The common thread emerging in these diverse disciplines and fields of learning and practice is the notion that relationships and interconnectedness are central, defining aspects of life. Such a notion of interconnectedness influences ways of being in relationship with self,
others, earth and life force regardless of the many and varied ways life force may be defined. The primacy of the individual and the notion of a separate, “bounded being” is pervasive in Western culture and has influenced ways of living, social systems and cultural institutions including education (Gergen, 2009, p. 7; Macy, 1991; Macy & Johnstone, 2012; Robinson & Aronica, 2009). Other trends in thinking aligned with the notion of interconnected self-in-relationship are challenging this individualist perspective within education (Apple & Beane, 2007; Ayers, 2009; Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Lasky, 2005; Renshaw, 2002a, 2002b; Sidorkin, 2000; Smyth, 2006; Warren, 2005; Willie, 2000).

A sociocultural perspective on identity and development has been adopted within this research project, with consideration being given to the social, cultural and historical aspects of identity formation (Morgan, Brown, Heck, Pendergast, & Kanasa, 2012). Identity formation is not a fixed construct; it is developed in an ongoing way (Sachs, 2001). In relationship with others it is constantly negotiated (Gee, 2001; Wenger, 1998). An individual in a social context is recognised as a certain ‘kind of person’ (Gee, 2001, p. 99) as they communicate their narratives of ‘being’ (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 16), and engage with ‘Discourses’ that represent the meaning attributed to social practices (Gee, 1992, p. 20). Identity formation is a dynamic process in which people act on the world and exercise agency (Lasky, 2005), negotiating and developing their social and individual identities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005) through numerous ways of being and becoming (Gergen, 2009; Wenger, 1998).

This view of identity – formed in relationships, enacted through individual agency and engagement with social ‘Discourses’, and influenced by relationships within particular contexts – will be adopted in this research project. It takes into account the social, cultural and historical aspects of identity formation and can, therefore, be described as a sociocultural approach to professional identity, in keeping with the
sociocultural theoretical perspective being adopted throughout the research project. This theoretical perspective will be explored in more detail in Chapter Three.

**Educator Professional Identity**

The manner in which professionals perceive themselves as professionals, and the various influences on this perception, is referred to as professional identity (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000). There are many facets of professional identity and the construct is not defined or understood consistently in the literature (Sachs, 2001). Wenger’s (1998) perspective that professional identity is clearly linked to practice highlights his notion of ‘communities of practice’ as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). According to Wenger (1998), “the experience of identity in practice is a way of being in the world” (p. 151). Wenger’s ideas have influenced the understanding of professional identity and practice adopted in this study in which identity and practice are perceived as intrinsically connected.

Of particular interest is the professional practice and development or learning that occurs within communities of practice. A community of practice can be defined as a group of people with a shared enterprise and activity that is jointly pursued in relationship with others and with the world, over time (Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice “create value by connecting the personal development and professional identities of practitioners to the strategies of the organization” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 17).

Organisational strategies that promote and foster the dimension of values that underpin practice are explored in this study. Values relate to judgments about what is important within an organisation, the ideals or principles that underpin the different ways of ‘being’ educator, within the research context. Expressions of particular values,
along with “ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and of acting” (Gee, 1991, p. 143) can be understood as ways to denote membership in a particular social group or social network, and comprise what Gee refers to as a ‘Discourse’ (Gee, 1991). Aspects of the discourse of educators in alternative education settings are explored in the following review of teacher identity literature. Whilst teachers are not the only workers in the multidisciplinary contexts of alternative education, it has been acknowledged within this group of professionals that much of what they learnt in their preservice teacher education did not adequately prepare them for working in flexi schools to enfranchise young people who experience multiple complexities (Hanson-Peterson, 2012; Reimer & Cash, 2003).

For this reason, a significant component of the literature review has specifically focussed on teacher professional identity as a way of highlighting some of the challenges for this group of professionals working in multidisciplinary contexts. Formal education and the professional identities of teachers that were negotiated and co-constructed in conventional education settings may, at times, contradict the experiences of teachers in alternative education settings. How and why this occurs will be explored in this research that looks at the influence of context on educator identity and development in practice.

**Teacher professional identity (TPI).**

Whilst the term *educator professional identity* is more appropriate for this research project, the term ‘teacher professional identity’ will be used for this section as a way of reflecting the ideas in the literature more accurately. How teachers perceive themselves as teachers and what factors influence this perception, is referred to as ‘teacher professional identity’ (TPI) (Beijaard et al., 2000). The experiences of teachers, their biographies and personal histories (Day & Sachs, 2005; Flores & Day, 2006) and the influence of particular contexts in which they teach (Beijaard et al., 2000;
Ben-Peretz, Mendelson, & Kron, 2003; Friesen, Finney, & Krentz, 1999; Hirst & Vadeboncoeur, 2006; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; van Huizen, van Oers, & Wubbels, 2005) have been found to be significant factors in addition to subjects taught, relationships with students, and the teacher’s “role or role conception” (Beijaard, 1995, p. 282). Teacher professional identity is also linked to their sense of agency, or capacity to act on the world around them (Lasky, 2005).

In reading the literature on teacher professional identity, five key focal points emerged. These focal points and the relevant research literature are presented in Table 2.2. Whilst all of these points of focus contribute to an understanding of TPI, the last three related to the influence of context, the notion of teacher as carer, and the impact of reform agendas will be highlighted in this research project as they address a particular gap in the literature related to TPI in the alternative education contexts specifically developed to enfranchise young people.

**TPI and the influence of context.**

The educational context for this research was quite unique in that the flexi schools’ context was specifically established in response to the needs of disenfranchised young people. Whilst some of the studies exploring teacher professional identity involved teachers who were working with at-risk and low achieving students (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003; Friesen et al., 1999; Lasky, 2005), they were conducted in conventional school contexts. These studies specifically used the term “at-risk” to refer to young people and so, when discussing this research, this term will be used. However, the complexities associated with using deficit language to describe young people who have experienced failure and exclusion in conventional school contexts is acknowledged as problematic in the literature. Among other things, it fails to recognise the system barriers that have contributed to young peoples’ experiences of being marginalised (Smyth et al., 2004; te Riele, 2012).
## Main Focal Points of Teacher Professional Identity (TPI) and Relevant Literature

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Focal Points of Teacher Professional Identity (TPI)</th>
<th>Relevant Literature</th>
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| 1. Defining TPI  
| 2. The formation of TPI  
What are the key influences that form TPI? | Beijaard et al., 2004; Beijaard et al, 2000; Ben-Peretz et al., 2003; Flores & Day, 2006; Friesen et al., 1999; Lasky, 2005. |
| 3. Educational contexts and TPI  
What is the influence of context on TPI? | Ben-Peretz et al., 2003; Flores & Day, 2006; Friesen et al., 1999; Hirst & Vadeboncoeur, 2006; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Lasky, 2005; van Huizen et al., 2005. |
| 4. The emotional dimension of TPI - Teacher as Carer  
| 5. The impact of Educational Reform Agendas on TPI  

The Canadian research study of Friesen et al. (1999) featured stories of teachers detailing the complexities of working with at-risk students. Differences between the Canadian research and what is being proposed in this research project are evident.

Although the proportion of students in the Canadian study who were at-risk was higher than in schools where other studies on TPI have been conducted, the school was still a traditional school not specifically established to address the complex needs of disenfranchised young people. The “locus of change” (te Riele, 2007, p. 56) was focussed on the young person who was perceived to have problems, rather than on the broader issue of how education is provided (Education Queensland, 2005; Friesen et al., 1999; Smyth et al., 2004; te Riele, 2007). Locating educational problems primarily with young people was a source of frustration for the teachers in the Canadian study as they talked about their sense of identity and agency. They expressed frustration at the inability of the system to provide support structures that would enable them to fulfil
what they perceived as an important aspect of their teaching identity – that of advocate for at-risk students (Friesen et al., 1999).

**TPI and the use of metaphor in context.**

The influence of context on teacher identity was specifically explored in a study by Ben-Peretz et al., (2003). This study used metaphors in order to explore teachers’ underlying assumptions and beliefs concerning the nature of education and their own roles as teachers. It was argued through this study that metaphors were not only useful as research instruments, but also for instructional purposes in teacher education. The power of metaphor to influence thinking about the roles of educators has also been explored through research on pre-service and in-service teacher education programs (Vadeboncoeur & Torres, 2003). This research highlighted the need to go beyond using “surface” metaphors to explore more “generative” metaphors that supported critical reflection and the interrogation of traditional dichotomies that exist in the conceptualisation of the work of teachers (Vadeboncoeur & Torres, 2003, p.88). It was argued that professional development that encouraged critical reflection may lead to more integrated approaches to professional learning and conceptualisations of teacher identity, for example “teacher as researcher and knowledge producer” (Vadeboncoeur & Torres, 2003, p. 100). Hunt (2006) also endorsed the use of metaphor as a way to explore educator professional identity as a process of ‘being’ through reflective practice.

A gap in the literature is evident with regard to the development of teacher professional identity and agency in educational contexts specifically developed for disenfranchised young people. Whilst some research has been conducted in contexts specifically developed for these young people, it has been largely conducted from a general perspective describing features of best practice (Cross, 2002; de Jong, 2005; de Jong & Griffiths, 2006; Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA), 2001) or from the perspective of young people and their
experiences (Fraser et al., 1997; Hirst & Vadeboncoeur, 2006). Research conducted from the perspective of teachers, which encompassed aspects of their sense of professional identity and agency, was rare. Although some research identified areas of professional development needed for teachers working in alternative education settings (Reimer & Cash, 2003; Smyth, 2007; Sutherland & Gunter, 2005; te Riele, 2012), specific research on educator professional identity and development in practice in alternative education or learning choices programs has not been identified.

**TPI and the emotional dimension: Teacher as carer.**

The next area of interest within the literature for this research was the aspect of teacher identity related to emotion and the sense of caring. Some scholars clearly argued that the development of caring teacher-student relationships forms the basis for re-engagement (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Fraser et al., 1997; Friesen et al., 1999; Hirst & Vadeboncoeur, 2006; Lasky, 2005; Smyth, 2007; Smyth & Hattam, 2002). However, the study by Ben-Peretz et al. (2003), suggested that if teachers prioritised the caring role, a deficit in the capacity of these teachers to engage students in academic learning often occurred. In other words, the implication of this study was that the students would be missing the qualities of “teachers who are committed to and responsible for the cognitive growth of their students” if their teachers were too caring (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003, p. 284). This positioning of caring teacher verses academic teacher, is an oppositional perspective that is not necessarily conducive to developing an holistic, integrated approach to teaching and learning.

Countering this position is particularly relevant in alternative education contexts that privilege relationships. This research will shed further light on whether educators in the flexi schools’ context perceive this dualistic positioning as an issue of concern, particularly when consideration is given to trauma-informed practice (Downey, 2009; Perry, 2001). Trauma-informed practice takes into account an understanding of how
experiences of trauma, such as abuse and neglect, can impact on children and young people’s brain development and subsequently on their capacity to learn. Not all children or young people who exhibit challenging behaviour have suffered abuse and neglect. They may have other issues related to temperament, disability, or medical and health conditions that make learning in classroom settings extremely difficult (Downey, 2009). Whilst the individual needs of each child or young person must be understood and responded to, an appreciation of trauma-informed practice is essential for staff working in alternative education settings. The impacts of trauma, neglect and abuse are varied, but may include:

- neurological and learning difficulties;
- affect dysregulation;
- relationship difficulties;
- attachment difficulties;
- shame;
- mood and attention problems;
- problem behaviours; and/or
- hyperarousal and dissociation. (Downey, 2009, p. 23)

The importance of prioritising relational pedagogy (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004), building relationships of trust and safety that support the development of social and emotional foundations for cognitive learning, cannot be underestimated. This is supported when parents/carers and the school community adopt a whole school health-promoting approach to children and young people who have experienced the impact of abuse, neglect and other trauma (Downey, 2010).

How teachers perceive learners is connected in some ways to the notion of teacher as carer. This is especially pertinent when considering low achieving students who are more at-risk of becoming early school leavers (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001; Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Fraser et al., 1997; Hodgson,
The manner in which low achieving students were perceived in the research of Ben-Peretz et al. (2003) will be challenged through this research project. Teachers in that study do not appear to have made a deliberate choice to work with these students. There did not seem to be recognition of the particular circumstances and social needs that impacted on the students’ capacities to engage with learning. The students seemed to be perceived as the problem because of their behaviour and low ability. Whilst some teachers highlighted the need for a more caring approach to this group, a general concern expressed in the research findings was that this caring approach became an excuse or a diversion from the important responsibility for developing academic skills (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003).

Of concern in the research findings was the correlation between the teachers’ view of their roles as primarily carers and the subsequent relegation of their duty to foster “the cognitive growth of their students” (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003, p. 284). The need to care was seen as an effect resulting from the kind of students in the group, that is, under-achieving students with behavioural issues. The nature of the students in the cohort was thus seen to be the main factor influencing the context. However, some other influencing factors need clarification before this causal link can be assumed. A clear distinction is made between the qualifications in the group of the teachers working with the high achieving academic students and those working with the underachieving students; only 5 out of the 30 teachers in the second group have university degrees compared to 19 in the first group. The researchers acknowledged that “the relationship between teacher education and the impact of teaching context needs further study” (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003, p. 283). However, in their findings there seems to be an assumption that the choice to primarily care for students implies no commitment to the promotion of their academic achievement. “This finding is cause for worry. Students who need their teachers’ attention to promote their academic progress and achievement
are denied this help. Their teachers ‘‘give up’’ and confine themselves to ‘‘caring’’ activities” (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003, p. 284).

The issues faced by low achieving students are complex. The impact of having teachers who may not have the education, experience and capacity to meet their complex social and academic needs highlights a broader social problem in education (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Smyth et al., 2004; Warren, 2005; Willie, 2000). Very often the problem or blame for poor outcomes is located within the students themselves rather than being explored through an interrogation of the “educational provision” (Deschenes et al., 2001, p. 56; Hodgson, 2007; Smyth & Hattam, 2002; Smyth et al., 2004; te Riele, 2007, p. 56). The privileging of the academic needs of the students over their need for care (Noddings, 2005a, 2005b), reinforces dualistic thinking that is not helpful when working with disenfranchised young people whose needs are complex and include social, emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual dimensions.

An holistic approach to teaching and learning that was inclusive of teacher as carer and academic guide provided another perspective. For example, when teachers work within a trauma-informed practice framework, it can make a significant difference for young people who may have experienced the impact of abuse, trauma or neglect (Downey, 2007, 2009, 2010; Perry, 2001, 2009). Awareness of other issues including mental health, disabilities or specific learning difficulties, can enable teachers to differentiate curriculum accordingly and address the learning needs of each individual young person.

Contrasting the previous study, another study on TPI highlighted teachers’ beliefs that their role with students included “helping in their social and emotional development, along with delivering the academic skills” (Lasky, 2005, p. 907). This study found that robust relationships are developed through openness between teachers and young people, and that the quality of relationships is directly linked with student
learning. Through gathering stories from educators working in the flexi schools’ context it may become evident whether caring for students and/or fostering their cognitive development are seen to be mutually exclusive, or whether these two aspects of educators’ professional identity can be held in balance and integrated (Lasky, 2005; O’Connor, 2008). Through the exploration of the stories of educators in flexi schools, it may become apparent whether educators who privilege relationships and their caring role, compromise student learning, or enhance it. The issue of how to evaluate and measure multiple dimensions of learning in an education system that overemphasises cognitive learning is problematic in this discussion.

A range of literature exploring notions of relational pedagogy has emerged (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Brownlee, 2004; Hargreaves, 2001; Sidorkin, 2000; Smyth, 2006, 2007). Some of this has been in response to contemporary reform agendas that have been perceived as market driven, with a narrow focus of the nature and purpose of education. Prioritising relationships has been seen as a way to redress the overemphasis on standardised testing and unreasonable accountability measures for teachers and schools, promoting teaching and learning that is more young person-centred.

**TPI and the impact of educational reform agendas.**

A crisis or place of struggle for teachers in general, as they attempt to come to terms with the demands of change and reform, was identified in the literature. Negative impact on teachers’ workload and sense of agency increased as they felt challenged to meet the needs of students who faced “moral, social, and emotional dilemmas” in the midst of uncertainty and significant social change (Beijaard et al., 2000, p. 751).

Struggles were also experienced by teachers in contexts in which expectations of increasing demands for compliance were greater (Lasky, 2005; Smyth, 2007). These demands were often in conflict with teachers’ own views of what should be prioritised
in education. This trend appears to be both a national and international phenomenon, particularly in wealthy Western countries (Day & Sachs, 2005; Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Sachs, 1997, 2001, 2003; Smyth, 2006). Questions around what constitutes learning and who decides this (Noddings, 2005a) were other aspects of this debate that impacted on TPI. These issues were explored in this study through the stories of educators in the flexi schools’ context and the research reported here may shed some light on whether this struggle was experienced in the research context.

**Domains of Practice in Alternative Education: Ways of Working**

The third key area of the literature review explores professional practice or ways of working related to one of the common features of best practice of alternative education. A unique feature of practice in alternative education that is different to practice in many conventional education settings is multidisciplinary practice. This will be discussed in relation to ideas of working across professional boundaries and in relation to informal education.

**Working across professional boundaries.**

A characteristic of alternative education is a multidisciplinary focus that draws on the expertise of teachers and other professionals including, youth, community and health workers (de Jong, 2005; Edwards, 2004; O’Brien et al., 2001). Multidisciplinary practice and collaboration between workers was necessary in alternative education contexts in order to support the development of positive educational pathways to enfranchise marginalised young people (Edwards, 2004, 2005; Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter, & Warmington, 2009). Within the literature it appeared that working to enfranchise young people has continued to require working collaboratively across professional disciplines with a broad community focus that fosters an holistic approach to young people, their families and carers, in order to meet their complex
needs (Axford & Little, 2006; Case & Haines, 2004; Edwards, 2004; Edwards et al., 2009; Harker, Dobel-Ober, Berridge, & Sinclair, 2004).

**Informal education.**

In the establishment of the first flexi school in the Queensland network of flexi schools over twenty-five years ago, ways of working with young people were significantly influenced by youth workers, social workers and outdoor education workers collaborating with teachers to find more constructive ways of re-engaging young people in education settings (Morgan, 2012). The principles of youth work were consistent with many of the ideas found in ‘informal education’, a way of working with young people that privileged natural conversation, relationships, the needs and interests of young people within locations where young people “hang out”, and which nurtured learning” (Jeffs & Smith, 2005, p. 41; Smith, 2001, 2008). Informal education also fostered “democracy and association” that in turn promoted positive relationships (Jeffs & Smith, 2005, p. 41). With its origins in Christian youth groups in the United Kingdom in the 1960s and 70s, informal education emphasised “fellowship” or a quality of relationships that fostered “companionship of people on friendly and equal terms” (Jeffs & Smith, 2005, p. 42). The notion of fellowship was linked to a sense of social cohesion and the promotion of citizenship in a democracy of equality (Jeffs & Smith, 2005).

Another feature of best practice in alternative education, the emphasis on positive relationships rather than punitive reactive responses to young people, resonated with the philosophy of informal education that embraced opportunities for open and honest dialogue, non-hierarchical structures and opportunities for participation by all (Jeffs & Smith, 2005). In order for young people to understand democracy as an expression of equality and active participation, they need to experience it through the structures and processes of their educational context, as noted in Queensland education
policy: “[T]o become active and productive citizens in a just and democratic society, students need to experience democracy in classrooms and in school organisation. Education through democratic processes is as important as education about democracy” (Education Queensland, 2005, p. 5).

The value of informal settings was also acknowledged by Edwards and Mackenzie when they stated that “more informal settings are more likely to be less regulated and provide more open learning opportunities” (2005, p. 290). Through their research they explored how an informal education setting that privileged relationships, contributed to the creation of a social learning context or “relational version” of Vygotsky’s ZPD as individuals interacted with others and explored options for their own agency (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005, p. 291). The way that individuals accessed and gave support, was also referred to as relational agency, a supportive and protective capacity that promoted resilience against the factors that have contributed to people being at-risk (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). According to Edwards and Mackenzie, the development of relational agency supported participation in learning opportunities “in both formal and informal environments” (2005, p. 291). Relational agency was also recognised as a necessary skill for those who work with people at-risk, particularly in the growing domain of multidisciplinary work contexts (Edwards, 2004; 2005).

More nuanced understandings of the different paradigm of working with young people that shifted power dynamics, challenged unquestioned assumptions regarding hierarchies in adult/young person relationships, and were generally more cooperative and democratic, were evident in the education literature (Apple & Beane, 2007; Ayers, 2009; Kalantzis & Cope, 2005; Renshaw, 2002b). However, these emancipatory ways of working with young people were more consistent with the literature of informal education influenced by youth work practice and other democratic and emancipatory styles of education and youth engagement (Freire, 2000; Nabavi & Lund, 2012; Smith,
2008; Smyth, 2006; Stuart, 2004). In order for these relational features of informal education and youth work practice to be supported and enacted in alternative education settings, staff must be highly skilled, possess a high level of self-awareness, excellent interpersonal skills and an understanding of the complex needs of young people (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006; Myconos, 2011).

These qualities of adults working in non-hierarchical ways with young people contributed to particular expressions of professional identity that were often different to what was experienced in conventional education contexts. Young people have described more authoritarian power dynamics in conventional education settings (Delpit, 1988; Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006; Smyth et al., 2004). This shift from unilateral power or power over, to relational power, involves using the power of connection and relationship to get things done collectively (Smyth, 2006; Warren, 2005).

**Domains of Practice in Alternative Education: Ways of Professional Learning**

An extensive review of the literature revealed no significant body of research related specifically to the professional development of teachers or workers in multidisciplinary alternative education settings. Some of the literature identified the need for professional development in certain areas (Ashcroft, 1999; Hanson-Peterson, 2012; Myconos, 2011; Reimer & Cash, 2003). For teachers working in alternative education settings, program specific professional development has been recognised as an important issue, and requests for different programs to what may be required in conventional settings were identified in some research (Hanson-Peterson, 2012; Reimer & Cash, 2003). These areas of professional learning included classroom management techniques, diversity training, alternative instruction methods, strategies promoting health and wellbeing, and multidisciplinary practice across professional boundaries,
rather than professional learning in specific content areas. Staff were interested in professional learning that emphasised understanding characteristics of young people and features of the organisational context in which they were working (Ashcroft, 1999).

Whilst professional learning in the context of alternative education has not been represented significantly in the literature, much research has been conducted on professional development in education. Desimone (2009) argues that consideration of the core aspects of effective professional development is vital. A core conceptual framework has been devised based on research consensus of professional development related to “changes in knowledge, practice, and, to a lesser extent, student achievement” (Desimone, 2009, p. 183). These core features include content focus; active learning; coherence; duration; and collective participation (Desimone, 2009, p. 183). Other important components of professional learning that were not included in the model due to lack of empirical research, highlighted factors such as “professional identity”, “teacher reflection” and “the role of context in teacher learning” among other factors, which have potential for developing understanding of effective professional development (Desimone, 2009, p. 186).

Whilst aspects of Desimone’s core conceptual framework are applicable to professional learning in the flexi schools’ context, of greater relevance in this newly emerging education sector are those components not included. For example, the role of context in teacher learning highlights the importance of multidisciplinary practice in alternative education settings. Research on multi-agency working with at-risk young people has identified new types of professional learning associated with networking or ‘co-configuration’ (Daniels et al., 2007). Co-configuration is identified as work practices that are “emerging in complex multi-professional settings” which are characterised by the need for “participants to have a disposition to recognise and engage with the expertise distributed across rapidly changing work places” (Daniels et al., 2007).
A twofold challenge of learning ‘for’ and ‘in’ co-configuration is outlined by Daniels et al. It emphasises the need for professional learning in multidisciplinary ‘fields’ (e.g., health, education, social services, youth offending teams) ‘for’ co-configuration that enables practitioners to renegotiate and reorganise “collaborative relations and practices” to create and implement, “corresponding concepts, tools, rules and entire infrastructures” (Daniels et al., 2007, p. 527). Learning ‘in’ co-configuration refers to the importance of learning with and from clients or users.

Daniels et al., describe co-configuration in the following terms:

> It occurs over time, in actions and interactions, in reflections on transformations and disruptions and is evident in interpretations of and responses to the objects of the activity which act as stabilising foci where the individual sense making of diverse professionals is brought to bear. Here there is a tension between the need for certainty for immediate purposes and the need to remain uncertain for future purposes. (Daniels et al., 2007, p. 527)

Generally speaking, workers from community welfare sectors, such as youth work or social work, have had more education regarding engaging with young people in complex circumstances in a relational way, and many of these workers have developed a range of practical skills, such as networking across agencies, that are more readily transferable to working with young people in alternative education contexts. Of course this may not always be the case and other factors can influence a worker’s capacity to be effective or otherwise in this work to enfranchise young people.

Due to the lack of research on professional development for teachers in alternative education settings, this aspect of the research study reported here was more exploratory and influenced by staff perceptions gathered in data and connected to features of best practice identified in the review of the literature. Smyth (2007) has argued that teacher development in schools needs to refocus on the significance of relationships. This conclusion was influenced by his own extensive research with early school leavers and his critique of reform agendas that he viewed as overly
“managerialist” and market driven (Smyth, 2007, p. 223). Other research gaps in professional learning were identified and included developing useful strategies for attaining the skills, knowledge and attitudes consistent with features of best practice, to ensure staff are suitably trained (te Riele, 2012). Working collaboratively in multidisciplinary contexts requires a set of skills not always recognised in conventional school settings as being necessary or of value. Skills associated with multidisciplinary collaboration require specific training and support (Black, Lemon, & Walsh, 2010).

Another area of practice that has been highlighted both in education and in the community welfare sector as a strategy for professional learning is reflective practice.

**Reflective practice.**

Within alternative education contexts, familiarity with reflective practice was more commonly experienced by community welfare workers, more so than by teacher educators. Reflective practice has been employed by professionals in a range of settings and has been recommended in a variety of professional standards documents as an effective tool for educators (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2011; Harrison, Lawson, & Wortley, 2005; Queensland College of Teachers (QCT), 2009; Training and Development Agency for Schools, 2007). At national and international levels, no significant body of research on reflective practice in alternative education contexts is evident in a review of the literature (Morgan et al., 2012). The processes, activities and experience of reflective practice in multidisciplinary alternative education settings with educators and other community welfare professionals has not been documented in research (Morgan et al., 2012). Hence, whilst the significance of reflective practice as an integral aspect of identity work for teachers, social workers and health practitioners is well-known (Cox, 2005; Fook & Gardner, 2007; Fook, White, & Gardner, 2006; Walkington, 2005; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), it is an area requiring further research in relation to alternative education settings in which multidisciplinary
practice occurs. How these various multidisciplinary ways of working with young people and colleagues in the flexi schools’ context influenced educator identity and development in practice will be explored through this research project.

**How the Research Questions Contribute Something New to this Field**

From the research literature it has been established that the ways educators work to enfranchise young people in alternative education contexts is different to ways of working in conventional schooling. Contemporary economic, social and cultural shifts require that new ways of understanding and providing education are vital and overdue (Wyn, 2008), particularly for those who are disenfranchised, if they are to experience social inclusion (FYA, 2008; MCEETYA, 2008). Educational provision that supports the enfranchisement of young people who have experienced social exclusion and marginalisation from conventional schooling requires further research. An exploration of educator identity and development in practice guided by the research questions on how ways of working and ways of professional learning influence educator identity and development in practice in the flexi schools’ context may offer new insights into educational provision in other learning choices programs. It also has the potential to inform teachers in conventional schools who are working with young people who are at-risk of disengaging (Morgan, 2009).

**Common perspectives adopted in previous research.**

A review of the literature in this sector of educational practice and field of research at national and international levels indicates three perspectives that have been commonly adopted, creating an emerging picture of the sector and field of research. These perspectives do not offer a comprehensive coverage of the entire sector, nor are they unrelated to each other, but offer a way of making sense of the fragmented nature of this educational sector and field of research (te Riele, 2012). Examining these perspectives makes clear the unique contribution that the study reported here makes to
this educational sector. Naturally some research adopts multiple perspectives and, therefore, cannot be easily categorised. However, for the sake of clarifying the particular contribution of this study, some general patterns in wider research have been identified. Table 2.3 identifies key research perspectives identified in the literature review and some publications that reflect these different perspectives.

The first perspective identified in the review of the literature in this educational sector is the viewpoint and experience of young people. Research that has foregrounded the perspective of young people as a starting point or primary focus has documented young peoples’ stories and experiences of marginalisation and exclusion from conventional education settings and how these differ from the experiences recounted by young people in alternative education settings.

This first research perspective included:

- experiences of young people as key informants;
- presentation of young people’s needs;
- analysis of the impact of conventional schooling on young people;
- young people’s perspectives on their futures; and
- descriptions of young people’s relationship with teachers in conventional schools, and staff in alternative education and learning choices programs.
Table 2.3
Three Research Perspectives and Key Researchers Identified in the Literature Review of Alternative Education and Learning Choices Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research portraying young peoples’ viewpoint and experiences</th>
<th>Research foregrounding program features, typologies and program evaluation</th>
<th>Research presenting a critical perspective: sociological, ideological, political and policy issues impacting young people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key informants’ experiences (Fraser et al., 1997; O’Brien et al., 2001; Smyth et al., 2004; Taylor, 2009; te Riele, 2000)</td>
<td>Typologies of alternative education and features of best practice (Aron, 2003; Aron, 2006; de Jong, 2005; de Jong &amp; Griffiths, 2006; DEETYA, 2001; Gable et al., 2006; Lehr, Chee, &amp; Ysseldyke, 2009; Powell, 2003; Quinn et al., 2006; Raywid, 1994; Reimer &amp; Cash, 2003; Tobin &amp; Sprague, 1999)</td>
<td>Challenging issues of transitions (te Riele, 2004; te Riele &amp; Crump, 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship of young people with teachers in schools and staff in alternative education and learning choices programs (Croninger &amp; Lee, 2001; Mills &amp; McGregor, 2010; Quinn et al., 2006; Wilson et al., 2011)</td>
<td>Scans of alternative education and flexible learning choices programs (de Jong, 2005; Holdsworth, 2011; Mills &amp; McGregor, 2010; Powell &amp; Shafiq, 2009; te Riele, 2012)</td>
<td>Indicators of disadvantage and social exclusion (Saunders, Naidoo, &amp; Griffiths, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of programs (Halsey, Jones, &amp; Lord, 2006; Myconos, 2011; Reimer &amp; Cash, 2003; Te Puni Kokiri, 2004; Walsh &amp; Tilbury, 2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Contradictions of alternative education programs (de Jong, 2005; Vadeboncoeur, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Critique of educational policy for young people (te Riele, 2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second perspective identified in the literature review foregrounded the features of best practice of alternative education or learning choices programs, including typologies of different kinds of programs presenting the emphasis in how the programs operated and the groups of young people they targeted. Also included in this perspective was research that evaluated programs. This second perspective included:

- typologies of alternative education and features of best practice;
- research that promoted preventative programs and alternative models of schooling;
- descriptions of sustainable programs;
- comparison between conventional schooling and other learning choices programs;
- scans of alternative education and learning choices programs; and
- evaluation of programs.

The third research perspective identified in the literature review encompassed research that presented critical perspectives including sociological, ideological, political and policy issues impacting young people. This third perspective included:

- challenging issues of transitions;
- marginalisation of young people;
- different views of the nature of education;
- sociological studies of young people;
- indicators of disadvantage and social exclusion;
- contradictions of alternative education programs; and
- critique of educational policy impacting marginalised young people.

A recent Australian report commissioned by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum mapped flexible and inclusive learning choices for young people and provided “an overview of the field of alternative education provision in Australia” (te Riele, 2012, p. 3). The report drew upon data from three main sources. First, data from the Learning
Choices National Scan (Holdsworth, 2011), which reviewed the range of programs across the country that seek to re-engage young people in positive learning choices; second, data from reports from individual programs; and third, data from an overview of existing research publications.

Report findings by te Riele (2012) have indicated that comprehensive knowledge about the range of programs, their purpose, outcomes, measures of success, and use of common terminology was limited and that these gaps should be addressed. The gaps related to six key themes including: numbers; outcomes; structures; mission; curriculum; and staffing (te Riele, 2012). This thesis exploring how ways of working and ways of professional learning in a network of flexi schools influences educator identity and development, addresses some aspects of two identified gaps in knowledge in te Riele’s report (2012).

These gaps fall under the themes of mission and staffing. Recommendations for further research within each of these themes were made by te Riele (2012). Three specific recommendations from the national report are partly addressed in this thesis.

Table 2.4 shows how identified gaps in the research in learning choices programs, under the two key themes of mission and staffing were represented in three report recommendations for further research. These recommendations were directly linked to aspects of the research project reported in this thesis. Recommendations for further research within each of these themes were made (te Riele, 2012).
Table 2.4

Identified Gaps in Research in Learning Choices Programs and Report Recommendations (te Riele, 2012) with Links to this Research Thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified gaps in research in learning choices programs and report recommendations for further research</th>
<th>Links between report recommendations and aspects of this research thesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mission</strong></td>
<td><strong>Staffing</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Recommendation 12  
Exploring the ways in which a shared mission gets enacted in programs, especially given the difficulties of developing a shared vision under conditions of insecurity, high workload and high staff turnover.  | Exploration of ways of working with young people within the flexi schools context, guided by operation by principles including respect, participation, safe & legal, and honesty.  |
| Recommendation 13  
Further research on the key elements of school culture that impact positively on student engagement in education in the specific context of Learning Choices programs.  | Exploration of ways of working and the underpinning values that support this work within the flexi schools context, e.g.,  |
|  
• using the four principles of respect, participation, safe and legal, and honesty  |
|  
• enacting caring relationships  |
|  
• fostering a sense of inclusive community.  | |

**Unique contribution of this study to this field of educational research.**

From this comprehensive review of the literature, it is apparent that there is a scarcity of research about educator identity and development in practice in alternative education or learning choices programs, and more specifically, the influence of the context on the formation of educator identity and development in practice in alternative education settings. Whilst some scholars have acknowledged the need for further research on staffing and professional development in this sector (Ashcroft, 1999; Hanson-Peterson, 2012; Myconos, 2011; Reimer & Cash, 2003; te Riele, 2012), research studies in these areas were not identified in the review of the literature.
Chapter Summary

This review of the literature has covered six areas including: the features of best practice of alternative education from international and national perspectives; the literature on the nature of identity in order to establish the interpretation attributed to this concept in this thesis; the notion of educator identity and in particular, teacher professional identity (TPI) with an emphasis on the influence of particular educational contexts on TPI, the emotional dimension of TPI – teacher as carer, and the impact of educational reform agendas on TPI; and literature connected to the foci of the two research questions, namely, ways of working and ways of professional learning in flexi school settings. Finally, gaps in the research were outlined, and the unique contribution this study makes to expanding knowledge in this education sector and field of research were identified.

Overview of Chapter Three

Chapter Three will present the sociocultural theoretical perspectives that informed this research project through consideration of theorists such as Wenger and his social theory of learning and notion of communities of practice, and Vygotsky’s perspective on human mental functioning and his construct of the ZPD. The researcher’s own theoretical construct of relational dynamics will also be presented in detail.
Chapter 3
SOCIOCULTURAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES
INFORMING THIS RESEARCH

Chapter Overview

The exploration of educator identity and development in practice in this study has its foundations in sociocultural theory. In this chapter sociocultural theory will be defined in terms of its roots in the work of early 20th Century Russian psychologist, Lev Semenovich Vygotsky. His theoretical legacy expressed in his ideas on human mental functioning, including the mediation of action through the use of cultural tools, and his theoretical construct of the ZPD as it relates to the notion of learning and development, will be discussed. Additionally, Vygotsky’s theories on human development and the formation of mind have influenced more recent developments of sociocultural theories of mind and action that “attempt to provide an account of learning and development as mediated processes” (Daniels, Cole, & Wertsch, 2007a, pp. 2-3).

Recent interpretations and developments of Vygotsky’s ideas can be categorised into four sociocultural theoretical traditions (Daniels et al., 2007a). The first tradition emphasises “semiotic mediation with a particular emphasis on speech”; the second tradition explores mediated action, or how “cultural artifacts, such as speech, serve as tools that both shape possibilities for thought and action and, in turn, are shaped by those who use them”; a third tradition emphasises “analysis of participation and the ways in which individuals function in communities”; whilst the fourth tradition of activity theory has a focus on joint-mediated activity (2007a, p. 2). Two of these traditions have directly influenced the formulation and design of this study. The first tradition of influence in this study emphasises how people participate and function within communities (Daniels et al., 2007a; Gee, 2004; Harland, 2003; Wenger, 1998), and the second influential tradition emphasises mediated action, or the dynamic

As the study reported in this thesis is a sociocultural exploration of educator identity and development in practice, a brief definition of identity and development will be restated. A more in depth examination of educator identity and development in practice may be found in Chapter Two: Literature Review. The two sociocultural traditions that have shaped this study, as outlined above, will be discussed and considered in relation to Vygotsky’s construct of the ZPD. Additionally, a sociocultural theoretical construct that the researcher has developed for this study, relational dynamics, will be explained. The potential theoretical contribution of relational dynamics to the sociocultural exploration of educator identity and development in practice in the research context will also be considered.

The manner in which sociocultural theory has informed the design and implementation of the study will be outlined with some reference to how the research questions were formulated, how the data collection methods were developed, and how data analysis was conducted. A more comprehensive treatment of research design and implementation will be presented in Chapter Four: Methodology. Finally, a summary of the sociocultural approach to theory that forms the basis of this research study will conclude the chapter.

**Vygotsky’s Legacy in the Development of Sociocultural Theory**

The work of Vygotsky has influenced “a wide range of disciplines and professions” through his attempts to develop “a theory of social, cultural and historical formation of the human mind” (Daniels et al., 2007a, p. 1). Vygotsky’s areas of research were broad and eclectic, a reflection of the historical, social and cultural context of Russian academics and scholars in the early 20th Century (Burns, Bodrova, & Leong, 2003). Of particular relevance for this study are his ideas on human mental
functioning including the mediation of action through the use of cultural tools, and his construct of the ZPD as it relates to the notion of learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Vygotsky’s perspective on human mental functioning.**

Vygotsky argued that human mental functioning was not so much an individual cognitive process, but rather a social process through which human action at both the individual and social levels is mediated through the use of various cultural tools such as language and other symbolic systems (1978; Wertsch, 1991, 1998). His idea that the development and formation of human mind and thought were influenced by social, cultural and historical conditions was a different approach to that of developmental psychologists of his time. They proposed that mental functioning was a cognitive process that occurred in the mind of an individual, possibly influenced by environmental factors that were considered independently and as a secondary concern (Daniels et al., 2007a; Good, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991).

Whilst Wertsch contended that a complete approach to a theory of human mental functioning and action and the relationship to social, cultural and historical factors was not necessarily apparent in the writings of Vygotsky, he identified three “basic themes” interwoven in Vygotsky’s writings that have contributed to an understanding of human mental functioning and action (Wertsch, 1991, p. 19). The first theme was that mental functioning was developmental in nature and changes over time; second, was the theme that higher mental functioning exists in the individual (“intramental functioning”) but derives from the social (“intermental functioning”); and the third theme concerned the mediation of human action at the individual and social levels through cultural tools and signs (1991, pp. 19 & 26). These ideas of Vygotsky have been of particular importance in this study exploring educator identity and development in practice. Educators’ ongoing identity construction and transformation, or their processes of being and
becoming educator, are situated in practice (Wenger, 1998), are not separate from human action (Wertsch, 1998), and from a sociocultural theoretical perspective, can only be understood in relation to the social, cultural and historic dimensions of the educational context.

Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD).

The ZPD is a Vygotskian concept that can be used to explain the distance between a learner’s actual ability and their potential capacity, which can be realised through the guidance and support of a more experienced other. Vygotsky described the ZPD stating that:

It is the distance between that actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

As a learner moves from a position of current capacity to realising their potential capacity, the boundaries of the ZPD change.

Vygotsky’s ZPD has been one of his most well-known concepts. In recent times it has been reinterpreted and developed. For example, some have described the ZPD as a bridge or connector from the mind to the body (Del Rio & Alvarez, 2007). However, the spatial dynamic of Vygotsky’s ZPD will be further explored and elaborated in this research study through incorporating the sociocultural notion that learning is embedded in social relationships and is situated in place.

Embodiment in educational research and the ZPD.

Recent trends in educational research on identity and sociocultural theory have incorporated notions of embodiment and images which have spatialised the research context. This trend has been reflected in the use of language and metaphors of space and place, for example, the subtitle of Alsup’s (2006) book on teacher identity discourses, is “Negotiating personal and professional spaces”. Connelly and Clandinin

Whilst Vygotsky’s ZPD may have been construed as an abstract space, the above research emphasises the need for a current interpretation of the ZPD to reflect the physicality or embodied nature of learning environments. That is, to be characterised by the social relationships of those who inhabit a specific space or place. As such, the ZPD may be conceptualised in an embodied sense, as being a part of the dynamic interactions in relationships, of members of a community or group.

Whilst relational spaces may be mediated by virtual or physical cultural tools, they are nonetheless embodied in the sense of being intrinsically located in the relational spaces between people in a learning community (Wenger, 1998). As such, the ZPD cannot be solely defined as a physical space, nor can it be defined as a purely abstract space. It is a “learning/teaching space constructed in relationship between child and adult” (Panofsky & Vadeboncoeur, 2012, p. 194) between “a learner’s level of independent performance . . . and the level of assisted performance” and is realised through a “dynamic interrelationship” with a more experienced other (Burns et al.,
2003, p. 575) to support learning and development. If the development of the learner changes, the boundaries of the ZPD change through the process of transformation from learning to development (Harland, 2003). The ZPD’s connection and integration with physical, embodied space is inevitable through its reliance upon the social, cultural and historic ‘situatedness’ of learning and development processes. It operates on both the “intermental and intramental planes” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 47), within and without, “inside and outside the skin” (Del Rio & Alvarez, 2007, p. 281). This interpretation of the ZPD informs this research study which is located in an educational context that has a strong emphasis on relationships and operation by principles that are enacted through negotiation and dialogue in order to find a “common ground” of understanding in democratic, relational learning places (Flexible Learning Centre Network (FLCN), 2005, p. 5).

**Defining Educator Identity and Development in Practice**

**Educator identity.**

Within this research study, educator identity is understood as a process of being and becoming that is ongoing. Identity is not a fixed construct (Sachs, 2001), it is constantly negotiated in relationship with others (Gee, 2001; Wenger, 1998). Through human action in particular sociocultural contexts (Alsup, 2006; Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, 1991), through engagement with ‘Discourses’, which capture and convey the meaning attributed to social practices (Alsup, 2006; Gee, 1992, p. 20), and through the narratives of ‘being’ that one communicates (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 16), one is recognised as a certain ‘kind of person’ (Gee, 2001, p. 99). This understanding of identity as being a process of becoming requires an appreciation of the socially situated notions of ‘identity- in practice’ and ‘identity- in discourse’ (Trent, 2010; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005).
These two notions of identity are consistent with the two sociocultural traditions previously outlined, namely the tradition focusing on human participation and functioning in communities and the tradition focusing on mediated action. The two sociocultural traditions highlight that identity formation is not passive, but involves human beings who exercise agency, or the ability to act on the world around them (Lasky, 2005). In the process of constructing identity, of being and becoming, human agents negotiate, form and perform their social and individual identities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Educator identity may therefore be understood in terms of how it is formed in relationship with others in action or practice (Bakhtin, 1981; Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, 1991, 1998), how it is shared and communicated through personal and collective stories or narratives of being and becoming (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), and how it is enacted with agency through engagement with discourses (Gee, 2001).

In this research study, the primary emphasis will be on educator identity in practice. Whilst an exploration of educator identity in discourse would have complemented the exploration of identity in practice, it has not been included as a significant component of this research study due to the choice to focus on an in-depth exploration of educator identity in practice. The practice of being educator in the research context is quite recent, only developed over the past 25 years. Whilst it has its origins within the educational tradition of Edmund Rice (McLaughlin, 2007), and congruence with well-established educational philosophies articulated in the work of Dewey (2010), Illich (1972), Freire (2000), and Ayers (2009), its conception, evolution and development within the Australian context has been recent. There has been little research conducted on the specific nature of the practice and even less on educator identity in practice.

Whilst some national and international studies have attempted to document features of best practice in alternative education contexts (Aron, 2006; de Jong &
Griffiths, 2006; Mills & McGregor, 2010; O’Brien et al., 2001; Reimer & Cash, 2003; Tobin & Sprague, 1999), educator identity in practice in these settings is a relatively under-researched area within educational research. For these reasons, the study reported in this thesis focuses on an in-depth exploration of educator identity and development in practice. Some reference is made to the complementary and interconnected role of discourse in the formation of educator identity and development, but this is not a major focus in this study.

**Educator development.**

Educator development within this research study is understood from a sociocultural perspective and is particularly influenced by Wenger’s (1998) social theory of learning. Ways of knowing (related to epistemology) and ways of being (related to ontology) are integrated with and inseparable from the social dynamic of relationships. It is through interacting experientially with the surrounding world, with objects and other people, mediated through cultural tools and symbols, in an experiential, embodied sense that people learn and develop (Alsup, 2006; Emig, 2001; Gee, 2004; Gilligan, 1982; Wertsch, 1998). Educator development may, therefore, be understood as being a process of integrating “professional and personal identities and related subjectivities/ideologies” (Alsup, 2006, p. 43), rather than as being a product that has a singular focus on increasing technical pedagogical expertise or content knowledge (Varghese et al., 2005).

This understanding of the nature of learning by doing, and learning through participation was explored by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). Lave and Wenger’s theory of situated learning and Wenger’s theory of learning in communities of practice, emphasise the social, participatory aspects of learning. Such theories highlight the interplay and integration of social, cultural and historical aspects of human interactions. These interactions characterise learning and development, and are
inclusive of the processes of being and becoming, of shaping and negotiating identity and development.

**Theoretical Traditions Shaping this Research**

This research study initially draws on the sociocultural tradition influenced by the ideas of Vygotsky that examine human participation and functioning in communities. Through an exploration of educators’ ways of working and ways of professional learning in the research context, insights will be gained into educator identity and development in practice. Subsequently, the research study reported here draws on another sociocultural tradition influenced by Vygotsky’s ideas. In this tradition, mental functioning and mediated action are explored with a particular emphasis on the kinds of cultural tools used, and the agency of those who act with meditational means in processes that transform and become transformed in the interaction (Wertsch, 1998).

The ways in which sociocultural forces are accessed through practice in communities and through the use of cultural tools by actors exercising agency in a particular context, are given analytic primacy in this study. According to Penuel and Wertsch (1995), analytic primacy “refers to the fact that researchers must employ some starting point in their approach and methodology, a starting point that necessarily directs attention toward certain phenomena and away from others” (p. 84). The analytic primacy of “meaningful human action” (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 91) expressed in the practice of educators and in the ways they contest, challenge and negotiate dominant cultural representations of educator identity in practice and discourse, is the starting point for understanding the ways that sociocultural forces within the context influence and shape identity formation. As educators exercise agency and access social, cultural and historical resources in their context, they can experience these resources “as both an empowering and constraining function for identity formation” (Gergen, 2009; Penuel &
Wertsch, 1995, p. 90; Vadeboncoeur, Hirst, & Kostogriz, 2006). The formation of identity is influenced by practice that informs discourse, and by discourse that shapes practice in complex sociocultural contexts.

The Influence of Practice on Educator Identity and Development: Participation in Communities of Practice

Wenger (1998) closely links identity to practice, suggesting that “the experience of identity in practice is a way of being [emphasis added] in the world” (p. 151). In Wenger’s social theory of learning, ways of being are inseparable from practice, are connected to meaning, identifiable within community and part of the process of learning as becoming. The four constructs of identity, practice, meaning and community are the essential components of Wenger’s social theory of learning. These four essential components of Wenger’s model are defined in relation to learning in the following ways: identity (learning as becoming); practice (learning as doing); meaning (learning as experience); and community (learning as belonging) (1998, p. 5). These components are “deeply interconnected and mutually defining” and Wenger himself commented that “you could switch any of the four peripheral components with learning, place it in the center as the primary focus and the model would still make sense” (1998, p. 5).

Consequently, as this study is primarily exploring educator identity and development, Wenger’s model of a social theory of learning has been reconfigured following his own suggestion, and the construct of ‘identity’ combined with the notion of ‘development’, has been moved from being peripheral components, to being the central focus of the model. The four peripheral components now include: practice (identity and development as doing); learning (identity and development as social participation); meaning (identity and development as experience); and community (identity and development as belonging). See Figure 3.1 for the reconfigured components.
Figure 3.1. Components of a social theory of identity and development, based on a reconfiguration of Wenger's components of a social theory of learning.
This reconfiguration of Wenger’s model of a social theory of learning could now be described as the components of a social theory of identity and development. As such, the reconfigured model was used as the basic framework for the exploration and analysis of educator identity and development in practice in this study.

**Beyond communities of practice: Addressing critiques of Wenger’s model.**

Some contention exists around Wenger’s model of communities of practice. This is partly related to aspects of his definition of what constitutes a community of practice, who belongs, how the boundaries of the community are defined, and how participation is understood (Gee, 2005a). Criticism has been made that Wenger’s model has lost a critical perspective of earlier work, becoming oversimplified in terms of how membership is defined and in terms of how members function within communities of practice (Barton & Tusting, 2005). His model has been criticised for not addressing complexity within diverse communities, for the lack of critique around issues of “power, conflict, inclusion and exclusion” and for the lack of a theory of language that could inform such a critique (Barton & Tusting, 2005, p. 7 & 10). Gee’s perspective regarding Wenger’s model of communities of practice is useful in response to such criticism (Gee, 2005a). Gee suggests that rather than focusing on whether a model is right or wrong, another approach that may be more useful is the toolkit approach. This approach allows a consideration of whether the model is a tool that works better for a particular purpose or a specific question given that the shared purpose of social research is “the study of meaning making” (Gee, 2005a, p. 593).

Whilst the above criticisms may have importance for those adopting a sociolinguistic approach to analysis, the approach adopted for this study has the aim of understanding how human action is mediated through participation in communities.

The purpose of this research study is to gain insights into how practice in an educational context shapes educator identity and development, essentially viewed as a
process of being and becoming. Wenger (1998) suggests that a discussion of power “must include considerations of community, negotiation of meaning, and identity inherent in any social context” (p. 190). The researcher recognises the importance of considering how issues of power, conflict, inclusion and exclusion relate to educator identity and development in the research context and will be considering this through the theoretical construct of relational dynamics, specifically developed by this researcher for this study. Details of relational dynamics will be elaborated later in this chapter.

The Influence of Mediated Action on Educator Identity and Development in Practice

Consideration of how speech, cultural tools and sign systems mediate human action is a feature of the work of James Wertsch (1991). He contends that towards the end of Vygotsky’s life the trend of his work was more focused on “intermental functioning rather than intramental functioning” (1991, p. 47). The emphasis on the social dynamic of mental functioning is privileged by Wertsch who proposed that “the goal of a sociocultural approach is to explicate how human action is situated in cultural, historical and institutional settings” and that an understanding of the notion of mediated action is crucial in this explication (1991, p. 119). Mediated action consists of three integrated elements: “action, agent (the person doing the action), and the meditational means for the action” (1991, p. 119). These elements cannot be viewed in isolation, the means of mediation is inextricably linked to the action and the agent of the action. This interconnected view of the action, the meditational means and the person is reflected in the “person-acting-with-mediational-means” and is fundamental to Wertsch’s (1991) approach (p. 119). In considering units of analysis for understanding the cultural, social and historical situatedness of human action, Wertsch emphasises the importance of not focusing on language and other sign systems in isolation or “abstracted from human
action” (1991, p. 119). Therefore, mediated action can be seen in the practice of educators in context within a community of discourse.

**Discourse.**

Particular “ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and of acting” (Gee, 1991, p. 143) can be understood as ways to denote membership in a particular social group or social network, and comprise what Gee refers to as a ‘Discourse’ (Gee, 1991). An awareness of educator discourse informs the exploration of educator identity and development in practice within the research context. Appreciating the manner in which educator discourse has shaped educator identity in practice in historical, social and cultural ways is relevant in terms of understanding how the particular features of the research context may influence the proposed different ways of being educator that are being explored through this study. This approach is in keeping with the sociocultural tradition that explores mediated action (Wertsch, 1991).

Discourse does not exist in isolation from the actions, behaviours and ways of being educator in the flexi school contexts. In terms of the research reported in this thesis, Gee’s notion of discourse influenced the exploration of mediated action with a particular emphasis on the kinds of cultural tools used and the agency of those who act with meditational means (Wertsch, 1998). Consideration of the way discourse is socially, historically and culturally situated and how it is shaped through human beings exercising agency, creates a space in which issues of power, conflict, inclusion and exclusion can be identified and explored, and is therefore another attempt to address the critique of Wenger’s communities of practice model that it does not adequately address these issues.

**Reinterpreting the ZPD.**

The ZPD has been described in relation to learning processes, but can also be reinterpreted for wider purposes. In the ZPD, the difference between a more
experienced other and a novice, and the manner in which this difference is overcome in order to transform the limits of the learner’s abilities and understanding, is often interpreted as a dialectic learning process. Whilst this is one legitimate interpretation, the ZPD can also be reinterpreted as a space of relational interaction between a more experienced other and the learner (whether teacher or peer) in which the influence between both parties is multi-directional rather than uni-directional (Del Rio & Alvarez, 2007; Goos, Galbraith, & Renshaw, 2002; Harland, 2003). This reinterpretation of Vygotsky’s ZPD that has emerged over time as a result of the influence of more contemporary social, cultural and historical contexts, enables the ZPD to be understood and applied with greater levels of complexity. For example in the research context for this study, the conventional norms of expert teacher/student relationships are in fact challenged and transformed into a relational model in which the learning environment is deliberately transformed to be more welcoming, non-hierarchical, democratic, supportive and nurturing. The experiences of disenfranchised young people and the complexities in their lives that have, in many instances, involved discrimination, social exclusion, trauma and neglect, require a different model of interaction than what may have been experienced in more conventional educational settings and that can redress the “relational poverty” sometimes experienced by young people (Downey, 2007, 2009; Perry, 2009, p. 250). In this instance, the potential of the reformulated ZPD lies within the basis of learning and development and is inclusive of a model of interaction in the space between teacher and learner that highlights communication as meaning making that is participatory and potentially performative in that it recognises the agency of both the more experienced expert, as well as the novice learner (Biesta, 2004). Therefore in the reformulated ZPD, learning not only consists of a one way dialectic communication characterised by passing on information or content, which at times may be useful, but is also the result of the interaction in the dialogic, relational space in between a more
experienced other and the learner (Bhabha, 1994; Biesta, 2004; Brownlee, 2004; Renshaw, 2004).

**Contemporary varieties of dialogue.**

A useful perspective on dialogue is that outlined by Renshaw (2004). Renshaw (2004) highlights the fact that contemporary researchers define dialogue quite broadly, noting that “‘Dialogue’ as a construct looks both ways – towards individual processes of thinking and reflection, as well as towards the constitution of cultural practices and communities at particular historical moments” (p. 1). Renshaw describes different kinds of dialogue in terms of “instruction, conversation or inquiry” (2004, p. 6). He acknowledges the “irreducible tension” between dialogue and instruction, but argues that:

Effective teachers have learned how to perform in this contradictory space to both follow and lead, to be both responsive and directive, to require both independence and receptiveness from learners. Instructional dialogue therefore is an artful performance rather than a prescribed technique. (Renshaw, 2004, p. 10)

Renshaw draws upon Halasek’s notion of pedagogy of possibility (1999), a pedagogic model that recognises contrasting cultural discourses and varying pedagogic strategies, adopting a both/and, rather than an either/or stance. This perspective requires that researchers and educators are clear on the purpose, intent and focus of their observation, analysis and pedagogical choices in terms of how they assist transformation of the individual learner as a result of the structure and performance of different kinds of dialogue as defined by Renshaw (2004, p. 11).

**Exploring Identity and Development in Practice through Relational Dynamics**

Within the sociocultural theoretical framework that shapes this research, the researcher has developed a construct that is referred to as relational dynamics.
Relational dynamics is a theoretical construct offering a relational model of identity and development in multidisciplinary communities of practice. It is a construct that highlights the interplay of relational agency (Edwards, 2005) and relational equity (Boaler, 2008). It provides a specific focus of practice that differs in some ways from Wenger’s reconfigured model outlining a social theory of identity and development. Whilst Wenger’s model incorporates practice as an integral component, relational dynamics incorporates relational agency and relational equity and has relevance for complex contexts characterised by multidisciplinary practice - contexts in which working across professional boundaries is a common and necessary feature of the working environment.

**Relational agency.**

Relational agency is about social interactions and the social and cultural tools that assist in the mediation of agency, or one’s capacity to act on the world (Edwards, 2005). Edwards states that what is of particular interest in terms of professional social interactions is the “attention to the negotiations that individuals make as they work in and with the social” with emphasis being given to “the resources” and “cultural tools” beyond the individual that can “enhance action” (2005, p. 172). In her argument, Edwards makes a clear connection between the development of relational agency and enhanced professional agency. She locates her argument within a sociocultural theory of learning, Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) influenced by ‘sociocultural psychology’ and ‘activity theory’ (2005, p. 171).

Developing relational agency enhances the capacity of educators to learn from the difficulties and challenges of their practice through collaboration and the sharing of issues with other educators. This then has the potential to expand their understanding of an issue and allows ‘pedagogic expertise’ to be exercised, thus developing “their professional identities as responsive teachers” (Edwards, 2005, p. 176), or in the context

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of this research, responsive educators, a term that includes other professionals who are also educators in the broad sense of what it means to educate. Relational agency as a part of professional learning, has implications for workers as they learn how to recognise and utilise the resources within the workplace, including people, in the transformation of the object of their work (Edwards, 2005). For example, in considering how to support the needs of a young person, attempts could be made with other professionals to engage in the “negotiations which elicit understandings, reveal one’s own interpretations and allow for alignment of action to accomplish the transformation of the object that is being worked on” (Edwards, 2005, p. 171). In this case, the object being worked on is the “young person’s trajectory” that is, the workers are exploring how to meet the needs of a young person who is negotiating complex life and educational choices (Edwards, 2005, p. 171). Relational agency has the potential to enhance the capacity of workers to move across professional boundaries and to make them more effective in finding new and more creative ways to work through problems and challenges, drawing on the resources within the work context, particularly the resource of people and their experiences, insights and perspectives in problem solving (Edwards, 2005). If the capacity for relational agency is targeted as an area of significance for professional learning, Edwards (2005) contests that the ability of workers to access and contribute resources can be enhanced.

Teachers in a Canadian study acknowledged the limitations of meeting the needs of at-risk students and the frustrations they experienced when system-wide “mechanisms to deliver integrated services” were not in place (Friesen et al., 1999, p. 928). Some of these teachers felt isolated in their efforts to support young people whose needs were complex and required “pedagogical responsiveness” inclusive of a “community approach” across professional disciplines (Friesen et al., 1999, p. 928). They themselves recognised the significance of working in collaboration with other
professionals for the sake of at-risk students. This collaboration is a feature of relational agency as described by Edwards (2005).

Another study by Edwards (2004) has implications for understanding how relational agency can improve professional practice. Based on three evaluative studies of multi-agency collaboration intended to prevent social exclusion of children, young people and families, Edwards proposed a model that emphasised relational agency as a way forward in multi-disciplinary work practices. She suggested that relational agency enabled crossing of traditional boundaries between professions in order to enhance the capacity of workers to work through complex issues that required a broader perspective, than can be provided by only one profession (2004). Relational agency also occurred in the process of professional colleagues “bringing to bear two subjectivities and sets of conceptual tools on the problem and thereby expand[ing] interpretations of the problem” (Edwards, 2005, p. 174). As the “understanding of how aligned action is negotiated and sustained” professionals are learning “how to work together and to learn from doing so” (Edwards, 2005, p. 175). See Figure 3.2 for a synthesis of some of the capacities of relational agency.

Whilst relational agency is a concept that focuses on the processes of learning through working with others and negotiating ideas around a particular object for the purpose of transformation of that object, the specific values underpinning this concept tend to be implicit and the communicative practices associated with how this process unfolds, are not explicitly defined.
Relational equity.

The other dimension of relational dynamics, which complements and enhances relational agency, is the notion of relational equity (Boaler, 2008). Relational equity explicitly defines values-based practices – the ways that people should treat each other as they work together (Boaler, 2008). See Figure 3.3 for a synthesis of relational equity capacities.

In research with heterogeneous groupings of mixed-ability, multi-racial and multi-lingual secondary school students in mathematics classrooms, relational equity became crucial in terms of providing specific values-based communicative practices (Boaler, 2008). These practices included respecting each other’s differences, listening to those who have “a different opinion, perspective or experience” and “acting in equitable ways” (Boaler, 2008, p. 173; Brown & Renshaw, 1999). Equitable ways of acting can include appreciating that there are many different ways to solve a problem.
Enacting relational equity involves negotiation through practices such as explaining, justifying, listening to explanations, asking for clarification, re-looking at possible solutions together, caring about another person’s learning and engagement, and valuing helping another to develop understanding not only at an individual level but for the common good of the group (Boaler, 2008).

The values underpinning the way that people treat each other as they work together were made explicit through the development and enacting of relational equity (Boaler, 2008). For example, in an American study of culturally and linguistically diverse Latino students being taught by predominantly white middle class teachers, the role of Latino paraeducators (teacher aides or education support workers) were recognised as a classroom resource for accessing the “funds of knowledge” of the culturally diverse student cohort (Rueda & Monzo, 2002, p. 505). The expression funds of knowledge, “refers to the sometimes hidden intellectual knowledge that people gain as they participate in a given culture, community and household, including their
language, values, concerns, interests, skills, and competence” (Rueda & Monzo, 2002, p. 505).

The findings of this study suggested that the potential of working with paraeducators to access funds of knowledge of culturally diverse students was negatively affected by a general lack of awareness amongst middle class white teachers. The teachers in the study did not recognise the need to provide culturally responsive instruction for the sake of equity and access. Additionally, structural issues impinged on creating opportunities for collaboration, for example, lack of allocated time and overcoming embedded institutional notions of teacher status compared with paraeducator status (Rueda & Monzo, 2002, p. 519). The researcher of the project reported here would argue that if relational equity was evident in the context of the American study, more teachers would have been active in valuing the contribution of paraeducators through “listening to those who have a different opinion, perspective or experience” (Boaler, 2008, p. 173), particularly in relation to cultural diversity.

**Relational dynamics: An interplay of agency and equity.**

The interplay of relational agency and relational equity forms the basis of relational dynamics (see Figure 3.4 for a model of relational dynamics). Of importance in this model is the dynamic interplay and interconnectedness of an individual actor who performs their identity in and through social relationships with others. Each individual actor/performer has varying degrees of potential to exercise agency and equity as they negotiate and perform their identity, in processes of being and becoming, of negotiating meaning and belonging, as they learn and develop within a multidisciplinary community of practice. Whilst the focus of this study is on educator identity and development in practice, all actors and individuals in the research context, including the young people who choose to re-engage in education, their families and carers, various community members, volunteers and workers from collaborating
agencies, are perceived to be actors/performers of agency and equity.

Educators do not exist in isolation, but are part of a dynamic, interconnected community, whose members, participate in varying ways and at various levels. Whether this participation is peripheral or central (Lave & Wenger, 1991), all performers of identity have agency that can be exercised (or not), have the potential to enact equity (or not) and negotiate meaning in various ways within the community of practice. The extent to which members exercise and enact agency and equity is shaped in part by the daily practices of the community and by the discourses of the context that are privileged. By looking at the context in this manner, as a community of practice in which identity is linked to practice, a greater understanding may be developed of the manner in which particular contexts influence and shape educator identity and development. This influence may include the agency of individuals, meaning making in
terms of the values that are negotiated, the experience of belonging in community and the processes of learning in which people negotiate ways of being and becoming. The influence of context on identity and development is dependent on the manner and extent to which the interplay of agency and equity is negotiable as actors perform and negotiate their identity – the processes of being and becoming - within a community of practice.

The trustworthiness of the theoretical construct of relational dynamics will be considered in relation to the data gathered from on-the-ground practitioners. This research project aims to explore whether the sociocultural theoretical construct of relational dynamics contributes to a deeper understanding of educator identity and development in practice – in relation to the ways people participate and function in the multidisciplinary educational context of the flexi schools.

**Theoretical Foundations of the Research Design and Implementation**

**Formulating research questions.**

The research questions for the research study reported in this thesis were based on the sociocultural theoretical premise that educator identity and development is intrinsically linked to practice, influenced by social discourse, which in turn influences practice within the research context. The overarching research issue regarding how practice in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development was informed by two questions that relate to two specific domains of practice, viz:

- How do ways of working in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice?
- How do ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice?
When considering these questions, Wenger’s social theory of learning was influential. Initially, his idea that “the experience of identity in practice is a way of being [emphasis added] in the world” (1998, p. 151) influenced the decision to specifically focus on exploring educator identity and development in practice. The lack of research on educator identity and development in practice in alternative education settings confirmed the significance of this research focus in the relatively new education sector of flexi schools in the field of sociocultural research exploring identity and development in practice. Making explicit aspects of the practice of educators and their ways of being in relationship with young people and colleagues in this context was a way that this study could contribute to expanding the knowledge of educator identity and development in practice in a system of flexi schools.

As previously mentioned in this chapter, Wenger (1998) suggested that the components of his social theory of learning could be moved around so that any component could become the central focus and the model would still make sense. The efficacy of the reconfigured components creating a framework for a social theory of identity and development was tested in the design experiment reported in this thesis, not only through the construction of the research questions, but also in designing research instruments and through data collection and analysis. The ways the responses to the research questions can be linked to the components of this framework for a social theory of identity and development in multidisciplinary communities of practice, based on Wenger’s social theory of learning (Wenger, 1998), will be made explicit within the final discussion in Chapter Eight.

**Choosing a research design.**

In choosing design experiment methodology for this research study, four main factors were considered including: the potential to improve educational practice; consonance with sociocultural theory; the opportunity to develop and refine theory; and,
providing an appropriate ethical fit with the research context. Details of how design experiment methodology was consonant with sociocultural theory will be outlined in Chapter Four: Methodology. In essence, design researchers acknowledge the complex social features of educational contexts attempting to be attentive and responsive to these various social dynamics in order to continue the process of “progressive refinement” of the design in order to “better address the goals and principles” of the researchers (Collins, Joseph, & Bielaczyc, 2004, p. 18).

Developing and implementing research tools.

Wenger (1998) recognises the significance of narratives or stories in the way people engage in communities of practice. He describes this notion by explaining that:

A community of practice is a history collapsed into a present that invites engagement. Newcomers can engage with their own future, as embodied by old-timers. As a community of practice, these old timers deliver the past and offer the future, in the form of narratives and participation both. Each has a story to tell. In addition, the practice itself gives life to these stories, and the possibility of mutual engagement offers a way to enter these stories through one’s own experience. (p. 156)

The stories of educators in the flexi schools’ context are imbued with values and the processes of making meaning through experience. The personal lives and experiences of educators are integrated into their professional identity (Alsup, 2006) which is negotiated through processes of participation in communities of practice. With the notion that story is an expression of identity (Sfard & Prusak, 2005), initial data were gathered through a general staff questionnaire and interviews with sixteen experienced educators in the context who were asked to tell their story of how they came to the work, how they saw themselves in relation to their work with disenfranchised young people, what was valued in their work, and what they felt newcomers to the work needed in terms of induction. Subsequent research tools including those associated with RPGs conducted with staff during their induction year, continued to emphasise the links
between identity and development in practice with discourse, situated in social, cultural and historical contexts of the research location.

**An approach to data analysis.**

Data analysis tools were specifically adopted with the intention of exploring educator identity and development in practice with a view to understand the embedded social, cultural and historical features of the context. This was achieved through examination of educators’ perceptions of self and ways of working and professional learning captured in the descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis of open-ended responses in a number of items in the questionnaire; through thematic content and thematic network analysis of narratives of being and narratives of practice gathered in semi-structured interviews, highlighting particular ways of working and professional learning; and through thematic content and thematic network analysis of researcher journal entries and participants’ written evaluations of RPGs that were collected in Stage Three of the design experiment. Further details of data collection methods and specific details of data analysis tools will be outlined in Chapter Four: Methodology.

Two aspects of a social theory of identity and development were considered in relation to the findings on identity and development in practice to gain further insights into how educator identity and development were influenced by the context. The first aspect was a social theory of identity and development based on Wenger’s components of a social theory of learning. The second aspect was the researcher’s theoretical construct of relational dynamics, a construct of a social theory of identity and development in practice in multidisciplinary contexts. These aspects were considered in relation to the findings from the data analysis to gain further insights into how educator identity and development were influenced by the context. Vygotsky’s construct of the ZPD has been reinterpreted to include notions of embodied learning and spatial relations that exist within the learning context that encompass dialogic and dialectic
learning experiences. These ideas will also contribute to the exploration and discussion on the influence of the flexi schools’ context on educator identity and development in practice.

**Chapter Summary**

The sociocultural exploration of educator identity and development in this study was influenced by particular ways of working or practice (Wenger, 1998), informed by the underpinning and implicit values of this practice (Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 2005a; Wenger, 1998); and by ways of professional learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) that were privileged within the research context, thus contributing to the ways in which educators negotiated their identity in practice and in relation to discourse (Gee, 1991). These contextual influences are cultural, social and historical and they are in relationship with the actions and agency of those who inhabit the context (Wertsch, 1998).

The researcher’s interest in this study was located within the interplay of educators’ “individual functioning and development and the sociocultural practices in which individuals take part” that encapsulates a Vygotskian perspective (van Huizen, van Oers, & Wubbels, 2005, p. 271) informing the theoretical basis of this research. Whilst the social, cultural and historical aspects of human contexts are not isolated or independent of each other, making use of one particular aspect as a lens for understanding educator identity and development may provide useful insights into the ways in which identity is co-constructed in context. In this research study, educator identity and development were explored in relation to how they were formed in relationship with others in action or practice using a social lens (Bakhtin, 1981; Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, 1991, 1998); how they were enacted with agency through engagement with discourses using a cultural lens (Gee, 2001) and; how they were shared and communicated through personal and collective stories or narratives of being
and becoming using an historical lens (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). The embodied and spatial dynamics of Vygotsky’s ZPD were considered with the components of a social theory of identity and development influenced by Wenger and through the researcher’s construct of relational dynamics. How the various components of a social theory of identity and development in practice in multidisciplinary contexts influence the negotiation of educator identity and development in practice – the processes of being and becoming educator embedded in and influenced by social relationships in situated places – was explored through this research study.
Chapter 4
METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

The research methodology of Design Experiment chosen for this study has been pivotal in translating the research issue identified in the literature review, and the sociocultural theoretical perspective espoused, into a design that advances a comprehensive exploration of the research questions. This methodology chapter outlines the research design of the study providing a definition of design experiment and a rationale for the choice of this methodology for this study. The research questions about how ways of working and ways of professional learning influence educator identity and development in practice have been restated.

Drawing on Bannan-Ritland’s (2003) model of an Integrated Learning Design Framework as the basis for this study, the three stage structure of this design experiment is presented and explained. An overview of the recruitment processes for participants, details of the data collection methods used in each stage and how the data sets addressed the research questions are presented. The procedures used in carrying out the design including data analysis, consideration of issues of authenticity and trustworthiness of data collection methods and data analysis tools, as well as ethical considerations for the research study are outlined. Finally a summary of the chapter is included to prepare for the presentation and discussion of findings in subsequent chapters.

The Research Questions that Informed this Study

In this exploration of educator identity and development in practice in the flexi schools’ context, this study has sought to address one overarching research issue regarding how practice in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development. Two questions have been formulated to inform the overarching research issue and relate to two specific domains of practice, viz:
• How do ways of working in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice?
• How do ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice?

In exploring ways of working and ways of professional learning, this research study was designed to explore the influence of the flexi schools’ context on educator identity and development, and to enhance an aspect of professional learning through staff induction. Due to the increased growth in the number of flexi schools over the last few years, the importance of inducting staff into the practice and philosophy of this model of working to enfranchise young people is critically important. The methodology of design experiment enabled this two-fold objective to be achieved.

**Design Experiment Methodology**

In a design experiment\(^1\), consideration of a particular issue or aspect of educational practice is made with a view to bring about some kind of enhancement or improvement through implementing various stages of enquiry. These stages include exploration, enactment and evaluation (Bannan-Ritland, 2003). The purpose of these stages is to consider how a particular issue or aspect of educational practice could be improved through designing, prototyping and evaluating an enhancement to the way the practice occurs. The evaluation of the enactment of the enhancement informs further cycles of exploration, enactment and evaluation. Iterative cycles of reflection throughout the process of implementing the design experiment, enable input and feedback from various stakeholders and participants to be incorporated. In this way these iterative cycles of reflection on the experience of implementing the design can contribute to improved educational practice and a deepening awareness of the

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\(^1\) Design Experiment” or “Design Research” is an emergent methodology in educational research. Throughout this study, the term design experiment will be used.
theoretical underpinnings of “teaching, learning and educational systems” (Edelson, 2002; Schoenfeld, 2006, pp. 106 -107). This kind of awareness was important for the context of the flexi schools in which reengaging young people who were disenfranchised from education was the priority.

Improved educational practice specifically related to the research questions about how ways of working and professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influenced educator identity and development has implications for professional development and induction of new staff. These features of design experiment were important for the context of the flexi schools that were located within a rapidly growing educational sector and research field that were diverse and somewhat fragmented (te Riele, 2012). The educational model used in flexi schools to enfranchise young people who have experienced failure and exclusion in conventional schooling is recognised within this sector as having some degree of legitimacy due to its longevity, underpinning educational philosophy, and range of learning choices offered to enfranchise young people. This recognition has been supported by ongoing invitations from various communities, government and non-government partner organisations to develop new initiatives (FLCN, 2008).

Due to the limited research in this sector related to educator identity and development in practice, two objectives informed this research. The first and primary objective of the research was to explore the influence of the flexi schools’ context on educator identity and development in practice. In conducting this exploration, the importance of including the perspectives of on-the-ground practitioners was prioritised. The second and complementary objective of the research was a pragmatic consideration to contribute to improving an aspect of the practice of educators in the realm of staff induction. Including educators’ perspectives and experience was also a key priority of this second objective. The cyclic nature of the design experiment was important, as
reflection on the experience of implementing an enhancement to practice within an educational setting, impacted on the next cycle and enabled participant input. In this regard, a design experiment has similar features to action research. However, a design experiment has both a practical and theoretical focus for enhancing practice.

The close relationship between improving educational design for new kinds of learning and the development of theory is acknowledged within design experiment methodology (Cobb, Confrey, di Sessa, Lehrer, & Schauble, 2003). The theory development made possible through using a design experiment in this research project could be relevant across the network of flexi schools, with some possible implications for a wider range of alternative education contexts. This differs from the specific practical focus of action research that is used to improve “a specific problem in a defined context” (Burns, 1994), and to understand the educational practices and situations in which these practices occur (Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart, & Zuber-Skerritt, 2002).

A Framework for Design Experiments

The framework for design experiments that was adapted for this research was based on Bannan-Ritland’s stages of Integrative Learning Design Framework (2003). This framework provided flexibility during the different stages of the implementation. It was specifically developed for an education context and was based on Bannan-Ritland’s (2003) own research and experience in education settings. The framework was chosen for its clarity of purpose captured in the specific explanations outlining each stage. It could be adapted by researchers to a wide range of contexts. Figure 4.1 illustrates how the framework was applied to this study. One significant modification to Bannan- Ritland’s framework is shown at the bottom of the diagram and represents the overarching research issue this study has sought to address regarding how practice in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development.
Throughout the design experiment this primary objective of the study was embedded within each stage and formed the backdrop for the second and complementary objective: contributing to improving an aspect of the practice of educators in the realm of staff induction. The two research questions were explored throughout the design experiment. The first research question about how ways of working influenced educator identity and development was explored primarily through Stage One questionnaire and interview data. Some aspects of Stage Two and Three data also contributed to an understanding of ways of working.

The second research question about how professional learning influenced educator identity and development in practice was explored primarily in Stages Two and Three of the design experiment within a real context of professional learning for staff induction. This exploration was also shaped by questionnaire and interview data.
from Stage One. In this way, practitioners’ perspectives of their experience of ways of working and ways of professional learning throughout each stage of the design experiment influenced the responses to the research questions.

According to the description of Bannan-Ritland’s (2003) framework, Stage One: Exploration, included the customary stages of educational research such as identification of the problem, literature review, definition of the problem and formulating an hypothesis or key concepts. Additionally, other processes from design fields, including needs analysis and identification of the target audience, were included (Bannan-Ritland, 2003). In this study, Stage One included a review of the literature, and data collection using a questionnaire and interviews. Results of analysis of these data contributed to developing an understanding of the needs of the context, a clearer definition of the research issue, and experienced educators’ perceptions of staff induction needs.

The description of Stage Two: Enactment acknowledged that any intervention is constructed within a social context and influenced by those in the context. This allows for initial planning and subsequent revisions in reflective cycles during which feedback from users can be integrated into further development of the intervention (Bannan-Ritland, 2003). This stage usually occurs over a longer period of time, and involves numerous cycles of design and refinement achieved through reflection on implementation of enhancements to practice. In this study, Stage Two included the enactment of an intervention to enhance staff induction through prototyping RPGs.

One of the aims of Stage Three: Evaluation Local Impact was to determine the level of satisfaction among participants involved in designing and implementing an enhancement to educational practice. For example, in an education intervention design described by Bannan-Ritland, (2003, p. 23) participants included teachers, parents, literacy facilitators and children. Two levels of evaluation were identified, namely
formative and summative. Formative evaluation usually happens during the enactment phase when theory development is occurring at a local level. The summative evaluation occurs towards the end of the intervention and has the potential to inform theoretical developments, as well as adaptations to the original design (Bannan-Ritland, 2003). In this study, the third stage of Evaluation: Local impact included documenting and evaluating the enhancement to staff induction.

The fourth stage of the framework, Evaluation: Broader Impact, involves consideration of how the educational research practices and enhancements are adopted or adapted, emphasising a concern for the longer term impact of using the insights from the learning developed in the enhancement to staff induction that is a key focus of the design experiment (Bannan-Ritland, 2003). In this research study Stage Four, Evaluation: Broader Impact, was encompassed in the thesis writing process that included the synthesis of data through analysis, and the articulation of research findings incorporating the relationship of these to theory development around educator identity and development in the research context. The development and refinement of theory occurred as cumulative insights gained from each cycle were considered in the light of educator identity and development expressed through ways of working and ways of professional learning. Other publications arising out of the design experiment were also part of Bannan-Ritland’s description of Stage Four Evaluation: Broader Impact. In this study, only three stages were explicitly reported in this thesis and include: Stage One: Exploration; Stage Two: Enactment; and Stage Three: Evaluation (local impact). Stage Four: Evaluation (broader impact) is represented in the process of writing this thesis and in publications produced as a result of engaging in this process.

**Rationale for Using Design Experiment in this Study**

Choosing a research method as a way of engaging in an inquiry involves consideration of the best fit of research paradigm, theory, data gathering, data analysis
(Silverman, 2005), and the unique features of the research context, in order to construct an integrated and comprehensive response to the research questions. The choice of design experiment for the methodology of this study was based on four main reasons: first, improvement in educational practice was a feature of design experiment methodology that could readily be applied to this study; second, design experiment methodology was consonant with sociocultural theory; third, a design experiment emphasised the development and refinement of theory; and fourth, design experiment methodology provided an appropriate ethical fit with the research context. Each of these reasons will now be justified.

**Improvement of educational practice.**

The first reason for using a design experiment was the capacity to provide findings that may potentially lead to improvements in educational practice (Collins et al., 2004). The second research question asked how ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influenced educator identity and development in practice. Data were drawn from practitioner perspectives in interviews, such as recalled personal accounts and recommendations regarding what new staff need for induction. Additionally, this design experiment enabled engagement in professional learning by the researcher with participants, providing empirical research of the experience of a common event of professional learning through processes of staff induction. This experience of professional learning was complemented by participant recall captured in Stage One data. This created a broader understanding of the second research question about how ways of professional learning influenced educator identity and development in practice.

As minimal research has been conducted on educator identity and development in the flexi schools’ context and within the alternative education sector, both nationally and internationally, the need for further research on staff professional development
requirements for this context has been identified in the literature review (Reimer & Cash, 2003; te Riele, 2012). Ways of being educator in the flexi schools were explored through staff perceptions of the practice of educators in the context with consideration given to how this practice in the context influenced educator identity and development. The design experiment incorporated cycles of reflection and collaboration with staff at various stages of the research that influenced the design or prototyping and enactment of enhancements to staff induction processes providing different perspectives in response to the research questions.

**Consonance with sociocultural theory.**

Design researchers in educational settings acknowledge that research occurs within complex social contexts with multiple variables that are not able to be controlled or predetermined (Collins et al., 2004). Design researchers’ recognition of the significance of social dynamics in educational research settings highlights the consonance of this methodology with the sociocultural theoretical framework adopted in this study. An assumption underpinning sociocultural theories of learning is that all learning is located within a context of social interactions, emphasising the importance of a sociocultural setting in the shaping of mental functioning through the use of various cultural tools (van Huizen et al., 2005; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Wertsch, 1998; Wertsch, Del Rio & Alvarez, 1995). Whilst design researchers pay particular attention to the specific details of each phase of the design process for the sake of improving educational practice, the acknowledgement of the complex social features of educational contexts means that a design researcher is attentive and responsive to these various social dynamics in order to continue the process of ongoing fine-tuning of the design in order to more effectively address their research goals (Collins et al., 2004). This responsiveness to multiple variables and unpredictable interactions of the social
context by design researchers highlights the consonance of this methodology with the sociocultural theory that frames this study.

**The development and refinement of theory.**

A third feature of the methodology of design experiment that was important for this study was the notion of theory development and refinement (Collins et al., 2004; Edelson, 2002). Within the sociocultural theoretical tradition, a theoretical construct of relational dynamics was developed by the researcher and outlined earlier in this thesis (see Chapter Three). The development and refinement of this theoretical construct occurred throughout the research process. The authenticity of the theoretical construct was considered in relation to the experiences of educators, who were on-the-ground practitioners in the research context of the network of flexi schools. These experiences were captured in the data gathered through a number of different data collection methods. The authenticity of this process of theory development and its application to practice emerged through collaboration and consultation, and through processes of refinement, which were integral parts of the design experiment methodology (Collins et al., 2004).

The theoretical construct of relational dynamics was considered through the various stages of the research study. The researcher ensured that space was created for reflective practice and dialogue to consider whether or not the theoretical construct of relational dynamics fit with aspects of identity and development in practice, or whether modifications were needed. This was consistent with Edelson’s (2002) notion describing how:

Design researchers proceed through iterative cycles of design and implementation . . . . Through a parallel and retrospective process of reflection upon the design and its outcomes, the design researchers elaborate upon their initial hypotheses and principles, refining, adding, and discarding – gradually knitting together a coherent theory that reflects their understanding of the design experience. (p.106)
The researcher was open to learn from this process, to recognise the limitations and possible strengths of the theoretical construct and make necessary adaptations through reflection on the experience of implementing the design experiment (Collins et al., 2004; Edelson, 2002).

**Appropriate ethical fit with the research context.**

A fourth reason for the choice of design experiment for this study was that it provided an appropriate ethical and practical fit with the research context. Given the complex nature of the work of educators with disenfranchised young people in the network of flexi schools, two important ethical considerations influenced the choice of design experiment. First, it was important that the stories and professional experience of educator participants were acknowledged and incorporated throughout the research process. Second, it was important to ensure that participants were collaborators and consultants in the design, implementation and evaluation of the research study. Utilising educators’ expertise through consultation and collaboration increased the sense of partnership between researcher and participants. Third, it was important to explore the research questions at the system level rather than only looking at individual sites and the design experiment was a methodology that enabled this to occur.

The design experiment allowed data collection to occur across five flexi school sites and seven mobile outreaches thus providing a network-wide perspective on the nature of educator identity and development to be co-constructed with research participants from multiple sites. The advantages associated with being a worker/researcher across multiple sites also needs to be acknowledged in terms of providing a network-wide perspective on the experience of staff induction. The network-wide perspective into educator identity and development in practice and specifically into ways of professional learning through staff induction, offered initial insights and potential future research options, rather than generalisable findings.
In summary, the design experiment methodology was chosen for four main reasons. It had the focus of improving educational practice; it was consonant with sociocultural theory; it provided opportunities for theory development; and it was an appropriate ethical fit in terms of acknowledging expertise and stories of educators and providing opportunities of working in partnership with participants as collaborators and consultants in the research process.

The Structure of this Design Experiment

This design experiment was structured in three stages: Exploration, enactment and evaluation. The framework for the three stages in the design experiment is presented in Table 4.1 where details of each stage – such as data collection methods, purpose of data collected, data analysis and links to research questions – are presented.

Stage One: Exploration.

In this design experiment, Stage One: Exploration included a review of the literature and consideration of how experienced workers in the network of flexi schools perceived themselves as educators in relation to their practice, specifically their ways of working and ways of professional learning. Consultation with a wide range of key stakeholders occurred in this first stage of the design experiment through the construction and implementation of data collection methods. Data collection methods in this first stage included a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with educators.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Data Collection Instruments</th>
<th>Purpose of data collected</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
<th>Links to research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage One</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| EXPLORATION     | Questionnaire                | To provide a snapshot of demographics of network educators: age; gender; qualifications; role; years of experience; previous work history. To provide insights about staff perceptions of professional identity: how staff saw themselves as educators; metaphors of themselves as workers; what was important in their work; what was valued in the work; what supported them in their work; and ways of working with young people and colleagues. | • Collation of descriptive statistics.  
• Collation and comparison of ranked responses, e.g., Likert-type scales.  
• Co-analysis with peer researchers for data categorisation  
• Thematic content analysis of open responses. | • How do ways of working in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development?  
• How do ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development? |
| Literature review |                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Research design |                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Data collection & analysis |              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Stage Two       |                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| ENACTMENT       | Researcher’s journal entries on experiences of facilitating enhancement to staff induction (later titled RPGs) across five flexi school sites, with another member of the flexi schools’ support team. | To provide a researcher and co-facilitator perspective on the experience of implementing enhancement to staff induction – co-facilitating RPGs across five sites.                                                                                                                                  | • Thematic content analysis.  
• Thematic network analysis.  
• Co-analysis with peer researchers for data categorisation. | • How do ways of working in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development?  
• How do ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development? |
| Stage Three     | Written evaluations from the enhancement to staff induction (later titled RPGs). | To inform the planning of subsequent sessions through iterative cycles of reflection and allow responsiveness by the facilitators to the needs and interests of the participants in the following session. To explore whether there were any changes in staff perceptions of their practice as educators as they participated in enhanced induction processes during the first year of employment. | • Collation of descriptive statistics.  
• Thematic content analysis of short responses. | • How do ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development? |
| EVALUATION      |                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Analysis, Design, Implementation, Reflection. |                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
Questionnaires often incorporate different types of questions such as: closed questions to gather demographic statistics such as age, gender, role, and number of years working in the context, qualifications and previous work experience; questions using rating scales, for example Likert-type scales; and other questions that were open-ended and required written comments and opinions. Semi-structured interviews are generally organised around a standard set of questions and depending on the purpose of the interview and how it is conducted, may provide more useful information than questionnaires (Mertler & Charles, 2005) in terms of the level of detail including personal perceptions of participants. The data collection method of semi-structured interviews in Stage One gathered data related to staff perceptions of their ways of working and professional learning, for example assumptions, beliefs and priorities. Semi-structured interviews also explored identity aspects of educators: their personal stories of how they came to the work; their perceptions of ways of working with young people and with colleagues; what supported them in their work; what was valued in the work; and perceptions of what was needed for staff induction and professional development.

**Stage Two: Enactment.**

In this design experiment, Stage Two: Enactment occurred through the collaborative development and implementation of an enhancement to staff induction processes for new staff in 2010. Collated data from the Stage One questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, especially data related to educator perceptions of what new staff needed for induction purposes, were presented to a consultation group of four voluntary staff. This group provided a reflective member checking process of the data related to induction needs of new staff. The consultation group was presented with a range of data which had an emphasis on educators’ perceptions of staff induction needs. Through conversation and dialogue the group prioritised these perceived needs for
induction. A recommendation using these priorities was then made to the network support team and a proposal to conduct an enhancement to staff induction processes, which was later referred to as RPGs, was enacted. The main data collection method in Stage Two: Enactment were researcher journal entries (N=13) describing the experiences of implementing the enhancement to staff induction processes through the co-facilitation of a series of RPGs across five of the flexi school sites for new staff in 2010.

**Stage Three: Evaluation.**

In this research study, Stage Three included the evaluation of the enhancement to staff induction, the RPGs. The data collection method used for this stage were written evaluations of RPG sessions from consenting participants (N=20). The written feedback was gathered at the end of the first two sessions when participants were invited to complete written evaluation forms that included rating questions using Likert-type scales, as well as some open-ended questions seeking comments and feedback on participants’ experience of the session.

**Overview of Recruitment Processes for Participants**

The research participants were educators in the flexi schools’ context. As previously outlined, in this setting, educators included: registered teachers; education support workers such as teacher aides; youth workers; social workers; health workers; counsellors; community development workers; job placement workers; chaplains; administration support staff; and network support team staff who had leadership, management and staff support responsibilities. The majority of staff in the network of flexi schools were registered teachers. However, for recruitment purposes in this study,

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2 The network support team provided support to all staff across the network of flexi schools and was comprised of six staff with leadership experience and a range of responsibilities including learning choices support, formation and development, child protection support, support in working with the four principles, administrative and financial support, recruitment and employment, and any other support needed at school sites.
no distinction was made between teachers and other workers with different training or expertise. All workers were seen to have an educator role in a broad sense, either formally or informally.

Research participants were drawn from staff across the network of flexi schools covering five main school sites and seven outreaches. Recruitment of research participants initially occurred through a general invitation to all staff. Information about the research study was verbally communicated at the annual whole staff professional development days in April 2009. Approval from the flexi schools’ Principal had been previously obtained by completing an ethics application for conducting research within the organisation. A printed summary of staff participation options was given out during the presentation and data collection occurred during the three stages of the design experiment, over a period of eighteen months. Reminders of participation options were either emailed or communicated through site coordinators at local staff meetings.

Ethics approval had been obtained through Griffith University and procedures for recruitment of participants were outlined in the ethics application (GU Ref No: EPS/09/08/HREC). Participants were not individually approached by the researcher so as to preserve the voluntary nature of participation. Voluntary participation and the ability to withdraw at any stage without penalty were important given the researcher’s status as insider/researcher with a part-time position in the network support team. Options for participation in the first stage of the research study (Exploration) included completing a questionnaire and being interviewed.

---

3 At the commencement of the research study the network of flexi schools consisted of five sites and seven outreaches. During the eighteen months of data collection from April 2009 – October 2010, the number of sites and outreaches increased due to growth and expansion of the network. However, this growth did not change the location of the research in the five sites and seven outreaches.

4 The researcher’s status as insider/researcher was relevant here because the researcher was a member of the network support team as a part-time worker in the flexi schools.
Options for participation in the second stage (Enactment) involved attending the group consultation process to prioritise themes in the data from stage one for the design of enhancements to staff induction processes. After being given general information and consent forms, any staff member who wanted to participate in the research study made contact with the researcher to indicate their preferences.

Recruitment for the third stage of the study (Evaluation: Local Impact), only involved new staff commencing in 2010. In a similar process to that previously outlined for the first two stages of the design experiment, new staff in 2010 were given information about the research study verbally at the staff induction day at the beginning of 2010, and information and consent forms were distributed on that day. Options for participation included staff attending RPGs once per term for three terms and consenting to their written evaluations of the RPGs being made available to the researcher. Completed evaluation forms from RPG sessions were returned to the researcher at the end of the first two sessions. Participation in the research was voluntary therefore staff were able to attend the RPG sessions and not participate in the research.

Data Collection Methods Used in this Design Experiment

This section outlines data collection methods in each stage of the design experiment and the procedures used in the implementation of the data collection methods. An explanation of how each data set addressed the research questions will be provided. Figure 4.2 illustrates the stages of the design experiment and shows data collection methods and iterative cycles of reflection that occurred throughout its implementation. Stage Two and Three were not linear in their implementation, but were influenced by the iterative cycles of reflection that occurred following each RPG session held over the nine month period.
Figure 4.2. Three Stages of Data Collection with Iterative Cycles of Reflection.

STAGE ONE
EXPLORATION

- Interviews
- Questionnaire

STAGE TWO
ENACTMENT

- RPG1
  - RPG 1 Researcher Journal Entries
  - Reflection on Experience of Co-facilitating RPG1.
- RPG2
  - RPG 2 Researcher Journal Entries
  - Reflection on Experience of Co-facilitating RPG2.
- RPG3
  - RPG 3 Researcher Journal Entries
  - Reflection on Experience of Co-facilitating RPG3.

STAGE THREE
EVALUATION

- Participants’ Written Evaluations RPG Session 1
- Participants’ Written Evaluations RPG Session 2

Development of Reflective Tool based on Questionnaire Data for RPG Enhancement to Staff Induction – Metaphor Cards.

Reflection on Interview & Questionnaire Data – especially related to Staff Induction. A group consultation process for member checking resulted in enactment of enhancement to staff induction, later referred to as RPGs.

KEY:
- RPG: Reflective Practice Group
- Data collection methods
- Reflective processes in design implementation
- RPG Sessions
Data collection methods for Stage One: Exploration.

Two data collection methods were used in Stage One: A questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with staff in the network of flexi schools. Each data collection method will be considered in turn, with details provided about how they were developed and for what purpose.

Questionnaire.

The design of the questionnaire used in Stage One was influenced by the literature review on teacher professional identity and common features of alternative education, as well as the particular foci of the two research questions of this study, namely, ways of working and ways of professional learning. An initial aim of the questionnaire was to construct a demographic snapshot or profile of educators in the network of flexi schools. Questionnaires generally require that participants respond in writing to questions requiring closed answers or open ended comments. The questionnaire gathered information including age, gender, professional qualifications, roles at school sites, years of experience working in the network of flexi schools and previous work history was collected. Table 4.2 provides an overview of the questionnaire including purpose of the questionnaire, the relevant questions, the kinds of data collected and how the data addressed the research questions.

A limitation of the questionnaire was that the voluntary nature of participation did not necessarily ensure a full representation of all flexi schools’ staff, but rather a snapshot. This questionnaire was qualitative in design and data incorporating statistics were descriptive in nature (Babbie, 2004). The questionnaire was distributed to 80 staff and the response rate for the questionnaire was 38% which is considered acceptable for data collected from within organisations (Baruch & Holtom, 2008; Smith, 1997; Tomaskovic-Devay, Leiter, & Thompson, 1994).
### Table 4.2

**Overview of the Questionnaire Including: Purpose, Relevant Questions, Kinds of Data Collected and How the Data Addressed the Research Questions.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of the questionnaire</th>
<th>Relevant questions</th>
<th>Kinds of data collected</th>
<th>How the data addressed the research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Demographic snapshot.     | • Items 1 – 6 Questions requiring demographic information.                        | • Age, gender, professional qualifications, roles at school sites, years of experience working in the network of flexi schools and previous work history. | • What were some trends or common ground of experience of workers in this context and how these compared with national trends of employees in education and community services sectors.  
• Related to providing information on the research context creating a snapshot of questionnaire respondents’ general personal details, qualifications, experience, etc. |
| 2. Educators’ sense of themselves as educators. | • Item 7 Lists of words describing themselves as educators.  
• Item 8 Most important aspects of work.  
• Item 9 Metaphors of self as worker. | • Lists of words describing self as educator with young people.  
|                                                                 |                                                                                   |                                                                                       | • Explored staff perceptions of themselves as workers and the priorities that were most important to them.  
|                                                                 |                                                                                   |                                                                                       | • Related to the first research question about ways of working. |
| 3. Educators’ perceptions of their practice. | • Item 8 Most important aspects of work.  
• Items 10-14 Questions on professional support, collaboration and ways of working with colleagues. | • Prioritised lists of most important aspects of work with young people.  
• Ratings on work practice such as collaboration, sources of support and ways of working at local sites with colleagues. | • Explored staff perceptions of what was important in their practice.  
• Explored staff experiences around ways of working with others, both young people and colleagues.  
• Related to the first research question about ways of working. |
| 4. Educators’ values that underpinned their practice and identity. | • Items 7-14 Capturing values that were related to what was important to individuals and within the organisation. | • Lists of words describing self as educator.  
• Most important aspects of work.  
• Metaphor images with descriptions of self as worker.  
• Ratings on work practice such as collaboration, sources of support and ways of working at local sites with colleagues.  
• Open responses on educators’ understanding of collaboration. | • Explored staff perceptions of the values that underpinned their work and that influenced their identity.  
• Related to the first research question about ways of working. |
Other aims of the questionnaire were to gain insights into staff perceptions of themselves as educators, their perceptions of their practice, and the values that underpinned their practice and identity. For example, staff were asked to write five words that described how they saw themselves as educators in the flexi schools and what they considered to be five important aspects of their work. Staff were then asked to prioritise these aspects of their work from the most important to the least important. These questions partially addressed the first research question about how ways of working in the flexi schools’ context influenced educator identity by providing insights into staff perceptions of their work with young people. Insights into the values that underpinned this practice were also explored as a dimension of ways of working. The questionnaire also explored perceptions of educator identity through the use of metaphors. A research study of teacher professional identity that made use of metaphor images was conducted by Ben-Peretz et al. (2003). This study explored the connection between educational context and teacher professional identity. The researchers used drawings of teacher metaphors to elicit teacher’s perceptions of themselves to investigate the influence of this on the education of their students (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003).

As the influence of context on teacher professional identity was a significant finding of their study, and as this was a particular focus of this research study, the use of written metaphors was adopted in the questionnaire to elicit perceptions of professional identity from staff through consideration of their practice. A list of metaphors was provided, and staff were also given the option of creating their own metaphor/s that described themselves as educators in the network of flexi schools. The significance of metaphors was highlighted by Grbich when she stated that “all language comprises metaphors but that the choice of particular metaphors by participants can often clarify emotive meanings” (2007, p. 32). Investigating professional practice through a number
of response options including creative or emotional responses in metaphors, and through more traditional questionnaire responses such as Likert-type scale responses, descriptive responses in lists of words, short answer responses, and paragraph responses, provided a range of perspectives that produced a rich data set.

Another aim in the development of the questionnaire was to explore staff experiences around ways of working with others, both young people and colleagues, which related to the first research question. These ideas were important aspects of the sociocultural thematic construct of relational dynamics discussed in Chapter Three. Ways of working with others were explored through questions on professional support and collaboration. Such ideas reflected different understandings of the notion of collaboration. These questions required responses on rating scales such as Likert-type scales, as well as some short answer open-ended written responses. Ways of working were also explored through the consideration of work priorities, through staff exploring metaphors of themselves as educators and exploration of ways of working with others. These questions required short answer open-ended written responses.

The second research question regarding how ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influenced educator identity and development was partially addressed in questions that dealt with sources of professional support. However, this question was not addressed comprehensively through this data collection method but was further explored in data collection methods implemented in later stages.

*Semi-structured interviews.*

The second data collection method used in Stage One: Exploration was semi-structured interviews conducted with educators (N=16). Interview questions were devised in light of the review of the literature on teacher professional identity and were influenced in part by responses gathered in the questionnaire. Table 4.3 provides an
overview of the semi-structured interviews including the purpose, the relevant questions, the kinds of data collected and how the data addressed the research questions.

The interview questions covered five key areas. First, general demographic information and personal stories of educators’ experiences were explored. Second, ways of working with young people that were considered effective and important, and the underlying values of work practice were discussed. Third, ways of professional learning and staff support, including questions on what was deemed necessary for staff induction and professional development were considered. Fourth, ways of working with other staff were discussed and fifth, the values of staff, both at a personal and organisational level were explored. These five areas directly addressed the two research questions. In the semi-structured interviews, ways of working and ways of professional learning were explored from the perspective of educators in the network of flexi schools as they told their stories and shared their experiences of being educator in the flexi schools’ context.

**Data collection methods for Stage Two: Enactment.**

The purpose of Stage Two: Enactment was to develop and trial an enhancement to staff induction processes across the network of flexi schools. Prior to a decision being made about what enhancement to staff induction processes should be enacted, a group consultation process for member checking data from the Stage One questionnaire and semi-structured interviews was conducted. One of the features of the design experiment was the use of processes of collaborative planning, reflection and reviewing implementations in various stages and modifying the research design in order to improve educational outcomes (Edelson, 2002).

The group consultation process provided an opportunity to reflect on data from Stage One and to develop ideas for the enhancement to staff induction processes.
### Table 4.3

**Overview of the Semi-structured Interviews Including: Purpose, Relevant Questions, Kinds of Data Collected and How the Data Addressed the Research Questions.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of the semi-structured interview</th>
<th>Relevant questions</th>
<th>Kinds of data collected</th>
<th>How the data addressed the research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. General Demographic information collected with staff consent form for interviews and completed prior to interview being conducted. | • Consent form for interviews required participants to respond in writing to questions on the form related to general demographics.  
• Can you tell me what your role is and how long you’ve been working at ________? | • Age, gender, qualifications, role at school site, length of time working at current school site, previous work history. | • What were some trends or common ground of experience of workers in this context and how these compared with national trends of employees in education and community services sectors.  
• Related to providing information on the research context creating a snapshot of interview participants’ general personal details, qualifications, experience, etc. |
| 2. Capture personal narratives of workers. | • Can you tell me your story of how you came to do this work?  
• Where do you want to be in five years’ time? | • Attitudes and beliefs about the work with young people.  
• Underlying values and motivation for doing this work. | • Related to the first research question about ways of working with young people. |
| 3. Educators’ perceptions of what works. | • What is it about the way you work with young people that ‘works’ or is most effective? | • Experience of on-the-ground practitioners regarding their work to re-engage young people. | • Specifically related to the first research question about ways of working with young people. |
| 4. Educators’ perceptions of what supports and what connects. | • What are the things that have supported you most in your work here?  
• What professional development and staff induction do you feel is most important for new staff coming into the network?  
• What have you experienced yourself?  
• What do you think might work?  
• Does the emphasis on relationships with young people in the network also influence the development of professional relationships and ways of working together in a multidisciplinary context? How so? | • Details of staff relationships and support mechanisms of individuals and within the organisation.  
• Professional development needs of staff.  
• New staff induction needs. | • Related to the first research question about ways of working with staff.  
• Exploring ways of professional learning - what are the ways staff experience professional support, including questions on what is seen as necessary for new staff induction and professional development (second research question). |
| 5. Educators’ perceptions of what is valued. | • What do you feel is valued the most in the work?  
• How is that expressed on a day to day basis?  
• Can you give me examples from your work? | • Perceptions of what is valued on a personal level and how this translates into practice.  
• Perceptions of what is valued within the organisation and how this translates into practice. | • Exploring the values underpinning practice related to the first research question about ways of working in the flexi schools’ context. |
Volunteer participants, including members of the network support team and two other staff, came together to look at preliminary findings of the data analysis of the questionnaire and key ideas related to educator perceptions of induction needs of new staff gathered in semi-structured interviews. After reflecting on this data from the Stage One questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, a collaborative process of conversation and dialogue was undertaken to consider improvements and to identify priority areas for staff induction for 2010.

The specific purpose of this group consultation was to engage in member checking of data in order to contribute to the design of the enhancement to staff induction processes for 2010. Recommendations were made from the group consultation process to the network support team. After further collaboration and consultation with the network support team, RPGs were implemented during 2010 at local sites for all new staff across the network of flexi schools.

**Researcher journal entries from RPGs.**

The data collection method in Stage Two were researcher journal entries (N=13) documenting the experience of co-facilitating RPGs across five locations in the network of flexi schools with another member of the network support team. Table 4.4 provides an overview of the researcher journal entries including the purpose, the relevant questions, the kinds of data collected and how the data addressed the research questions. This data set addressed the research questions about how ways of working and ways of professional learning influenced educator identity and development.

The conversations in the RPGs were specifically focussed on the practice of educators as they discussed issues of concern, particular challenges in their daily work with young people and colleagues, or their experiences of being new staff members. RPGs were contexts of professional learning.
Table 4.4


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of the researcher journal entries</th>
<th>Relevant questions</th>
<th>Kinds of data collected</th>
<th>How the data addressed the research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Researcher reflections on the experience of co-facilitating RPGs with another member of the network support team. | • What went well in the RPG session?  
• What was challenging in the RPG session?  
• What insights were gained from this experience of co-facilitating the RPG that connected to research e.g., literature review, educator identity and development in practice? | • Reflections on the process of co-facilitation including self-awareness of own positioning e.g., co-learner rather than expert, open to what emerges for practitioners rather than being driven by content of facilitation agenda.  
• Reflections on the experience of engaging in critical reflective practice in a small group of practitioners – insights and challenges.  
• Reflections on various processes and activities that promote reflection within small groups. | • The data addressed the second research question about how ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice.  
• Data also addressed aspects of ways of working and the values underpinning engaging in critical reflective practice as a normal aspect of practice for educators working in a multidisciplinary context to re-enfranchise young people. |
As participants engaged in conversation and dialogue about various aspects of practice, and as they participated in reflective activities related to their understanding of themselves as educators in their flexi school context, new insights and understandings about their educator identity, the nature of their work and the nature of the young people were developed in some workers. In this way, the RPGs provided a context of situated learning through reflection in practice in a workplace setting. RPGs enabled reflection on practice through consideration of aspects of practice that were foremost in the minds of participants at that particular point in time.

**Data collection methods for Stage Three: Evaluation.**

The data collection method used in Stage Three: Evaluation were written evaluations of RPG sessions completed by participants after the first two RPG sessions (N=20). The purpose of this data collection method was evaluative: to determine the efficacy of the sessions; to see whether staff perceived they had developed their skills of reflective practice; and to explore whether this was relevant or meaningful in relation to their perceptions of their professional practice and sense of educator identity. Table 4.5 gives an overview of the written evaluations including the purpose, the relevant questions, the kinds of data collected and how the data addressed the research questions.

Feedback provided in the written evaluations from each session was used by the facilitators to plan the next RPG session. This data collection method addressed the research question about how ways of professional learning influenced professional identity and development. The written evaluations were intended to provide data from the perspective of educators about whether the enhancement to staff induction processes, that is, the RPGs, heightened their perceptions and awareness of their practice and their sense of identity and development in any particular ways.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of the written evaluations of RPGs</th>
<th>Relevant questions</th>
<th>Kinds of data collected</th>
<th>How the data addressed the research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To capture feedback from participants on their experience of the RPG session in terms of the relevance and meaningfulness or otherwise, of the session for their work with young people.</td>
<td>• What went well? • What was challenging? • What could be done differently or better in subsequent sessions? • What insights were gained from this experience that connects to research work e.g., literature review, educator identity and development in practice?</td>
<td>• Reflections on the process of co-facilitation including self-awareness of own positioning e.g., co-learner rather than expert, open to what emerges for practitioners rather than being driven by content of facilitator’s agenda, the need to work collaboratively with co-facilitator etc.</td>
<td>• The data addressed the second research question about how ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice. • Data also addressed aspects of ways of working and the underpinning values of engaging in critical reflective practice as a normal aspect of practice for educators working in a multidisciplinary context to re-enfranchise young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To gather feedback from participants on the processes used and the kinds of activities conducted that may inform subsequent sessions.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To develop further insights into educator identity and development in practice particularly in relation to ways of professional learning in a situated learning context.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Procedures Used in Carrying Out the Design Experiment

Stage One procedures.

Questionnaire.

At the annual whole staff professional development days in April 2009 all staff were presented with options for participation in this research project (see Appendix A: Options for staff participation in the research project). Also at the whole staff days, the questionnaire, with information forms and reply paid envelopes were distributed individually in a sealed pack to 80 staff. For details of these data collection methods see Appendix B: Questionnaire information sheet, and Appendix C: General staff questionnaire. Questionnaires and reply paid envelopes were non-identifiable. Completion and return of questionnaires were voluntary, anonymous and indicative of consent. A reminder to return the questionnaire was emailed to all staff in the flexi schools on 21 April, 2009 and a subsequent email sent on 27 April, 2009, with an electronic copy of the questionnaire attached, after a number of staff requested a second copy.

In the development of the questionnaire, the questions were trialled with at least six people outside the network of flexi schools. The experience of this trial group was that they had engaged in similar kinds of work with disenfranchised young people. Some of those who did the trial of the questionnaire had research expertise. Modifications were made to the questionnaire based on the recommendations of those who completed initial drafts of the questionnaire. Trialling the questionnaire ensured a degree of authenticity in this data collection method. Another procedure that contributed to authenticity of data analysis tools was adopting co-analysis with peer researchers for inter-rater authenticity. This process will be discussed at the end of the data analysis section of this chapter.
Semi-structured interviews.

Participation in interviews was voluntary. Those staff who wished to participate contacted the researcher after being given initial information at the whole staff days in April 2009. The semi-structured interviews with experienced staff were conducted at a venue and time decided by the participants in consultation with the researcher. Wherever possible, the requests of participants were given priority. Some interviews were held at flexi school sites while others were conducted off campus either at participants’ homes or other venues suggested by them. The length of time for interviews ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Sixteen educators across the network of flexi schools were interviewed. Those interviewed were representative of four of the five sites and four of the seven outreaches. Prior to being interviewed, participants completed a consent form and a form requesting general information such as basic demographic details (see Appendix D: Staff consent form for interviews, and Appendix E: General information for interviews).

It was important that the interviewing process adopted was respectful and allowed the researcher to adopt a supportive/empathetic listening stance (Boetker, 2004; Clandinin, 2006; Fontana & Frey, 2005). A relaxed and comfortable atmosphere was intended in the interviews. One way of achieving this was prioritising the choice of venue by the participants. Another strategy was to approach the interviews in an informal, conversational manner. For this reason the researcher interacted with the participants in a conversational manner in response to their answers. Interview questions were used as a guide, rather than a strict schedule (see Appendix F: Interview schedule for Stage One interviews). This conversational tone was not difficult to establish given that the researcher had previous contact and varying degrees of supportive professional relationships with all staff interviewed. An attempt was made
to use the position of insider/researcher as a way of creating a safe and comfortable environment in which staff could share their experiences and feel valued and not judged. Employing humour, based on shared understanding of the context, was another strategy used for the important purpose of developing rapport with the participants, an important responsibility of interviewers (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Fontana & Frey, 2000).

**Stage Two procedures.**

**Group consultation process.**

The Stage Two group consultation process provided an opportunity for member checking of Stage One data prior to the next stage of data collection that occurred in the enactment of the enhancement to staff induction. The group consultation process incorporated presentation of Stage One data, dialogue, reflection, planning, prioritising induction themes and making recommendations for developing enhanced staff induction processes in 2010. These recommendations were further developed by the network support team who had responsibility for the implementation of the 2010 staff induction.

Four participants and the researcher were present on the day. The group consisted of two staff who worked as teachers in two different sites, two staff from the network support team and the researcher who was also a part-time member of the network support team. Another participant who was a coordinator of a flexi school, had to leave unexpectedly before the day started due to three staff absences from his school. One other staff member who was a youth worker, was unable to attend on the day due to unforeseen family circumstances, despite an initial expression of interest. It was unfortunate that the group size was unexpectedly diminished on the day in terms of not being able to gather a wider range of viewpoints than what was possible with fewer participants. The balance of numbers of staff in the network support team, including the researcher (n=3), was greater than other staff participants (n=2).
Following introductions, participants had an opportunity to explain why they were interested in participating in the group consultation process. A brief discussion on the role and place of the researcher within the network support team occurred. Processes used during the day included group dialogue, individual reflection and collaborative planning to make recommendations for developing enhanced staff induction processes in 2010.

At the beginning of the first session the participants were asked the question that had also been addressed to staff in semi-structured interviews conducted during Stage One: What do you think new staff need in terms of induction or professional development when they come into the network of flexi schools? Participants wrote their own responses and held these until they were requested to add their ideas to the data that were presented on a whiteboard. Only one of the group participants had been interviewed in the first phase of data collection.

Following this activity, a general overview of the nature and purpose of the research study was given in a powerpoint presentation. The presentation included initial findings from the questionnaire data analysis conducted in Stage One of the design experiment. Some of this information was demographic in nature related to age, gender, qualifications, role, number of years working in the network of flexi schools and previous professional experience. These descriptive statistics were presented in graph or chart form. Qualitative data from the questionnaire were also presented. These data included responses from educators to questions asking for descriptive words and comments about five specific areas: self as educator; most important aspects of work as educator; images/metaphors of self as educator; comments on perceptions of sources of support and collaboration; and ways of working with other staff at a site level.

Charts and displays representing data were placed on the walls around the room so that participants could view these throughout the day and in lunch breaks and ask
questions. Following the presentation of the Stage One questionnaire data, some of the Stage One semi-structured interview data were presented. This data were drawn from 16 semi-structured interviews conducted with educators from the network of flexi schools. Four sites and four outreaches were represented in this group. Seven different worker roles across the network of flexi schools were represented. Interview data specifically addressing ideas for staff induction were the main focus of the presentation. Data analysis of the 16 interviews was ongoing and incomplete at that stage. Categories of who, what, when, where, how and why were used to organise the data in response to the question on induction regarding what new staff needed when they come into the work. Additional comments by focus group participants written earlier in the session were then added to the research data after it had been presented on butcher’s paper on a whiteboard. The inclusion of the consultation group participants’ perspectives added to the existing data from which recommendations for enhanced staff induction for 2010 could be made.

Much of the new data added by consultation group participants was consistent with and complementary to the findings from interview data analysis. Participants then highlighted three topics of interest they wished to further discuss in the next two sessions. The most important themes from the group were prioritised and any data gathered in the group consultation process were then presented to the network support team. The suggestions and priorities from the group consultation process were used to design enhanced staff induction processes for 2010, which were later referred to as RPGs.

**Researcher journal entries.**

The researcher co-facilitated the RPGs with another member of the network support team. The co-facilitators engaged in initial planning and subsequent review and refinement of each RPG session across five sites on a regular basis. On two occasions
each facilitator ran the group individually due to the other facilitator not being available. Journal entries for each RPG session that was attended by the researcher were written after each session. A total of 14 RPG sessions were run during the year. One of the sessions at one site was cancelled due to other staff commitments. The researcher attended and co-facilitated 13 RPG sessions and researcher journal entries were written for these 13 sessions within 24 hours of co-facilitating each session. This data set provided a researcher/co-facilitator perspective on the implementation of the enhanced staff induction process of RPGs.

Staff from each of the five sites participated in three sessions once per term over a period of nine months. Verbal feedback from participants was integrated into the planning of each subsequent session, thus replicating the notion of reflective cycles of refinement. The verbal feedback was provided through concluding activities in which participants were asked about their experiences within the group for that particular session. The facilitators used this feedback to plan for subsequent sessions. Stage Three written evaluations, completed voluntarily by participants, were also used for gathering feedback and the procedures for this data collection method will now be outlined.

**Stage Three procedures.**

*Written evaluations of RPG sessions.*

The data collection method in Stage Three involved written evaluations of RPG sessions voluntarily completed by participants. As part of normal processes for professional development in the network of flexi schools, participants were invited to complete evaluation forms at the end of the sessions. Most participants consented to give access to the researcher to the written evaluation forms. This consent was obtained by providing participants with an information form which outlined that completion and return of the written evaluation form indicated their consent to participate in the
research. Data from written evaluations were then collated and analysed for research purposes. This data set contributed another perspective to the exploration of educator identity and development of educators related to ways of professional learning in their year of induction.

**Data Analysis**

As the data were collected in three stages using a number of different data collection methods, a range of analytic tools were applied. In some instances, several methods of data analysis were applied to the same data set in order to “uncover the full meaning of the data” (Simons, Lathlean, & Squire, 2008, p. 120) and to comprehensively address the two research questions. A range of analytic tools will be discussed in relation to data analysis.

Figure 4.3 shows the different data analysis tools and how they were applied in each stage of the design experiment. Data analysis tools included: descriptive statistics (Babbie, 2004), thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Moen, 2006; Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2005), thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001), and inter-rater authenticity processes for categorisation of data (Cohen et al., 2007; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006).

**Descriptive statistics.**

The first analytic tool of descriptive statistics (Babbie, 2004) was applied to some of the data gathered from the questionnaire. Question response types included closed responses, rating responses using Likert-type scales and open-ended short response capturing participants’ opinions on certain topics. Demographics of staff were collated and summarised. The purpose of this analysis was to present a snapshot of the range of experience and diversity of educators in the network of flexi schools.
Figure 4.3. Data analysis tools and how they were applied in each stage of the design experiment.
Of interest in collating the demographic details of participants through descriptive statistics was whether there were some trends or common ground of experience of workers in this context that could be compared with national trends of employees in education and community services sectors working in other contexts. Comparisons were made between questionnaire participants’ demographic data and other data from employees in education and community services sectors as documented in national reports (Australian Services Union (ASU), 2007; Cortis, Hilferty, Chan, & Tannous, 2009; DEEWR, 2008).

Some responses in the questionnaire also provided general information about sources of professional support, aspects of staff collaboration and ways of working with others across professional boundaries through use of Likert-type scale responses. Presenting this data as descriptive statistics gave some indication of educators’ perceptions of the level and type of professional support they experienced and their understanding of topics such as collaboration. The questionnaire also gauged staff levels of satisfaction, or otherwise, with the current induction processes within the network of flexi schools.

The analysis of descriptive statistics provided some direction for other phases of the research, such as informing the framing of interview questions, and influencing the nature and location of the enhanced staff induction processes designed for Stages Two and Three of the research study. An example of how questionnaire data influenced staff induction processes was when questionnaire respondents overwhelmingly indicated that their main source of support was experienced locally at their flexi school sites. This directly influenced the choice to conduct RPGs at local sites, rather than conducting a network wide enhancement to new staff induction.

The only other time that the collation of descriptive statistics were used for the purposes of data analysis was during Stage Three with data from the written evaluations.
from RPGs. Participants were asked to rate their experiences of activities conducted during the sessions. This data analysis was used to indicate staff perceptions of the level of relevance or meaningfulness of the RPG sessions for staff in their work with young people and colleagues.

**Thematic content analysis.**

The second analytic tool that was applied to the data was thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Moen, 2006; Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2005). Qualitative responses in the questionnaire, including responses about perceptions of practice and important aspects of the respondents’ roles as educators were analysed using this tool. Descriptive words of educators’ perceptions of themselves as workers were clustered in groups and labelled with a key theme providing some indication of the priorities of educators in their ways of working with young people. In a similar fashion staff perceptions of important aspects of work were clustered into themes. The identification of these themes was considered in light of the literature review, in particular, the features of best practice of alternative education (see Chapter 2, Table 2.1), and aspects of teacher professional identity (TPI) such as influence of context, teacher as carer, and impact of reform agendas, that specifically related to the two research questions regarding ways of working and ways of professional learning. The emerging topics, unexpected patterns and themes (Patton, 2002) were further explored in interviews and/or considered for the implementation of enhanced staff induction processes. For example, responses in the questionnaire that related to the notion of collaboration or ways of working with colleagues were further explored in the interviews with experienced staff that, in turn, influenced the design of the enhancement to staff induction processes.

Thematic content analysis was the initial analytic tool used with the data set comprising 16 interview transcripts collected in Stage One. The procedures for
developing a coding scheme for the thematic content analysis of interviews in Stage One, was again influenced by the literature review. The process of analysis was more deductive, rather than inductive (Moen, 2006), being driven by the foci of the research questions, namely, ways of working and ways of professional learning and how these may influence educator identity and development. Developing the coding scheme involved the participation of one of the researcher’s supervisors as a critical friend (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Stenhouse, 1975). In research, the role of critical friend involves some degree of partnering, advising and supporting the researcher as they develop reflective learning capacity as a researcher to progress their research (Kember et al., 1997). The researcher and supervisor independently coded one of the interviews and then came together to see if there was consistency in the codes that had been applied. Following some discussion, codes were clarified and definitions of each code were written by the researcher (see Appendix G: Model of the coding scheme for interview data and Appendix H: Interview codes with definitions).

These codes were then considered again in the light of the research questions and in light of the literature review and the questionnaire data set. Key ideas in the interview data coding scheme were identified and defined. The coding therefore included a regular shifting back and forth across the interview data set (Moen, 2006), with reference to the relevant sections of the literature review and consideration of the analysis of the previous data set, working through recurring cycles in which data were revisited, in order to clarify codes and construct the foundation for an overall thematic content analysis of the interview data set. Having developed the coding scheme, the analysis continued in spirals of reviewing, coding, refining coding definitions, confirming coding with supporting examples across the data set.
Thematic network analysis.

Thematic network analysis was then applied to each coded set of interview data. In each data set three levels of themes were identified including the most “basic themes” or key ideas, “organising themes” or common threads drawing together a number of key ideas, and finally, “global themes” or strands of common threads across the set of coded data (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388). Figure 4.4 shows a model of this process of data analysis at a micro level, adapted from Attride-Stirling (2001).

![Thematic network analysis](image)

*Figure 4.4. An adapted model of thematic network analysis with variations in terminology.*

A global view of thematic network analysis applied to all 16 interviews for ways of working is represented in Figure 4.5. Codes from thematic content analysis were applied to interviews creating data sets of coded extracts. Common threads were identified in each coded data set then strands of common threads were synthesised from common threads across codes.
Figure 4.5. Diagram of thematic network data analysis of ways of working applied to semi-structured interviews.
An explanation and example of thematic network analysis for one code will now be presented. It has been drawn from the first domain of practice, ways of working: supporting young people, and is related to the first code: SYP1 *Understanding the needs of young people*. After identifying key ideas, common threads of key ideas were identified. The eight common threads for the code of *Understanding the needs of young people* included: understanding young people; strengths-based practice; listening; developing safe and supportive relationships; trauma informed practice; offering consistency and role modelling; taking time; and engagement.

When the common threads for all four codes in ways of working with young people had been identified by the researcher, they were then compared with common threads from all codes in the same domain of practice, for example, ways of working: supporting young people. Similar common threads were clustered into strands of common threads in order to see emergent patterns and similarities in the way staff perceived their work of supporting young people across the four codes. Table 4.6 shows the process of arriving at the strands of common threads across four codes in ways of working: supporting young people. The clustered common threads can be seen in strands across the horizontal rows. Common threads remain under the code in which they first appeared in the vertical columns of the table. Strands were identified through repetition of common threads across two or more codes or in some cases, because they represented an important idea that may only have appeared in one code.

Strands of common threads across both domains of practice including ways of working and ways of professional learning were compared. Three overarching themes were identified across all strands of common threads. Figure 4.6 shows the overarching themes including: *Relationships; Changing perspectives through reflection;* and *Holding complexity.*
Table 4.6

Arriving at Strands of Common Threads Across Four Codes in Ways of Working: Supporting Young People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code: SYP1</th>
<th>Code: SYP2</th>
<th>Code: SYP3</th>
<th>Code: SYP4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the Needs of Young People</td>
<td>Recognising the Agency of Young People</td>
<td>Learning Choices Support</td>
<td>Positive Relationship Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STRAND 1: RELATIONSHIPS**
- Understanding the young people
- Developing safe & supportive relationships
- Relationships first
- Qualities of educators offering relationship support

**STRAND 2: CONNECTIONS**
- The importance of making connections
- Relationship connected to community
- Takes time to build relationships

**STRAND 3: TIME**
- Taking time
- Takes time to build relationships

**STRAND 4: STRENGTHS-BASED PRACTICE**
- Promote strengths-based practice
- Supporting young people to develop a sense of achievement
- Strengths-based approach to young people

**STRAND 5: HOLDING COMPLEXITY**
- Trauma informed practice

**STRAND 6: CHANGING PERSPECTIVES**
- Questioning the purpose of education
- Help give young people another view – another perspective

**STRAND 7: LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE**
- Listening
- Listening to young people
- Listening to young people

**STRAND 8: RE-ENGAGEMENT**
- Engagement
- Re-engagement strategies
- Differentiated curriculum

**STRAND 9: AGENCY OF YOUNG PEOPLE**
- Giving young people choice
- Trusting young people
- Exercising ‘power with’ – a change in adult/worker role

**STRAND 10: STRUCTURES & BOUNDARIES**
- Offering consistency & role modelling
- Need for structure in learning
- Clear boundaries
Figure 4.6. Three overarching themes identified in strands of common threads across two domains of practice.
The strands of common threads that were developed in the thematic network analysis of the interviews were also applied in a second round of data analysis to the questionnaire and RPG data (researcher journal entries and written evaluations) to determine whether these data sets supported the results of the interview data analysis or otherwise.

**Inter-rater authenticity and trustworthiness of data analysis tools.**

In qualitative research, authenticity and trustworthiness are the terms used in relation to credibility and rigour of the research process (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Morrow, 2005). In this study, a strategy for ensuring authenticity and trustworthiness of the data analysis tools included using a range of data analysis tools. Another strategy for ensuring authenticity and trustworthiness of the data analysis tools was to consult with peer researchers or critical friends to engage in co-analysis for inter-rater authenticity when categorising data (Cohen et al., 2007; Gay et al., 2006).

**Using a variety of data analysis tools to create authenticity.**

Using two methods of thematic analysis, namely thematic content analysis and thematic network analysis, created different emphasis for different purposes. The thematic content analysis tended to be more deductive and was primarily informed by the literature review and features of best practice, as well as some of the initial findings from the questionnaire. On the other hand, thematic network analysis was more inductive, allowing emergent findings to be identified in the data and inform theoretical developments. The design experiment incorporating iterative cycles of reflection and modification through its various stages of exploration, enactment and evaluation, also contributed to processes that supported authentic and trustworthy data collection methods and data analysis processes.
Co-analysis with peer researchers for inter-rater authenticity.

Consulting with peer researchers or critical friends occurred at different stages of data analysis to ensure inter-rater authenticity (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Morrow, 2005). This provided another way of ensuring authenticity and trustworthiness of the research process by providing more than one researcher perspective. On four instances during the design experiment a number of data sets were analysed with peer researchers ensuring inter-rater authenticity when categorisation of data was required. All of these instances occurred either with data collected in the Stage One questionnaire or with semi-structured interview data. Inter-rater authenticity processes for data categorisation were reliant on conversation, dialogue and negotiation, rather than only relying on frequency counts, in keeping with the sociocultural paradigm of this research. These processes will now be described.

Co-analysis with peer researchers for categorisation of questionnaire data.

Peer researchers were used to assist with data analysis of two items of the questionnaire, where staff were asked to list five words that described themselves as an educator and when they were asked to list five most important aspects of their work with young people. Initial categories were devised with reference to the features of best practice and aspects of teacher professional identity in the literature review. Further refinement of the category definitions were achieved by the researchers working together. In the process of categorisation, two researchers engaged in an independent categorisation analysis and then came together to confer and reach consensus. Consensus was reached through conversation, dialogue and negotiation and was not only dependent on frequency counts of initial responses. The initial categories devised by the researchers were then translated into strands of common threads that had been synthesised in the thematic network analysis of the semi-structured interviews. In this way, both of the data sets were considered in relation to the strands of common threads.
and the three overarching themes identified in the thematic network analysis of the semi-structured interviews, which was the largest and most detailed data set of the study.

**Co-analysis with peer researchers for categorisation of semi-structured interview data.**

On two occasions, peer researchers were used to assist with data analysis of semi-structured interview data. The first instance occurred with the researcher and one of her supervisors, to devise an initial coding scheme for thematic content analysis. The second instance occurred after the thematic network analysis of semi-structured interview data had been completed. This additional analysis of the data to explore the overarching theme of relationships and educator dispositions was used to consider theoretical implications of the researcher’s construct of relational dynamics that was outlined in Chapter Three. An independent researcher who had previously worked in the flexi-schools’ context acted as a critical friend during the categorisation of data. A final sweep of the interview data was conducted to identify data related to educator dispositions and ways of being. Parameters for dispositions were established by the first researcher and then this data set was independently categorised by both researchers. Consensus on the identification and labelling of educator dispositions was reached through conversation, dialogue and negotiation. The dispositions were further categorised using the three overarching themes identified in the thematic network analysis, namely *Relationships, Changing Perspectives through Reflection*, and *Holding Complexity*. Table 4.7 provides four extracts showing inter-rater categorisation.
Table 4.7

Extracts of Inter-rater Categorisation of Dispositions of “Being” and “Becoming” in Quotes from Stage One Semi-Structured Interviews

(Researcher coding, independent researcher coding and final consensus following conversation and negotiation included)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote Number</th>
<th>Interview Extract</th>
<th>Ways of Being &amp; Becoming interpreted in the data by Main Researcher (black) and by Critical Friend (Italicised)</th>
<th>Consensus statements on Ways of Being &amp; Becoming following conversation and negotiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INT 01</td>
<td>Ahh. . . . I think a real openness about social justice and ethical stances - that kind of thing. Just having it up front. And also, the bit about, really being open about caring for each other (yes). That’s, yea, always bothered me that you can’t say, “no actually, we do care about you, I actually care about you. I don’t know you very well yet, cause you’ve just come to _________ [Flexible Learning Centre (FLC)], but because you’ve made a commitment to come here, I instantly care about you as a young person who is trying to make their way” and then of course you build the conversation for the future (p.9, lines 136-142).</td>
<td>Being just (social justice) Being ethical (ethical stances) Being open about caring for each other</td>
<td>Being just Being ethical Being open about caring for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INT 01</td>
<td>Um, well, certainly working with the four principles, those four principles are for everybody. So we, you know, there’s not a different set that works across the workers. And that just makes it really fantastic to be here, cause we’re all very clear about how we need to respect each other, and um, and be very open and honest if things aren’t working, you know, we need to say. (yea) And, when that happens, people are extremely supportive (p.17, lines 252-256).</td>
<td>Being respectful Being very open and honest if things aren’t working</td>
<td>Being able to apply four principles to self and others Being open and honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 INT 01</td>
<td>I guess where we need to be fairly aware of where people’s different strengths and where people’s preferences are (p.17, lines 259-260).</td>
<td>Being aware of where people’s different strengths and preferences are</td>
<td>Being aware and able to recognise strengths in others Being able to appreciate different preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 INT 01</td>
<td>And the other thing is um, being very open when you’ve made a mistake or you’ve just completely forgotten something and the deadline has come up. There, just be out there and open and honest and apologise and make up as quickly as you can with workers and young people (p.18, lines 271-274).</td>
<td>Being very open when you’ve made a mistake Being open and honest and apologise Open to admit mistakes Willing to make amends</td>
<td>Being open to admit mistakes Being willing to make amends (e.g., apologising)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 INT 01</td>
<td>Yes, so there’s that generosity here and it goes in all different ways (p.19, line 282).</td>
<td>Being generous Appreciate generosity in all Appreciate generosity in its different forms</td>
<td>Being able to appreciate generosity in all Being able to appreciate generosity in its different forms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethical Considerations

The notion of an objective, neutral stance adopted by researchers is not particularly convincing and has been contested by qualitative researchers (Alvermann, 2000; Boetker, 2004; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ellis & Berger, 2003; Gillies & Alldred, 2002; Hewson, 2007; Perumal, 2007). Positioning oneself as researcher was very important in this research context. As an insider/researcher having a role in the network support team, the researcher had a personal commitment to understanding the practice of educators in this context. The researcher’s relationship with the network of flexi schools was longstanding (more than 15 years). Although the researcher had not worked as an educator in the flexi schools she had experience of working in an informal education context at a local youth centre for disenfranchised young people, which had an inter-agency relationship with one of the flexi schools. Subsequently, the researcher’s own practice as an educator in conventional schools over a period of 15 years was strongly influenced by the ways of working with disenfranchised young people that were experienced in the flexi schools’ context. Those experiences gave some insights into the practice of educators in the network of flexi schools. In this way, this research project echoes Luke’s (2011) claim that “all social scientific and cultural research, no matter what its methodological and epistemological claims, is in some way autobiographical; that is, it is a situated extension of life history and cultural standpoint” (Conference Powerpoint presentation).

At the time of conducting this study the researcher’s part-time role within the network support team involved supporting staff and exploring the values and ethos of the organisation across the network. The researcher rarely worked directly with young people and contact with staff across all the sites was intermittent. Of particular interest to the researcher was a research methodology that was respectful and allowed a supportive/empathetic listening stance to be adopted (Boetker, 2004; Clandinin, 2006;
Design experiment methodology enabled a collaborative partnership with participants who were seen by the researcher as co-researchers (Collins et al., 2004).

In terms of ethics, awareness of being a worker/researcher was important in two ways: for recruitment processes and for collaboration purposes. In the recruitment process, the researcher needed to ensure that workers felt invited to participate on a voluntary basis, rather than feeling coerced or pressured to do so. If they chose to withdraw they needed to be able to do so without any fear of negative consequences. For this reason, no staff member was asked directly to participate. Information on how to be involved was given in general staff meeting forums and through group email notifications. This removed the personal dynamic and any potential pressure that some staff may have felt if directly approached due to the researcher’s part-time position within the network support team. Staff may have been more inclined to participate because they wanted to, rather than feeling obliged to participate.

Secondly, because the researcher’s part-time position was one of added responsibility, ensuring that the research process was collaborative, rather than hierarchical was a priority. The researcher did not see herself in a position of being an expert researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). Those participating in the design process were invited to collaborate and negotiate the content and processes that were included in the development of enhanced staff induction processes. The researcher’s role was as a facilitator and member of the group, rather than leader of the group with sole responsibility for decision making. The approach to recruitment adopted by the researcher had certain limitations with regard to the potential narrowing of participant numbers. Whilst this was initially a possible concern, it did not prove to be problematic in the implementation of the study. Numbers of participants were sufficient for the researcher’s purposes.
Ethical clearance from the university ethics committee was obtained early in 2009 (GU Ref No: EPS/09/08/HREC) and a separate ethics protocol from the Principal of the flexi schools was completed and approved prior to the commencement of data collection. A variation to the approved ethics protocol was made to the university ethics committee at the end of 2009 and was approved. This enabled integration of the recommendations and changes made through the Stage Two group consultation process, namely the implementation of RPGs and permission from staff to access written evaluations of the RPG sessions. These changes were also discussed with and approved by the Principal of the network of flexi schools.

**Chapter Summary**

This methodology chapter has provided an overview of the research design adopted for this study. It has defined design experiment methodology and provided a rationale for using this methodology. An outline of the structure of this particular three-stage design experiment that enabled a comprehensive exploration of the research questions was presented. Included were details of data collection methods, procedures used, data analysis tools adopted and ethical considerations for the implementation of this study.

In the following three chapters the findings of the data analysis will be presented in relation to the research questions, followed by discussion regarding how these findings influenced educator identity and development in practice. Chapter Five presents findings and discussion related to ways of working with young people and Chapter Six outlines findings and discussion of ways of working with staff in the flexi schools’ context. Both of these chapters address how ways of working influence educator identity and development in practice. In Chapter Seven, the findings about ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context will be presented.
Chapter 5
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
WAYS OF WORKING: SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present a rich profile of staff perceptions of their practice related to the first research question about how ways of working influence educator identity and development. Aspects of ways of working will be explored through consideration of educator perceptions of ways of working with young people. Two data collection methods were used in Stage One including a staff questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with 16 educators. Descriptive statistics provided a snapshot of the two groups of educators who participated in the questionnaire and interviews, and these participant details are presented in Appendices I and J.

Overview of Ways of Working with Young People in Flexi Schools

Review of analytic methods applied to the data.

Interview data were analysed using a coding scheme developed by the researcher in collaboration with one of her supervisors (see Chapter Four: Methodology for further details). In ways of working with young people, four codes were applied to the interview data during analysis then coded data were collated into data sets. A second level of data analysis was applied to the coded data sets using thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In thematic network analysis, three levels of themes were identified, including: key ideas or the most “basic themes”; common threads drawing together a number of key ideas or “organising themes”; and strands of common threads synthesising a number of common threads into more “global themes” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388). For an example of common threads see Appendix K: Common threads in four codes for ways of working: supporting young people.
Figure 5.1 presents a diagram of the thematic network analysis of ways of working applied to 16 interviews with educators. The diagram shows the process for arriving at the strands of common threads in this domain of practice of ways of working.

**Organising the data presentation using strands of common threads.**

Strands of common threads across the four codes for ways of working with young people were synthesised from the common threads and these will be presented as aspects of the practice of educators that support young people in the research context. For an example of how strands of common threads were derived see Appendix L: Arriving at strands of common threads in ways of working: supporting young people. These strands of common threads were then used as a lens for viewing questionnaire data. Aspects of practice in ways of working with young people that related to the spatial and embodied dynamics of the learning environment were highlighted in order to consider how Vygotsky’s concept of the ZPD was applicable in the data analysis. This will be further discussed in Chapter Eight: Discussion and Implications of Findings.

**Towards a synthesis of practice.**

Strands of common threads can be viewed as an initial synthesis of ways of working that demonstrate salient features of this domain of practice. However, on a broader scale, three overarching themes synthesised from the strands of common threads across both domains of practice are used as a framework to reveal how practice in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development. These overarching themes included: *Relationships; Changing perspectives through reflection;* and *Holding complexity.*
Figure 5.1. Diagram of thematic network data analysis of ways of working applied to interview data.
Figure 5.2 gives an overview of the interconnections and parallels between the strands across the domain of practice of ways of working, captured in the overarching themes.

Three overarching themes identified in strands of common threads across ways of working.

This figure shows how the three overarching themes of Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection, and Holding complexity are apparent in ways of working. These themes are also consistently evident in the strands of common threads across both domains of practice of ways of working and ways of professional learning, but will be initially discussed in relation to ways of working with young people. Data findings related to ways of working with staff and ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context, and how these influence educator identity and development, will be presented in Chapters Six and Seven.
Ways of Working: Supporting Young People

Due to the multiple complexities faced by young people in the research context, educators had to adopt different ways of working in flexi schools than those commonly practised in conventional school settings. As seen in Figure 5.1 staff perceptions of the ways they worked with young people were organised according to four codes: *understanding the needs of young people; recognising the agency of young people; learning choices support; and positive relationship support*. Interview data extracts for the common threads in each of these four codes can be seen in Appendices M, N, O and P.

**Strands of common threads.**

As represented in Figure 5.1, common threads identified by the researcher in the four codes applied in the data analysis of ways of working with young people have been clustered into strands of common threads in order to see emergent patterns and similarities in the way staff perceived their work of supporting young people across the four codes. Table 5.1 shows these ten strands of common threads synthesised from the interview data for ways of working with young people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strands of common threads across four codes</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Changing perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>Listening to young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking time</td>
<td>Re-engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths-based practice</td>
<td>Agency of young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding complexity</td>
<td>Structure and boundaries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strands of common threads were identified either through repetition of common threads across two or more codes or, in some cases, because they represented an important idea that may have only appeared in one code, for example, agency of young people. As previously mentioned, the process of arriving at strands of common threads in ways of working: supporting young people, can be seen in Appendix L.

**Strands of Common Threads in Questionnaire Data: Working with Young People**

Questionnaire data provided perspectives from 30 respondents in short answer and Likert-type scale responses and offered another range of views that added to those of the 16 staff who were interviewed. Data collected in the questionnaire are consistent with some of the ideas captured in the strands of common threads developed through the analysis of the interviews with educators. Questionnaire data will now be presented in relation to these strands of common threads. The two strands of common threads that are most obviously evident in questionnaire data are the strands of relationships and of re-engagement.

**Strands of common threads and staff perceptions of educator identity.**

A number of questionnaire items sought information on staff perceptions of their roles and professional identity in terms of descriptors of themselves as educators, the most important aspects of their work, and metaphors of themselves as workers. These data will be considered in relation to the strands of common threads identified in ways of working with young people (see Table 5.1). In Item 7 of the questionnaire, staff were asked to write five words that described themselves as an educator within their current role/s. Table 5.2 shows the representation of the descriptive words in categories and the translation of the categories into strands of common threads (see Appendix Q: Details of the process of independent categorisation analysis of staff descriptive words of self as educator; Appendix R: Questionnaire Item 7: Definitions for independent categorisation
of data; and Appendix S: Questionnaire Item 7: Descriptive words of self as educator sorted into categories).

Table 5.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Translation of categories into strands of common threads in ways of working</th>
<th>Order of priority of words in list</th>
<th>Total number of instances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carer</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>6 8 13 6 10</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>Re-engagement &amp; Listening to young people</td>
<td>8 5 3 11 6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organiser/Designer</td>
<td>Re-engagement</td>
<td>5 8 3 4 3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor/Guide</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>5 4 5 5 3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivator</td>
<td>Re-engagement &amp; Changing perspectives</td>
<td>7 4 4 1 2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2 1 1 3 6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>152</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The category of *carer* was most easily translated into the strand of *relationships*. The category of *mentor/guide* also translated into the strand of *relationships*. The other three categories that were translated included: *motivator; organiser/designer; and facilitator*. These categories translated most readily into the strand of *re-engagement*. There were some features of the strand of *listening to young people* associated with the *facilitator* category and some features of the strand of *changing perspectives* in the *motivator* category, but these were less obvious than the strand of *re-engagement*.

This data set shows again the significance of relationships captured in staff perceptions of themselves as educators. In the category of *carer* that was translated into the strand of *relationships*, words such as helpful, compassionate, caring, supportive, understanding and patient appeared repeatedly. In the *mentor/guide* category that was also translated into the strand of *relationships*, words such as mentor, guide, trustworthy, challenging and role model were included. Of similar significance in this data set was the strand of *re-engagement*. The *re-engagement* strand was a
conglomeration of the categories of *organiser/designer, facilitator* and *motivator* with words included such as organised, efficient, skills developer, flexible, enthusiastic and passionate.

**Strands of common threads and staff perceptions of important aspects of work.**

In Item 8 of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to list what they considered to be five important aspects of their work. This data were collated and analysed according to categories influenced by features of best practice in alternative education identified in the literature review that were similar to categories devised for Item 7, but they were framed as ‘work descriptors’, rather than ‘self-descriptors’.

Another category of *life learning and community networking* was added to the original six categories to reflect this particular aspect of work (see Appendix T: Questionnaire Item 8: Definitions for independent categorisation of data). The categories included: *caring and supporting; mentoring and guiding; motivating; organising and designing; facilitating; life learning and community networking*; and *miscellaneous*.

Whilst questionnaires were completed by 30 respondents, only 23 responses for this item were included in the analysis presented to ensure confidentiality of participants whose responses were identifiable. Independent categorisation analysis was also conducted for this item of the questionnaire (see Appendix U: Questionnaire Item 8: Categories of most important aspects of work with examples from data). Table 5.3 presents the categories of statements that participants used to describe their perceptions of the five most important aspects of their work, the translation of these categories into strands of common threads for ways of working with young people, and the priority these categories were given by respondents. A full summary of this analysis can be seen in Appendix V: Questionnaire Item 8: List of most important aspects of work linked with strands of common threads in ways of working: supporting young people.
Table 5.3

*Categorisation of Most Important Aspects of Work from Questionnaire Item 8*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Translation of categories into strands of common threads in ways of working</th>
<th>Order of Priority</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>First</td>
<td>Second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring &amp; supporting</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening to young people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>Re-engagement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising &amp; designing</td>
<td>Re-engagement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating</td>
<td>Re-engagement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life learning &amp; community networking</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Re-engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring &amp; guiding</td>
<td>Listening to young people</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approximately 65% of respondents’ first work priority were categorised within the strand of *relationships*. The most frequently identified strand in the list of the second work priorities was that of *re-engagement* (approximately 35% of respondents). *Re-engagement* was also rated most highly as the third work priority (approximately 48% of respondents). Similarly, *re-engagement* rated most highly within the fourth and fifth work priorities (approximately 26% and 39% of respondents respectively). The strand of *relationships* was strongly represented as a work priority across four of the five groups with some slight fluctuations in order of priority, tending to lessen in importance in the fifth priority column. All strands of common threads from ways of working: supporting young people, were represented in the data except for the strand of *time*. The two strands of *changing perspectives* and *holding complexity* were represented infrequently in the data in this item of the questionnaire.

**Strands of common threads and metaphor images of educator identity.**

Questionnaire respondents were asked to choose one or more of the images/metaphors provided, or to create their own metaphor to describe how they saw
themselves as an educator with young people in their flexi school. Staff were asked to give reasons for their choices. There were many instances within the reasons given for the choice of metaphors that were consistent and easily recognisable within the strands of common threads identified in the interview data. Table 5.4 highlights the strands and the number of instances these were recognisable in the reasons staff gave for their choice of metaphor. A detailed summary of this analysis can be seen in Appendix W.

Table 5.4

*Instances of Metaphors that were Identifiable in Strands of Common Threads*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strand of Common Threads</th>
<th>Instances in metaphors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-engagement</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding Complexity</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure &amp; Boundaries</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to Young People</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths-based Practice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Perspectives</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other categories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reason given for choice</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous metaphors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would identify respondent</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>52 metaphors</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary of Questionnaire Data: Working with Young People**

Data from the questionnaire were considered in relation to the strands of common threads synthesised from the analysis of interview data in ways of working: supporting young people. Staff perceptions of their roles and professional identity in terms of descriptors of themselves as educators, the most important aspects of their work, and metaphors of themselves as workers, were gathered in questionnaire data. These data were clearly consistent with the strands of common threads, in particular the strands of *relationships* and *re-engagement*. Educators prioritised the relational aspect of their work with young people and gave precedence to developing strategies for
re-engagement of young people in learning choices that were flexible, meaningful and relevant. Other strands that were evident in the questionnaire data were interconnected with the relational pedagogy of educators and included the strand of listening to young people, the strand of strengths-based practice and the strand of agency of young people. Whilst all other strands except for the strand of time were apparent in questionnaire data, strands such as connections, holding complexity, changing perspectives and structures and boundaries, were not as prominent as the strands of relationships and re-engagement. Staff perceptions of themselves as educators and their perceptions of the most important aspects of their work with young people, were unambiguously relational in the first instance, with an emphasis on strategies for re-engagement.

**Spatial Imagery: Place, Space and Body in Questionnaire Data**

The final aspect of the presentation of questionnaire data analysis includes consideration of the spatial dynamics – the spatial imagery and language of place, space and body. Spatial imagery was mainly connected to the strands of relationships and re-engagement. Discussion of how the ZPD, and the construct of relational dynamics relate to this data analysis will be included in Chapter Eight: Discussion and Implications of Findings.

The descriptive words of self as educator generated by responses to Item 7 of the questionnaire were reviewed a third time to determine if spatial imagery or language of place, space or body could be identified. The following descriptors indicate some spatial imagery or language of place, space and body that were used: allows space to grow; guide (two instances - guider and guiding); and, journeying with (not for).

The statements of most important aspects of work that were generated by responses to Item 8 of the questionnaire were reviewed a third time to determine if any spatial imagery or language of place, space or body could be identified. The following
descriptors indicate some spatial imagery or language of place, space and body used: building trust; building relationships (four instances); being present; provide a safe and positive learning environment; facilitating a comfortable and positive environment for young people; not rushing around trying to do everything; and, work environment.

The metaphor images and explanations of staff perceptions of themselves as educators generated in response to Item 9 of the questionnaire, were analysed again to determine if any spatial imagery or language of place, space or body were used. Spatial themes such as ‘journey’ were identified. In some instances, if more than one spatial theme was identified in the metaphor, they were repeated within the data for the relevant spatial theme. A summary of the metaphors with the spatial imagery they capture can be seen in Table 5.5. In the table, the text in brackets next to the metaphor indicates whether the metaphor was taken from those provided in the questionnaire item or whether it was an original metaphor created by respondents.

Of this group of metaphors evoking spatial imagery or themes of place, space or body, ten were taken from the metaphors provided in the questionnaire, and nine were original metaphors created by respondents. The spatial theme of journey, pathways and guidance were the most prevalent in this group of metaphors (over half of the metaphors were categorised in this theme). As indicated in Table 5.5, educators had a strong sense themselves in the role of journeying with young people, supporting them in finding pathways to where they wanted to be and guiding young people to “map out a path ahead” (Questionnaire Item 9, Response 27, Tour Guide metaphor). Some metaphors were placed under the theme of a resting or gathering space indicative of a sense of rest, healing and a sense of home that staff felt they helped create in their role as educator. In contrast, some metaphors were about movement that captured the more complex and unpredictable nature of the role of educator of disenfranchised young people, for example, the highs, lows, twists and turns of the roller coaster or the balls in the air of a
juggler (See Table 5.5). Finally, three other themes represented in the metaphors

included: the observing/watching theme; the space between theme; and the embodiment theme.

Table 5.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spatial themes and metaphors</th>
<th>Spatial imagery: language of place, space &amp; body</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>JOURNEY THEME</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dolphin in river (original metaphor)</td>
<td>Journey, river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour guide (original metaphor)</td>
<td>Journey, road ahead, map out a path ahead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaman (original metaphor)</td>
<td>Guide, journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parachute instructor (original metaphor)</td>
<td>Journey, safe landing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathon runner 1 (metaphor provided)</td>
<td>Journey, long run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathon runner 2 (metaphor provided)</td>
<td>Starting line, finishing line, ¾ mark (in relation to school year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PATHWAYS THEME</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggler 1 (metaphor provided)</td>
<td>Improve pathways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant stem (original metaphor)</td>
<td>Connecting young people to places they want to be, creating a pathway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour guide (original metaphor)</td>
<td>Journey, road ahead, map out a path ahead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GUIDE THEME</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiding star (original metaphor)</td>
<td>Guiding, showing by example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaman (original metaphor)</td>
<td>Guide, journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPS navigator (original metaphor)</td>
<td>I occasionally give wrong directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESTING/ GATHERING SPACE THEME</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gum tree 1 (metaphor provided)</td>
<td>Place to rest, sway with the breeze, provide a place, home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gum tree 2 (metaphor provided)</td>
<td>Safe gathering space, healing space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MOVEMENT THEME</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggler 2 (metaphor provided)</td>
<td>Balls in air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggler 3 with policeman/woman, hawk, clown/jester (metaphors provided)</td>
<td>Running around in circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roller coaster (original metaphor)</td>
<td>Twists and turns, highs and lows, level and smooth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OBSERVING/WATCHING THEME</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawk (metaphor provided)</td>
<td>Watching around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frog (metaphor provided)</td>
<td>Sensitive to what’s going on around me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SPACE BETWEEN THEME</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiator/mediator (metaphor provided)</td>
<td>Negotiating with parents and in space between people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EMOBODIMENT THEME</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancer in improvisation (original metaphor)</td>
<td>Embodiment - being responsive to the themes of the young people and community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 5.5, the observing/watching theme, respondents captured a sense of observing or watching what was going on or around in the context. This was perhaps indicative of the sense some staff had of the need to be constantly aware of what was going on with the young people, needing to be a step ahead. As the
 descriptors were not overly detailed, it was unclear exactly what the intention of this theme meant. Two interpretations were possible and the metaphor images ‘speak’ for both, but the exact intentions of respondents were inconclusive. For example, one intention may have been to be responsive rather than reactive, as with the frog metaphor – “sensitive to what’s going on around me” (Questionnaire Item 9, Response 6). Another interpretation could have been more about surveillance and prevention of certain behaviours, as with the hawk metaphor – “watching around” (Questionnaire Item 9, Response 21).

The next of the three themes was the space between theme (see Table 5.5), capturing the sense that one respondent had of being a negotiator or mediator in the space between people, for example, with parents/carers. The inclusion of parents/carers was frequent in the discourse of education in the context. Parents/carers were perceived by staff in interviews to be an important aspect of the flexi school community and links between young people, parents/carers and the flexi school community were encouraged.

Finally, as can be seen in Table 5.5, the embodiment theme was captured through the metaphor of a dancer in improvisation incorporating the skills, creativity and sensibilities of a dancer interacting with the “themes of the young people and the community” and “responding to and calling forth the dance in others” (Questionnaire Item 9, Response 10). There were parallels between this theme and the guide, journey and pathway themes, in terms of the notion of dancing in improvisation with the young people according to the themes or pathways they wished to pursue.

**Summary of spatial imagery in questionnaire data.**

In three items of the questionnaire in which staff responded with short answers, spatial imagery or language of place, space and body were evident in the data. Almost all spatial references were in some way linked with the notion of building positive relationships with young people. This showed how a relational dimension of the work
impacted on staff perceptions of themselves in their identity as educators, for example, descriptive words of themselves as workers with young people, most important aspects of work and metaphors of themselves as workers. Strong links between spatial imagery and the strands of relationships and re-engagement identified in the interview data analysis were clearly evident in the questionnaire data. Over half of the metaphors chosen by staff captured aspects of journeying with young people as a guide or mentor, or creating a safe learning environment. In this regard, the strands of common threads of relationships and re-engagement were clearly evident in the questionnaire data through spatial imagery.

In many ways staff appeared to be engaging in “place making” (Vadeboncoeur, 2012). Place making provided a relational perspective to building resilience and contrasted with traditional individualist perspectives on the notion of resilience (Vadeboncoeur, 2012). This relational perspective on resilience connected with previous notions highlighting how identity formation for adults and young people is mediated and co-created in and through social relationships. Through these metaphors of identity, staff were recognising and acknowledging an embodied physical dimension to their work with young people as they created physical and symbolic places of belonging and connection. These metaphors reflected a strong sense of place making for resilience, as educators negotiated and co-created their professional identities in the flexi schools, embodied and grounded in relationships.

**Strands of Common Threads Across this Domain of Practice**

Strands of common threads were identified in the data analysis for ways of working (see Figure 5.1). In data analysis of ways of working with staff, and ways of professional learning, which will be communicated in Chapters Six and Seven, strands of common threads were also identified and provided a synthesis for each domain of
practice. Across the strands of common threads in all domains of practice, three overarching themes including – *Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection, and Holding complexity* – are seen to be consistently evident. In the final section of this chapter in which the results from interview and questionnaire data analysis related to ways of working with young people are presented, the strands of common threads across this domain of practice of ways of working will be discussed using the three overarching themes. The ways these overarching themes influence educator identity and development in practice will be considered.

**How Ways of Working with Young People Influence Educator Identity and Development**

The data presented in this chapter outlines educator perceptions of their ways of working with young people. A range of different perspectives are evident in the data. Not all educators have one common view of their identity and development in relation to their ways of working. Identity is multifaceted for the individual and varies from one individual to another. There are many ways of being and becoming educator that are captured in the data. In the processes of exploring these various ways of working – of being and becoming educator in this context, staff make certain shifts in how they see themselves as educators and how this is expressed in their practice. The stories of educators’ work with young people, and their perceptions of what it means to be an educator in the context, gives particular insights into the processes involved in navigating personal and professional identities – the journeys of being and becoming educator.

**The Influence of Relationships in Ways of Working with Young People**

The first overarching theme of *Relationships* (see Figure 5.2) gives insights into how this aspect of practice in ways of working with young people in the flexi schools’
context, influences educator identity and development. When presenting findings for ways of working: supporting young people in this chapter, ten strands of common threads were identified. Four of these strands of common threads that connect to the theme of *Relationships* will be considered in this section of the discussion. These strands include *relationships, connections, listening to young people,* and *time.* Table 5.6 shows the shifts in educator identity and development that relate to the overarching theme of *Relationships* in ways of working with young people.

### Table 5.6

**Ways of Working Supporting Young People: The Influence of Relationships on Educator Identity and Development in Practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching theme and strands of common threads</th>
<th>Shifts in educator identity and development in practice influenced by relationships in ways of working supporting young people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td>Movement from task orientation to greater people orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strand of <em>relationships</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Understanding young people</td>
<td>• Shift to prioritising relationships first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Developing safe &amp; supportive relationships</td>
<td>• Shift to developing relational ways of being e.g., being more fully human; being a little bit more vulnerable; being open; being able to make amends; being respectful of the dignity of each young person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relationships first</td>
<td>• Shift from being primarily a deliverer of curriculum to being in authentic relationship with young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Qualities of educators offering support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strand of <em>connections</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The importance of making connections</td>
<td>• Shift to working outside common boundaries of practice e.g., outside classrooms and in community settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relationship connected to community</td>
<td>• Shift to emphasising principles of informal education – working through conversation and dialogue in real life settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strand of <em>listening to young people</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Listening to young people</td>
<td>• Shift from telling young people what they need to know to genuinely listening to what young people want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Shift to young person-centred learning choices</td>
<td>• Shift to valuing conversations and principles of informal education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strand of <em>time</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Taking time</td>
<td>• Shift to letting go of linear constructs of time and age-related learning structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Takes time to build relationships</td>
<td>• Shift to genuinely focusing on individual learners’ needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The strand of relationships.**

Educators in the context prioritise relationships in the ways they work with young people. Developing an understanding of the young people in the context is essential for learning to work relationally. Due to multiple complexities and
experiences of social exclusion that young people face in their lives, and their predominantly negative experiences of conventional school settings, educators in the flexi schools have to find different ways of working with this group of young people. The ways of working that are considered to be effective by practitioners in the context, and that are reinforced in the research literature, are primarily relational in nature.

Developing authentic relationships with young people is given primacy. Seeing themselves as being and becoming relational, in this way of working with young people, requires educators to be more fully themselves. This includes being able to be “a little bit vulnerable”, to show their human qualities through being caring, being open, having a sense of humour and being respectful of the dignity of each young person. For teacher educators, it requires a shift in identity from primarily being a deliverer of curriculum and attaining measurable outcomes, to being and becoming a person in an authentic relationship with young people as a starting point. This relational practice in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity both at a personal level and at an interpersonal level. Through seeing other more experienced educators working relationally with young people, and through talking with peers in debrief and reflective practice sessions, workers give themselves permission to perceive themselves in the first instance as relational beings. This prioritising of relationships supports a shift in educator identity where staff are able to see themselves as having the responsibility in the first instance to be in an authentic and safe relationship with young people. Becoming educators of young people through being in relationship, rather than through being deliverers of curriculum or teachers of particular school subjects, such as a Mathematics or English, is prioritised.

The strand of connections.

In recent years general trends in education toward more student-centred notions of teaching with more emphasis on learning rather than teaching are apparent (Beijaard,
Within the network of flexi schools this overt emphasis on young person-centred notions of learning requires building relationships of trust and safety in the first instance. These relationships support young people in moving from ‘isolation to connection’ (Downey, 2009), following experiences of trauma, neglect and abuse that are common for a number of young people in the context. Understanding the complex needs of this group of young people requires a process of awareness raising and education for workers with a teaching background. Shifts in understanding are necessary for these workers to be able to engage with young people in a safe and supportive manner in order to reduce ‘relational distance’ (Vadeboncoeur, 2011) and redress ‘relational poverty’ to increase wellbeing (Perry, 2009).

Supporting young people to make connections for wellbeing and to reduce the risk of isolation, both within the school community and the wider community, influences educators’ sense of identity and development in practice. For teachers, this shift requires working outside some of the common boundaries of practice experienced in conventional school settings, for example, outside of traditional classroom settings. For youth workers, social workers and other workers from community welfare backgrounds this emphasis on relationships sometimes provides an opportunity for validation of the ways of working that are common in their professional practice.

Drawing on principles from informal education in which learning takes place in real life settings, through relationships and in conversation (Smith, 2008), working relationally is often more familiar for educators from community welfare backgrounds. Working in community settings and supporting young people to make relational connections within and beyond the school are also familiar aspects of practice for these workers. Similarly, making connections to life and lifelong learning and the wider community including parents/carers, and other relevant groups and stakeholders, for example, cultural groups, are familiar aspects of practice for some workers. For other
educators, this aspect of practice in the context requires them to move beyond their own professional boundaries that influence their sense of educator identity and development in practice.

At times these shifts in educator identity and development are identified as sites of personal and professional struggle. Tensions are evident for some teachers who are concerned about not being a ‘proper teacher’ if they are not able to see and deliver legitimate curriculum and measurable outcomes for student learning in a school setting. Some teachers feel ill-equipped in terms of knowledge of young peoples’ needs and strategies to support young people in ways that are more often associated with community welfare professionals, such as youth workers, counsellors and psychologists. Some youth workers and social workers feel constrained by their perceptions of what it means to be working in a school setting, and coming to terms with the complexities of accountability requirements and jargon in education systems. At times it is apparent that education practice could easily dominate the identified needs of young people and this is a source of frustration for some workers in the context.

The strand of listening to young people and the strand of time.

As teacher educators become more comfortable with prioritising their relational educator identity, and are able to recognise the significance of emphasising relationships with young people as the starting point of their work, they seem to become able to listen more effectively to young people. Listening is seen as a practical strategy to understand the needs of young people. One of the teachers had a strong sense of the need to listen to young people in order to understand them and to be directed in action by their expressed needs. “I think that’s the essence of it, if we keep as adults getting back to listening to young people and what they’re looking for” (INT 16, p. 5). The commitment to listen to young people was perceived by another participant to be driven by confidence in young people’s resilience and capacity to cope. This was described as:
Listening, listening, listening and then trying to act upon what you hear with the understanding that often what young people say is not often what they mean and trying to keep talking and listening so that you can find out what they mean . . . not to fix the issue or their problem, but to help give them ways to look at it and cope with it. (INT 10 p. 1)

Listening to understand involves appreciating what young people need, what they want, what they are interested in, and what they are passionate about. The data indicates that when educators are actively listening to young people they more often experience greater freedom to implement re-engagement strategies and provide more relevant and meaningful learning options for this group of young people. Active listening can be defined as the capacity to listen sensitively to another (Rogers & Farson, 1957), showing “responsivity and empathy” (Hutchby, 2005, p. 304). Active listening seems to enable adults to let go of time frames for learning that are frequently attached to specific age groupings in conventional school settings. This letting go of perceptions of imposed structures of conventional education systems means that educators can be more responsive to the individual young person’s needs, rather than caught in the social and system expectations of learning and development that are frequently content driven, age-related (Fielding & Moss, 2011), or driven by inflexible reform agendas that do not necessarily meet the complex changing needs of young people in the 21st Century (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Smyth et al., 2004; Wyn, 2008).

Being attuned to young peoples’ developmental needs encompassing physical, spiritual, emotional, social and intellectual dimensions, requires a shift in educator identity and development in practice. Teacher educators have to let go of tendencies to impose linear constructs of time that require educational outcomes to be aligned with specific age levels, associated curriculum content or inflexible reform agendas that do not acknowledge the need for integrated support services to address “multiple barriers (individual, family and structural) that prevent social and economic participation for
many Australians” (Horn, 2010, p. 1). This shift requires educators to focus on individual learners’ needs to avoid further marginalisation and social exclusion.

The emphasis on being an educator who prioritises relationships first has other implications for the ways the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development in practice. In the data analysis, a range of personal qualities of educators were identified that enhance relationships with young people and, which over time, support more positive engagement and the provision of relevant and meaningful learning opportunities. Some of these qualities include wisdom, patience, humour, acceptance of where young people are at, being young at heart, being sensitive, caring, tolerant, compassionate and empathetic. These qualities will be further explored in the data analysis in Chapter 7 in which a range of educator dispositions are identified. The dispositions are enacted in different ways, yet appear to support the development of relational capacity in adults. The influence of the flexi schools’ context on educator identity and development in practice is evident in that educators are able to invest time in developing personal capacities and skills that have a relational focus. For those who struggle with this aspect of practice, achieving positive outcomes with young people is often more problematic.

For those workers whose professional identity is informed by a conscious awareness of adopting a transformational model of education, rather than prioritising formal curriculum delivery and attainment of measured outcomes derived from transmission or transaction models of education (Smith, 1999), the emphasis on relationships is a better fit and logical direction. For other workers, the development of a relational educator identity may occur through processes of situated learning in the workplace: observing more experienced others as they work with young people in a relational way. Some workers struggle and experience failure in re-engaging young people, but through processes of debriefing and engaging in critical reflection both
individually and with other colleagues, are able to find new ways of working and of being and becoming an effective practitioner in the flexi schools’ context. Engaging with the social practices within the flexi schools’ context provides opportunities for negotiations that shape and reshape educators’ own sense of identity and development in practice.

The Influence of Changing Perspectives through Reflection in Ways of Working with Young People

The second overarching theme of Changing perspectives through reflection (see Figure 5.2), gives insight into how this aspect of practice in ways of working with young people in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development. Ten strands of common threads were identified in data related to ways of working with young people. Four of these strands of common threads connected to the theme of Changing perspectives through reflection will be considered in this section of the discussion. These strands include strengths-based practice, changing perspectives, re-engagement, and agency of young people. Table 5.7 shows the shifts in educator identity and development that relate to the overarching theme of Changing perspectives through reflection in ways of working: supporting young people.

When relationships with young people are prioritised by staff, a range of perspectives that relate to educators’ understanding of the nature of their work with young people appear to shift and change. These changes seem to influence practice and educators’ own sense of identity and development. Such shifts and changes occur over time as staff engage in the daily relational practice of the work with young people and then reflect on their practice in a range of settings.
Table 5.7  
Ways of Working Supporting Young People: The Influence of Changing Perspectives through Reflection on Educator Identity and Development in Practice

| Overarching theme and strands of common threads | Shifts in educator identity and development in practice influenced by changing perspectives through reflection in ways of working supporting young people |
| Changing perspectives through reflection | Movement from doing and knowing to being and understanding |

**The strand of strengths based practice**
- Promote strengths-based practice  
  - Shift to a greater focus on genuine listening to young people
- Supporting young people to develop a sense of achievement  
  - Shift to being able to recognise the agency of young people
- Strengths-based approach to young people  
  - Shift from deficit view of young people to strengths-based view

**The strand of changing perspectives**
- Questioning the purpose of education  
  - Shift to re-evaluate the nature and purpose of education
  - Shift to a changed perspective on the meaning of achievement from a narrow academic view to broader wellbeing view
- Help give young people another view  
  - Shift to being primarily informed by young people – their reactions, their resistance and the relationships with them
  - Shift towards becoming critical reflective practitioners both at an individual level and in teams

**The strand of re-engagement**
- Engagement  
  - Shift to a young person-centred approach to learning – making real life connections; doing hands-on, practical activities, developing differentiated curriculum and individual learning plans;
- Re-engagement strategies  
  - Shift to greater collaboration with other professionals – high levels of peer support; high levels of team problem solving; high degree of flexibility
- Differentiated curriculum

**The strand of agency of young people**
- Giving young people choice  
  - Shift in power dynamics – becoming a co-learner; adults learning to let go of being expert in young peoples’ lives; giving young people responsibility and ownership of their learning
- Trusting young people  
  - Shift from ‘control paradigm’ to ‘cooperative paradigm’
- Exercising ‘power with’ – a change in adult/worker role  
  - Shift from ‘power over’ to ‘power with’

Staff perceptions of what it means to be an educator, which includes their personal and professional identities and how these develop through the social practices of being in relationship with young people and with colleagues, seem to be influenced and changed by the flexi schools’ context in which reflection is a regular feature of practice. The
importance of reflection is captured in one of the interviews where a staff member talked about the need to take a lot of time to reflect on the work:

There’s a lot of time for discussion and reflection, these are really important, because . . . it’s not like you can go off somewhere else where you can find out how to do it [the work]– you really have to do this [work]. (INT 03, p. 10)

Reflective processes seem to support staff as they renegotiate their sense of identity and development in practice. It is evident in interview responses that some educators’ experiences in practice of failing to re-engage young people is partly due to them not taking the time to connect with young people in and through relationships. Reflection on practice at an individual level, or with other staff in conversation at a one to one level, or in small groups, appears to support educators to shift their understanding of their professional identity in practice and do their work with young people differently in a more relational way.

In one of the RPG sessions, a new worker expressed disappointment that young people appear indifferent and unresponsive to the great ideas and activities that she offers them. This worker came to the realisation that she had not taken the time to establish relationships with these young people. During a debrief conversation with a more experienced colleague, the worker realised what was happening and described the realisation as an ‘aha’ moment. The details of this conversation are captured in a researcher journal entry where it is stated that:

They had been talking about the need to develop relationships with the young people first and foremost rather than expecting that they would respond to requests to engage in activities or do what the teacher asked. The new worker had been experiencing a certain level of frustration in trying to get young people engaging in activities in class and she was a bit perplexed about how to get young people participating and engaging. She was experiencing quite a lot of resistance. (Researcher journal, Site 3, Session 3)
Later that day in the RPG session, conversation with other workers supported a shift in the new worker’s sense of identity in practice. A reflection on this conversation in the RPG session is captured in a researcher journal entry that stated:

More experienced workers were able to share their own stories of similar challenges they had faced and their own realisation of the need to really focus on relationships first and foremost – setting aside curriculum requirements and notions of teacher responsibilities in the classroom from other mainstream contexts, and really focus on listening, building relationships, being open to what the young people were interested in rather than imposing their own ‘great ideas’ on the young people. (Researcher journal, Site 3, Session 3)

These ideas are also evident in interview data. Educators talk about the need to develop rapport with young people through really getting to know them. “That’s the rapport. That’s the big one with these kids. I mean if you don’t have rapport, forget it, you’re not going to do it” (INT 2, p. 20). It is perceived that taking a personal interest in young people is important. “Humour works. A real interest in them works” (INT 04, p. 5). Being aware of the young people’s particular interests and passions is viewed as significant. “You always focus on what their interests are first, they’re the most important people in the world” (INT 14, p. 4).

**The strand of strengths-based practice.**

Reflection on practice assists some staff to realise that adopting a strengths-based approach to working with young people enhances their capacity to engage and support young people. One interviewee describes her own preference for working within a strength-based perspective with young people. Whilst she is aware of this strategy, she learnt more about it from mentoring and supervision with other more experienced workers at her site. “I’ve really found value in that strengths approach in the work and the narrative approach as well. It’s really finding out and talking to young people, firstly finding out their story and then bringing the strength perspective to that” (INT 06, p. 21).
This approach requires a greater focus on listening to young people and recognising their agency. Within this study, agency is understood as the ability to act in and on the world. In this way educators shift their perspective of the young people from a deficit view to a strengths-based view that enables them to recognise what the young people are capable of, rather than what they cannot do or what their limitations are. A number of interview participants describe how they adopt a strengths perspective to young people rather than a deficit approach, which requires seeing the dignity and potential of the young people rather than only noticing their problems (McCashen, 2005). This perspective is captured in the following response:

If you can somehow break those barriers down and get to know that person. There's a rich little person in there, that's got a lot of really cool opinions . . . everyone's got something really great to do or give or learn. (INT 14, p. 5)

A strengths-based approach to working with young people was articulated by another respondent when she identified that:

Many of these young people have always been regarded by really good professionals as, you know, having deficits . . . So there’s no wonder that the young person after a number of years come to the conclusion that “Oh I'm the problem and I carry these things with me that are the problem”. So if you don’t work from that model, if you start with another model of “look at your strengths”. (INT 10, p. 5)

In describing a class group that she was preparing for an outdoor education experience, one worker adopted a strengths-based approach. She chose to see the potential in the young people and was prepared to take risks with them. She said, “I’ve explained to them very, very openly that I’m taking a risk because I think they have the potential” (INT 04, p. 9). By changing their view of young peoples’ capabilities, educators’ perspectives on the meaning of achievement seems to also change. Rather than viewing achievement through a narrow lens of academic outcomes, staff describe a
reframing of how they view achievement. When staff see this group of young people regularly attending school, developing quality relationships with their peers, and participating in the school community in a range of situations, this provides other ways of measuring success or positive outcomes related to personal wellbeing. In interviews with staff, education is perceived in an holistic way recognising that all parts of the young people’s lives need to be developed and strengthened. For example, one teacher described her own change in perception regarding the need for an holistic response when she stated:

I could come in as a teacher, and I probably did come into this organisation with teacher-thinking “Oh learning is great and having an education is great” and if I offer them this gift and they say they want it and they get it, which they did, then everything else will fall into place and I quickly learnt that it doesn’t. You’ve got to build all the other parts of that young person at the same time, or the gift that they’re taking from you and that they’re gifting themselves to, it’ll fall over. It’ll fall over because the other things haven’t been looked at along the way. (INT 10, p. 12)

Educational outcomes – such as personal development and growth, aspirational goals and the ability to get along with others – are seen as worthwhile and valid outcomes of education. One worker described it in the following terms:

Give them a bit of an awareness of who they are, where everything fits in the whole scheme of things and open their minds up to new things and possibilities that they can achieve in their lives, whether a career, whether you know trying to read, trying to get along with other people. (INT 08, p. 5)

Being able to support young peoples’ achievements through recognising an increase in their level of self-esteem or their capacity to relate to their peers and staff in positive ways are examples of shifts in staff perceptions of what they believe is important in terms of educational outcomes for young people. These shifts and changes in understanding about the nature of young peoples’ achievements seem to influence educators’ own sense of identity and development in practice. Their valuing of how
they support young people to achieve more holistic educational outcomes is increased and their expectations of only working within more limited parameters of measuring educational outcomes are diminished. This is particularly evident in questionnaire responses for Item 8 where staff were asked to describe the most important aspects of their work with young people. Staff perceive that the most important aspect of their work is connected to the role of caring and supporting young people. This aspect of the work is described in statements such as: being available for young people, listening to young people, building trust, rapport and developing trusting relationships that nurtured young people. For this group of young people, staff perceive that developing self-esteem, confidence, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence are the most important aspects of their work (see appendix U: Questionnaire Item 8: Categories of most important aspects of work with examples from data, under the category of caring and supporting).

**The strand of changing perspectives.**

Over time, as staff experience a capacity to prioritise relationships and as their understanding of the needs of young people develop, it is not uncommon for educators in flexi schools to engage in some level of questioning their understanding of the purpose of education. One of the teachers described this notion in the following way:

> I see success as engagement, no matter how small or big it is. Um, and success to me is the young people here having ownership of this place. You know Maths and English all that can come later . . . one of the boys, he got a C for [school subject] and he said “well, how do I get a B?” and I said “Well, trust yourself”. So he did. I said, “Trust your judgement, trust yourself”. Cause he was very hesitant. And, he did. And then he thanked me for it. That’s it – self-belief with the kids. (INT 11, p. 10-11)

Developing the aspirations and confidence of young people in their own ability to learn is considered essential for learning choices support. The need to strengthen young people’s self-esteem and capacity to get along with other people is viewed as important
in foregrounding other learning. Strengthening relationships is viewed as a contributing factor towards better academic achievement through developing confidence and self-trust.

Many educators have already engaged in processes of re-evaluating the purpose of education, and for some, it is a motivating factor for initially coming to work in the flexi schools’ context. Nevertheless, further critical reflection on the nature and purpose of education seems to influence educator identity and development in practice and may cause educators to see the value in adopting a more holistic and long term view regarding the nature of education as a lifelong endeavour that is broader and wider than academic outcomes (Delors, 1999; Fielding & Moss, 2011). Participants’ experiences of working with young people seem to reinforce an appreciation of the need to educate the whole person, to accommodate physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual aspects of learning into ways of working with young people in the flexi schools. In order for young people to be able to engage in learning, the importance of developing positive relationships first is consistently identified in the analysis of interview data. A number of staff identify that the ability to relate to others is a positive educational outcome and one worker talked about her own valuing of relationships as a priority:

I love that the relationships come first and, I mean as an educator we know that’s the most important thing, that is, somebody’s comfortable and confident . . . that’s what’s going to provide them with opportunities in terms of relationships, friendships, social networking and work – and that’s the most important thing you know. (INT 09, p. 18)

This shift to prioritising relationships first can sometimes be challenging for new staff. Awareness of this challenge is evident in one educator’s comment stating that:

[When new staff] became more relaxed they became more aware that the content of a curriculum isn’t all that significantly important in the young people’s life at the moment. It’s not denying the value of learning but learning is, well you start by saying, education is much broader than two As, Bs or Cs. (INT 05, p. 27)
From staff accounts in interviews, and from hearing young peoples’ own stories, it appears that young people in flexi schools have a different, more positive experience in the learning community because of the primacy of relationships. New opportunities to negotiate their identities as learners in a safe, supportive context are presented to them. They are able to reclaim, renew, renegotiate and redefine their identity as a learner and this opens up the possibilities of new trajectories of being a learner in other contexts. Young people’s own stories describe their experiences of attending flexi schools and describe the internal changes that have occurred for them which support this shift in learning identities described above (Flexible Learning Centre, 2011; Flexible Learning Centre, 2012). As Wenger emphasises in his social theory of learning in communities of practice, “learning is a lifelong process not limited to education settings but is limited by the scope of our identities” (1998, p. 273).

Not surprisingly, this different awareness about the nature and purpose of education is also a point of struggle at times in terms of staff navigating requirements of education systems and funding bodies. It was recognised by one staff member that the accountability measures for teachers have increased dramatically over time with regard to curriculum, assessment, administration and other dimensions of professionalism now imposed on teachers. “Teachers too now, [pause] are very busy - they’re busy with the teaching, they’re busy with the education. Now, the accountability measures are much more” (INT 10, p. 15).

For another worker, this struggle was perceived at a much broader level requiring a capacity to see the bigger picture. In a political and ideological sense, seeing the bigger picture involves offering a challenge to the very notion of what education entails and how it can be enacted. One participant articulated that the practice of education experienced in the network of flexi schools offers a unique and important
perspective contributing to the wider social discourse of education. He expressed his perspective stating that:

I think these places actually offer and stand in front of a fair bit of what can be seen in the current economic climate, as being a revisionist kind of approach to education. And in that sense, the very existence of these places becomes radical. Places like this need to exist to challenge other systems, so in that kind of hegemonic sense, they are extremely important as a political and pedagogic point of difference. (INT 16, p. 9)

At times the struggle involves justifying their practice to themselves and others and dealing with social and system expectations, and expectations that young people themselves may bring to the flexi school context that are shaped by traditional educational discourse. One teacher identified that her experience of working in the network is a “backflip from the authority model of being teacher” that she experienced in another conventional education setting (INT 09, p. 6). This shift towards emphasising relationships as the first priority is challenging at times. When describing an experience of mentoring a pre-service teacher on practicum, one teacher described the struggle the pre-service teacher was experiencing and how she as a mentor communicated the importance of relationships:

Look we’re in this room, it’s a library, five of your students walked in and you don't know who they are, so you have to make the effort and go up and say ‘Hi, I'm your teacher’ or ‘I'm not sure if I'm your teacher, but ‘Hi, I’m, this is me’. I expect you to do that here because they’ll just hide under the table or be outside you need to get to know everyone you teach. You've got to develop a relationship. (INT 14, p. 27)

Defining the nature and purpose of education is a contentious issue within the wider society, amongst policy makers, researchers, practitioners and within the general public, all of whom have various perspectives on what education could and should be (Apple & Beane, 2007; Ayers, 2009; Delors, 1999; Fielding & Moss, 2011; Sachs, 1997, 2003). The concern that the focus on the nature and purpose of education is
narrowing and that “Australian educational policies overwhelmingly emphasize utilitarian and economistic visions of education” (Wyn, 2008) has serious implications for disenfranchised young people. Questions about lifelong learning, health, wellbeing and social cohesion and the complex changing needs of young people in the 21st Century are often not adequately addressed (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Wyn, 2008).

When considering their work with young people some staff realise that the young peoples’ perspectives and responses inform and influence their work. Some teachers who have experienced being a successful practitioner in other more conventional school settings have to reconsider the ways they are working with young people in the network of flexi schools due to their sense of frustration about not being able to connect with young people. This is exemplified in the RPG session previously described where a new teacher realises she has not given priority to relationships first and this is causing challenges in terms of being able to connect with young people. This interaction is captured in a researcher journal entry identifying that dilemma:

More experienced workers were able to share their own stories of similar challenges they had faced and their own realisation of the need to really focus on relationships first and foremost . . . and really focus on listening, building relationships, being open to what the young people were interested in rather than imposing their own ‘great ideas’ on the young people. (Researcher journal, Site 3, Session 3)

As these workers develop a deeper understanding of the complex needs of this group of young people and reflect on the young peoples’ reactions to them in the learning space, they start to question their own actions and their underlying assumptions about their own ways of working with young people. The process of changing their perspective on how they engage with young people and how they explore learning choices that are relevant, flexible and meaningful for young people takes time and reflection on their own practice, supported by more experienced workers. Educator
identities that have been shaped by traditional educator discourse seem to be challenged and changed through the relationships that are experienced with young people and through reflection on practice with peers.

In some instances, staff perceive that their practice involves supporting young people to develop another perspective or another view about what is possible in their lives and through their learning. In one interview this was described by a worker:

Give them a bit of an awareness of who they are, where everything fits in the whole scheme of things and open their minds up to, to new things and possibilities that they can achieve in their lives, whether a career, whether you know trying to read, trying to get along with other people. (INT 08, p. 5)

Another worker described this ‘other view’ as a shift from a deficit model of working with young people to a strengths-based model. She believed that:

If you start with another model of “look at your strengths” and you work on your strengths then if their view of themselves changes, hopefully that gives them some sense of strength to go, “Oh yea, I’ve got problems” and we’ve all got problems too, but this is what I’m good at . . . and it doesn’t have to be schoolwork they’re good at. “I’m good at being patient” or “I’m good at being you know a good leader” or “I’m good at being a good friend”, “I’m good at healing or helping or just being me”. (INT 10, p. 6)

Developing another perspective may be connected to the young person’s sense of identity and self-esteem. Seeing another view may be related to seeing the bigger picture and supporting young people to recognise their own potential and their capacities or being able to find a purpose in what they are doing. The ability to support young people as they change their perspectives on life to be broader and able to encompass the possibilities of hope (te Riele, 2009) requires young people to develop reflective skills. In order for staff to encourage and support young people to develop reflective skills, they need to engage in “personal and social development” through their own identity work and reflective practice (Stokes & Wyn, 2009, p. 48; Walkington,
The value and potential for young people to engage in reflective practice as they develop work and career pathways, life choices and transitions, cannot be underestimated (Stokes et al., 2003). This dimension of the practice of educators in the flexi schools seems to influence educator identity and development in practice in that it requires educators to engage in their own reflection and inner work in order to be able to model and mentor young people in these processes. One worker described the need for reflective practice in the following terms:

Having enough space to talk about why, why do you do it like that? Why do you do this? What would you do in this situation? So I guess a lot of time for reflecting on how things are done and why things are done that way. Where that idea comes from . . . so there’s a lot of time for discussion and reflection, these are really important. (INT 03, p. 10)

For another worker, reflection supports diversity within the school community. Her example of how staff achieve this recognises the need to make time. She states that:

Time to reflect, whether in meetings with young people or time with colleagues is paramount, because the diversity of our young people and ourselves needs due recognition. (INT 01, p. 21)

The level of disconnection from family and community that various young people who come to the flexi schools may experience, and the social exclusion through poverty, unemployment, homelessness, substance abuse, limited access to health services, and the associated discrimination that young people may encounter, seems to heighten the sense of responsibility that educators feel and have to manage in supporting young people. One educator reflected on the complexity that the young people face in terms of the masks that they wear. She is conscious of the need for staff to be aware of this complexity in order to offer support and commented that:

A lot of these young people have got incredible masks, that you would expect them to be functioning in the same way, but the reality is that they are masks, and they’ve got all these other, there’s so much other stuff going on and the
more we are reminded of that the more we can have the patience and tolerance and things like that, that I think is really important. (INT 15, p. 5)

Some educators in the network of flexi schools seek to incorporate this reflective capacity in their own sense of professional identity and development. They recognise the responsibility they have accepted to mentor and guide this group of young people. Critical reflection is evident in situations in which staff are open to challenge themselves to “reflect on their own stuff and delve into themselves . . . and at the same time, want to work with this disadvantaged group of young people” (INT 16, p. 9). This questioning aspect of reflection is part of critical reflection on practice, a moment when unquestioned assumptions are challenged and in some instances change. This kind of critical reflection is mentioned in another way by a worker who highlights that it is easy to be seduced into wanting quietness and order with young people being on task in classrooms. This worker realised that there is always a need to ask the critical questions such as:

Who is not here? Like where’s so and so, and where’s so and so, and where’s the ruckuss and where’s, you know, where’s [young person] screaming her head off into the world cause she’s been in [State Government] care for ten years. Ahh, that’s right. Why aren’t they here? Yea, who are we shutting out? (INT 10, p. 22)

The level of mentoring and guiding required of staff is potentially more frequent and more complex in nature than what is required in many conventional education settings.

**The strand of re-engagement.**

Due to the high levels of disengagement that young people in the flexi schools’ context have experienced and the frequent absences and disruptions to attendance at school that are commonplace, educators have to employ high degrees of creativity, risk taking and trialling a wide range of strategies to support young people to engage in
learning that is relevant and meaningful. One worker talked about strategies he adopts in the following terms:

For me personally I never really liked just sitting in a classroom and being fed information after information. For me education shouldn’t be that way it should be interactive, it should be fun it should be engaging and full of many you know spikes of emotion, spikes of um, different types of sights, smells, because it all plays a part in recognising all these things later in life to remember. (INT 08, p. 12)

Re-engaging young people involves teachers finding what they are good at and what they themselves are passionate about. An educator described his own strategies for achieving this by saying:

What I do is, if I have to teach something, I make it enjoyable for myself. So I go well how will I make it so it’s enjoyable for myself to teach? And it will be enjoyable for the kids. So that’s the way I approach it. And it works, it really works. (INT 11, p. 3)

Another worker described his approach stating that “I draw on my knowledge and life experience and the things that I think kids can do practically” (INT 12, p. 5). This approach to re-engagement is based on finding contexts outside of traditional classrooms in order to engage young people in learning, where they are not conscious of being in a formal learning environment. In relation to a Maths class, a teacher described how this could be achieved:

A good example would be Maths, so that you don’t have to have a Maths class, you know your Maths can be taught in the woodwork class, it can be taught when you’re out playing volleyball or basketball. It can be taught on the beach. (INT 12, pp. 2-3)

As previously mentioned the starting point for re-engagement is the establishment of safe and supportive relationships and then a shift to a young person-centred approach to learning. This approach requires strategies such as making real life connections, doing hands-on and practical activities, exploring the interests and
passions of young people (Robinson & Aronica, 2009) and finding activities that are enjoyable, relevant and engaging for the young people, drawing on relational, experiential and project-based learning (Fielding & Moss, 2011; Margonis, 2004; Seddon & Ferguson, 2009). The nature of this aspect of practice to support the learning choices of young people requires an ability to develop and implement differentiated curriculum and individual learning plans that cater to the learning needs of each learner.

These ways of working influence educator identity and development in practice. The work with young people often requires staff to exercise high levels of collaboration with a range of other professionals, maintain high levels of peer support and implement high levels of problem solving skills. Staff are often working outside of their own area of expertise or education and feel that they are required to have a high degree of flexibility. This flexibility is not only necessary with the content of learning activities, but also with the processes of learning and the skills of working in small groups that promote cohesion, a sense of safety and belonging and an ability to support the resolution of conflict through nonviolent means. For example, one worker describes the conflict resolution processes she has witnessed and learnt from. When serious issues arise, such as a violent situation or an instance of theft, the normal school routine stops and a meeting is held with the young people to find a solution. One such process that followed a violent incident at a site was described by this worker:

So serious issues usually get dealt with in smaller groups in classrooms after we’ve had a quick intro at the big meeting . . . but there’s too many people to have a big meeting, so we’ll split off if there is a serious thing, that’s done in the classroom. In small groups. (INT 14, pp. 20-21)

Negotiating through the four principles offers an alternative to punitive controlling methods of behaviour management that tend to exclude those who have already been significantly marginalised. Whilst these processes are complex, challenging and take
time and specific skills, they offer young people an experience of resolving conflict in a constructive, nonviolent manner whilst providing the support and role-modelling of significant adults with whom they have established a relationship of safety and trust.

The work with young people involves dealing with complex situations that emerge on any given day. The demands of this work are extremely high for workers. However, reflection on practice and the concept of a young person-centred approach to learning, has for some workers, resulted in a changed perspective of educator identity and development. One worker recognised that this involves respecting the young person’s right to choose and that this is challenging for him at times. He believes that the goal of the work is to support young people in their personal growth and capacity to take responsibility for their own lives by allowing them to make choices and showing them how the principles apply to life. He talked about this in the following way:

I s’pose it’s always remembering to respect the young person, it’s their right to choose, positive or negative it’s their right to choose and that’s the hard bit cause you want to wrap them up and go “but, no, don’t do that again”. (INT 02, p. 13)

This aspect of practice requires that staff learn to step back and wait, avoid the tendency to ‘fix’ and ‘solve’ and learn to give young people the space to act and take responsibility. Another worker described such a situation commenting that:

When you're in a morning meeting, those big meetings, it's so easy for an older person who has got the power, to go “rah rah rah rah” . . . Again, this person who is such a great role model says, “we've got a really big problem here everybody, and this has happened and that's happened, and I need some suggestions right here and now [about] what we can do to fix it”. (INT 14, p. 23)

When educators shift the kind of power dynamics within adult/young person relationships, young people are gradually supported to take more responsibility for their own learning choices and interactions within the group, and adult workers are gradually able to ‘let go’ and change their perceptions that they are solely responsible for all of the
desired outcomes and learning processes. As adult workers ‘let go’ and share responsibility with young people, giving them ownership, choice and voice in their own learning, the educators’ sense of identity and development in practice is changed from teacher to co-learner. A degree of humility and the capacity to demonstrate one’s humanity through sometimes being vulnerable is perceived by some staff as important. For example, being able to admit mistakes and apologise to other workers or young people, or being willing to show sensitivity through emotions, demonstrates shifts in power dynamics. One participant described it as openness to being vulnerable and sensitive to what the young people have to offer. He stated that:

I think it happens by being open to the fact of, by being a little bit vulnerable. By putting yourself out there and doing the normal things and doing them sort of sensitively, you know where young people are coming from . . . having a sensitivity to young people and what they’ve got to offer as well. (INT 07, pp. 9-10)

Another worker was aware of the importance of listening to young people, being informed by the young people and acting on what is heard from the young people. This was summed up by the worker when she said: “Before I can do anything, I need to be informed by the young people, and then it’s a matter of making that connection” (INT 01, p. 5). The next strand of common threads addresses this change of perspective through consideration of the notion of the *agency of young people*.

**The strand of agency of young people.**

When the basis of working with young people is the primacy of relationships, some educators find themselves reconsidering and renegotiating traditional notions or discourses of what adult/young person relationships entail. For example, “socially accepted hierarchies” (Nabavi & Lund, 2012) that traditionally exist between adults and young people are challenged. The process of having to renegotiate aspects of one’s professional identity in relationship with young people requires a shift from operating
out of a traditional paradigm shaped by traditional discourse that adopts traditional teacher-centred practices (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005). For example, in conventional school settings, it is common practice for the teacher to be the figure of authority and control (Delpit, 1988), the manager of knowledge and information, and the arbiter of how knowledge should be constructed and subsequently represented. When using the word control, it should be appreciated that control does not necessarily equate with being overly authoritarian, overbearing or dominant, although in some situations this may be the case. Being an authority figure in a conventional school context has a range of expressions that differ in intensity and intention. Managing and controlling what happens in a classroom can be a subtle phenomenon that may be experienced by many young people in conventional settings as quite normal and acceptable, especially when a teacher combines aspects of relational pedagogy with a genuine concern for the students’ wellbeing and achievements. If young people in their role as students are able to conform to the standards of behaviour and expectations around completing tasks in a way that meets the requirements of the teacher, and more broadly, those of the education system, families and cultures, there may not be significant issues of concern for that young person. Negotiating their identity as a learner in a conventional setting, particularly if this conformity is reinforced in the family and social context (Alpert, 1991; Thompson, Entwisle, Alexander, & Sundius, 1992; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006), may not be problematic.

However, the experience of control is frequently problematic for some young people who, for a range of reasons, are unwilling or unable to conform to a set of behavioural standards imposed upon them, and unwilling or unable to complete learning tasks in what is deemed to be an ‘acceptable’ manner according to the requirements and academic standards of either the teacher, or of an education system (Smyth et al., 2004). The shift in educator identity from what Kalantzis and Cope (2005) describe as a
paradigm of control to a more cooperative paradigm, from power over to power with (Slattery, Butigan, Pelicaric, & Preston-Pile, 2005; Stuart, 2004; Warren, 2005), is captured in the experiences and practice of educators in the flexi schools’ context. A number of educators talk about their perceptions of having as much to learn from young people as they have to teach young people. Vygotsky describes this quality of teaching/learning relationship through his concept of ‘obuchenie’, which captures the idea that all participants are both teachers and learners, and every act of teaching is also an act of learning (Cole, 2009; Vadeboncoeur, 2011). This kind of mutuality requires a letting go of traditional paradigms of control in order to embrace and enact cooperative paradigms (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005). For one worker this idea was captured in the following two comments:

I guess I don’t want to be seen as an authority person. I’m not above them, we’re all people in this community and that’s how I’m gonna approach it in a respectful way and not that I’m a senior person in this environment. I don’t want to be seen or approached in that way. (INT 06, p. 17)

I feel I have as much to learn from the young people here as they have to learn from me. [There is] that real feeling that we’re all on a level playing field. (INT 06, p. 21)

When educators enact relational pedagogy, critically reflect on their practice with an openness to change their perspective and practice, and when they trust young people as the experts in their own lives, a different paradigm is enacted. When educators give young people real choices in their learning and adopt young person-centred practices in all aspects of their work, a more cooperative paradigm is enacted. The democratisation of learning spaces refers to educational processes that promote respect, inclusion, participation and dialogue (Apple & Beane, 2007; Ayers, 2009; Lally
& Barrett, 1999; Mann, 2005), as well as encouraging “control over production, consumption and legitimation of knowledge” (Skelton, 2002, p. 197).

Democratisation of the flexi schools’ context influences educators’ own sense of professional identity and development in practice, as they became co-learners, facilitators and mentors with young people, rather than the experts in young people’s lives and learning. *Recognising the agency of young people* through listening, giving choice, respecting their right to choose and trusting them, ultimately leads to a change in the power dynamics between adults and young people in the learning community. According to staff, listening supports young people to enact their own solutions, allowing them to drive outcomes according to what they themselves are seeking. One youth worker recognises that young people can work out their own solutions and that they mainly want to be heard. She described this by highlighting that:

You don't always want to give them the solutions, ‘cause they have it. They have it, they know it. It's about you helping them get to their solution, and actually making them think about it . . . they just don't want you to tell them, they just want you to listen. (INT 13, pp. 7-8)

Helping young people find their own passion thus enabling them to do things that they want, is another dimension of how choice is perceived by a worker as she recognises the agency of young people. She makes the connection between young people being able to make choices and develop passion, saying that:

I really enjoy the kind of adult, young adult to adult kind of model. You’re here ‘cause you want to be’ . . . not kind of trying to force people to do things . . . Just helping people find their passion . . . when they’ve got a passion then they’ve got a drive, they’ve got a reason to do stuff. (INT 03, p. 5)

Trusting what young people know is captured by a teacher who fosters young people’s agency by trusting that they already have a significant knowledge and skill base. She is conscious of highlighting this as she supports young people who are choosing to re-

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engage in education. She emphasises the skills young people have already acquired and states that:

It’s sort of letting them understand how they’ve actually already got a whole lot of skills, but perhaps not the awareness around those skills, and that’s the basis of their learning, they’ve actually learnt a whole lot. (INT 01, p. 5)

In the flexi schools, educator identity and development and the processes of being and becoming an educator are frequently influenced and shaped by another paradigm – that of cooperation and co-learning.

**The Influence of Holding Complexity in Ways of Working with Young People**

The third overarching theme of *Holding complexity* (see Figure 5.2), gives insights into how this aspect of practice in ways of working with young people in the flexi schools’ context, influences educator identity and development. Ten strands of common threads were identified in data related to ways of working supporting young people. Two of these strands of common threads connected to the theme of *Holding complexity*, will be considered in this section of the discussion. These strands include *holding complexity*, and *structures and boundaries*. Table 5.8 shows the shifts in educator identity and development that relate to the overarching theme of *Holding complexity* in ways of working with young people.

When relationships are prioritised and educator perspectives change through reflection, high levels of complexity are still apparent in the work of educators in the flexi schools due to the complexities faced by young people in their lives. One worker described this situation for the young people she works with, mentioning that:

Quite often we find that by the time that they’ve found us, a lot of structure in their life has gone. And it’s kind of dissipated a bit, they have some structure around their social life or their cyber life – but actually getting out and about and connecting with other people on areas that, you know, are not their first
interest but may be useful for them to connect. That needs a whole lot of work. (INT 01, p. 6)

Table 5.8

Ways of Working Supporting Young People: The Influence of Holding Complexity on Educator Identity and Development in Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching theme and strands of common threads</th>
<th>Shifts in educator identity and development in practice influenced by holding complexity in ways of working supporting young people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holding complexity</td>
<td>Movement from managed outcomes to more emergent outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strand of holding complexity

- Trauma informed practice
  - Shift to understanding young peoples’ needs as a primary motivation
  - Shift to deepened awareness of trauma informed practice and the impact on young peoples’ capacity to learn and develop relationships
  - Shift to having a greater level of understanding, access to a wider range of strategies to support young people, and a higher degree of compassion informed by knowledge of the potential impact of trauma and neglect on young peoples’ capacity to learn and engage.

Strand of structures and boundaries

- Offering consistency and role modelling to young people
  - Shift to young person-centred ways of working as a primary motivation
  - Shift to motivation for providing consistency and role modelling was driven by young peoples’ needs, rather than adult worker, school or system needs
  - Shift to primacy of relational ways of working motivated by the needs and circumstances of young people – not driven by need to change or ‘fix’ young people
  - Shift for educators to appreciate the need to take time with young people

- Need for structure in learning
  - Shift to having structure in learning was for the benefit and support of young people whose life experiences were frequently complex. It was not primarily motivated by convenience for the adult worker, school or system

- Clear boundaries
  - Shift towards being able to balance flexibility with boundaries through negotiation with young people
  - Shift to sensitive combination of clear boundaries and great flexibility coupled with a capacity to negotiate using the four principles
  - Shift to involve young people in processes to develop positive relationships with others

The ability to hold complexity and provide appropriate structures and boundaries in the face of the challenges that invariably emerge in re-engaging disenfranchised young people is demanding for staff. Consistency and stability in young people’s lives is not always apparent. Staff constantly need to work with young people where they are at on any given day. Circumstances in young peoples’ lives
change from day to day. This requires flexibility from staff and a willingness to return to the priority of consistent relationships with young people.

**The strand of holding complexity.**

One of the ways that staff develop their capacity to deal with the complexity of the context is through developing a deeper understanding of trauma informed practice. In emphasising how trauma affects some young people’s capacity to interact constructively with others and engage positively with learning, one interviewee highlights the need for knowledge. She commented that staff need:

> A constant reminder of the nature of our young people and why they are the way they are, which is like the trauma and the effect of abuse . . . there’s so much other stuff going on and the more we are reminded of that the more we can have the patience and tolerance [and] feel more passion towards them and compassion . . . And you can't do that unless you've got the knowledge. (INT 15, p. 5)

This involves learning about the impact of neglect and trauma on young people’s ability to learn, to regulate their emotions and moods, to be able to be attentive, to be able maintain relationships and avoid problem behaviour such as hyperarousal and dissociation (Downey, 2007, 2009; Perry, 2009). When staff develop an awareness of the impact of trauma and/or neglect on young peoples’ capacity to learn and develop relationships, they are more equipped with strategies to address this. One key strategy includes developing safe and supportive relationships in the first instance (Downey, 2007, 2009). Educators’ sense of compassion seems to develop through understanding trauma informed practice, which supports them to avoid blaming young people. Educators’ shift towards greater understanding, and the ability to develop relational strategies to support young people, seems to change their sense of professional identity in the context of flexi schools.
The strand of *structures and boundaries*.

A dimension of understanding the needs of young people expressed by staff in interviews is the need to provide some structures and boundaries for young people. This is exemplified when staff offer consistency and role modelling in relationships with young people. This was important for one worker who makes sure that she checks in with young people as a way of them experiencing consistency. She offers this through her caring approach described in the following way:

> I have a group of young people that I work with and that I check in with and check how they’re going and talk with them about what they’re doing, and meet with them regularly and follow up if they’re not around. (INT 03, p. 1)

Another worker feels that young people learn about relationships through role-modelling that creates some practical boundaries for them. He offers support by understanding where they are at and by realising that change takes time. He said that:

> It’s about you displaying it and you role-modelling it, and kids getting it and they do get it but it takes time. It’s not gonna be overnight, you rock in and say it and the kids basically do it. It takes time. (INT 02, p. 17)

As staff develop relationships with young people they recognise that time is needed to create safe and supportive learning environments and that for some young people the only consistent aspect of their lives is the environment and relationships within the flexi schools. This understanding supports staff in their shift to work relationally and offer this consistency to young people. They recognise that their relational identity as educators is of primary importance in establishing trust, consistency and safety for young people in their journey of re-engagement in schooling and that this requires the commitment of time.

Along similar lines, the need for structure in learning requires a shift in educator identity to a relational emphasis and a young person-centred perspective (Downey,
2009). The purpose of providing structure in the learning environment is not merely for the convenience of the teacher in order to get through a required curriculum. Offering appropriate structure in learning is for the benefit and support of young people who often lacked structure in other dimensions of their lives. The experience of some degree of appropriate structure is supportive of young peoples’ re-engagement in schooling, which at times may be intermittent and disrupted due to external circumstances in their lives.

In terms of offering young people positive relationship support, educators talk about the need to be able to balance consistency with flexibility. This is often in relation to communicating clear boundaries regarding the treatment of others in the learning environment, which at times involves challenging young peoples’ behaviour, negotiating with young people using the four principles, and inviting them to be participants in finding solutions. The complexity of being able to read situations, understanding young peoples’ needs and offering relevant and meaningful learning choices is complex and requires a movement towards greater flexibility whilst holding boundaries and realising that this process takes time. Taking time – time to care (Noddings, 1992), time to develop safe and supportive relationships (Beck & Cassidy, 2009), and appreciating time in the learning process (Cassidy & Chinnery, 2009) – supports staff to understand the needs of young people. One worker talked about how he understood learning and the need to take time when he stated that:

Learning is not subjecting a person to ‘you’ve gotta learn this now’ you know, especially with the kids that we are working with. You need to take time you know. I think we as a society are putting too much pressure on our children to learn so quickly that you forget that the learning process takes time to develop. (INT 08, p. 17)
Due to the complexity faced by many young people in their lives, it is essential that taking time be valued as an aspect of practice in the work. Appreciating the importance of taking time was expressed by an educator who stated that:

It takes time . . . What many of the young people are dealing with in their lives just does not fit neatly between school times. If that is happening we need to be prepared to stay connected with them for a lot longer than the usual two or three year senior. (INT 01, p. 20)

Consistency and flexibility and appreciating the need to take time with young people is supported by emphasising relationships first and engaging in reflective practice with other colleagues in order to develop understanding of the young peoples’ lives. Understanding the needs of young people involves “understanding the kids – not writing them off” (INT 11, p. 17); “understanding where they are at” (INT 02, p. 17); and starting where they are at” (INT 04, p. 4). The complex context of flexi schools influenced educators’ sense of identity and development, and caused changes in their ways of working with young people.

Summary of Ways of Working with Young People in Flexi Schools

The strands of common threads across the domain of practice of working with young people form the basis of a rich profile of the ways of working of educators in the flexi schools’ context and contributes to a deep appreciation of the complex nature of this work. This chapter presented insights from questionnaire and interview data analysis resulting in a profile of ways of working with young people in the flexi schools’ context. The findings were informed by two snapshots of educators: first, those who completed the staff questionnaire, and second, those who were interviewed. The two snapshots incorporated descriptive statistics that captured basic demographic details of educators who participated in the research (see Appendices I and J). Data
extracts from interviews related to ways of working with young people that were organised in common threads were presented in Appendices M, N, O and P.

Following this the strands of common threads evident in the analysis of the two data sets of interviews and the questionnaire were presented in such a way that captured staff perceptions of their work to enfranchise young people in the flexi schools’ context. The ways of working with young people that were presented in this chapter have formed the background for the exploration of two other aspects of practice in the research context.

Chapter Six will include findings and discussion related to ways of working: staff relationships and support, also in response to the first research question about how ways of working in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice. Chapter Seven will present findings and discussion related to ways of professional learning in response to the second research question about how ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice. The findings and discussion will be presented in a similar fashion to the way they were presented in this chapter. Chapter Six and Seven will draw on the same two sets of interview and questionnaire data, as well as two other data sets that were the result of the implementation of Stages Two and Three of the design experiment related to the RPGs for new staff.
Chapter 6
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION – WAYS OF WORKING: STAFF RELATIONSHIPS AND SUPPORT

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the second aspect of the domain of practice of ways of working – related to staff relationships and support. The findings presented capture staff perceptions of their practice related to the first research question about how ways of working influence educator identity and development. In Chapter Five, educator perceptions of ways of working supporting young people were presented. In this chapter, educator perceptions of ways of working: staff relationships and support, will be presented using the same two data collection methods applied to ways of working: supporting young people. These Stage One data collection methods included a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with 16 educators. The snapshot of the two groups of educators who participated in the questionnaire and interviews were presented through descriptive statistics and can be found in Appendices I and J.

Overview of Ways of Working: Staff Relationships and Support

Review of analytic methods applied to the data.

Interview data were analysed using a coding scheme developed by the researcher in collaboration with one of her supervisors (see Chapter Four: Methodology, and Appendix G for further details). In ways of working: staff relationships and support, three codes were applied to the interview data during analysis then coded data were collated into data sets. A second level of data analysis was applied to the coded data sets using thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In thematic network analysis, three levels of themes were identified, including: key ideas or the most “basic themes”; common threads drawing together a number of key ideas or “organising themes”; and, strands of common threads synthesising a number of common threads.
into more “global themes” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388). For examples of common threads see Appendix X: Common threads in three codes for ways of working: staff relationships and support. Figure 6.1 presents a diagram of the thematic network analysis of the two aspects of ways of working applied to 16 interviews with educators. The diagram shows the process for arriving at the strands of common threads in this domain of practice of ways of working with young people and with staff.

**Organising the data presentation using strands of common threads.**

Strands of common threads across the three codes for ways of working: staff relationships and support were synthesised from the common threads. These will be presented as aspects of the practice of educators in ways of working that develop supportive relationships between staff in the research context. These strands of common threads will then be used as a lens for viewing questionnaire data analysis.

**Towards a synthesis of practice.**

A comparison of the strands of common threads from the two aspects of ways of working will be offered as a synthesis of this domain of practice. These two aspects of ways of working are the focus of the first research question: How do ways of working in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice? Strands of common threads can be viewed as an initial synthesis of ways of working that demonstrated salient features of this domain of practice. However, on a broader scale, three overarching themes synthesised from the strands of common threads across both domains of practice will be used as a framework to reveal how practice in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development. These overarching themes include: *Relationships; Changing perspectives through reflection;* and *Holding complexity.*
**Figure 6.1.** Diagram of thematic network data analysis of ways of working applied to interview data.

### Codes applied to the interview data

- **SYP1**: Understanding the Needs of Young People
- **SYP2**: Recognising the Agency of Young People
- **SYP3**: Learning Choices Support
- **SYP4**: Positive Relationships Support

### Common threads of key ideas identified in coded data set

- **SYP1**: 8 Common Threads
- **SYP2**: 4 Common Threads
- **SYP3**: 7 Common Threads
- **SYP4**: 8 Common Threads

### Strands of common threads synthesised from common threads in ways of working

#### STRANDS OF COMMON THREADS in **SYP**
- Relationships
- Strengths-based practice
- Listening to young people
- Agency of young people
- Connections
- Holding complexity
- Re-engagement
- Structure & boundaries
- Taking time
- Changing perspectives

#### STRANDS OF COMMON THREADS in **SR&S**
- Multidisciplinary practice
- Collaboration
- Relationships
- Working with the four principles with staff
- Organisational structures that support
- Seeing the bigger picture
- Challenges to support

**KEY**

- **SYP**: Supporting young people
- **SR&S**: Staff relationships and support
Figure 6.2 gives an overview of the interconnections and parallels between the strands of common threads across this domain of practice of ways of working, and the overarching themes identified on the left side of the figure.

The three overarching themes of Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection, and Holding complexity were distinct in ways of working. These themes were seen to be consistently evident in the strands of common threads across both domains of practice, and will now be discussed in relation to ways of working: staff relationships and support. Data findings related to the second research question about how ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development will be presented in Chapter Seven.
Ways of Working: Staff Relationships and Support

In the flexi schools’ context, educators perceived that their experiences of ways of working: staff relationships and support contributed to the achievement of positive educational outcomes for young people. In ways of working: staff relationships and support, three codes were applied in the interview data analysis. These codes included: *multidisciplinary practice and collaboration; productive relationships among staff;* and, *staff support* (see Figure 6.1). Data for each code were collated and key ideas noted. Common threads of key ideas were then identified (for lists of common threads see Appendix X: Common threads in three codes for ways of working: staff relationships and support). Interview data extracts related to the common threads identified in each of these three codes can be seen in Appendices Y, Z and AA.

**Strands of common threads.**

The common threads identified by the researcher in the three codes applied in the data analysis of ways of working: staff relationships and support have been clustered into strands of common threads in order to see emergent patterns, similarities and differences in the way staff perceive their relationships with other staff and how they experience support in their work across the three codes. Table 6.1 shows seven strands of common threads across the three codes synthesised from the interview data analysis for ways of working: staff relationships and support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strands of common threads across 3 codes</th>
<th>Multidisciplinary practice</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Working with the four principles with staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisational structures that support</td>
<td>Seeing the bigger picture</td>
<td>Challenges to support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1

*Strands of Common Threads Across Three Codes in Ways of Working: Staff Relationships and Support*
Strands of common threads were identified either through repetition of common threads across two or more codes or, in some cases, because they represented an important idea that may have only appeared in one code, for example, multidisciplinary practice (for an example of how the strands of common threads were derived, see Appendix AB: Arriving at strands of common threads across three codes in ways of working: staff relationships and support).

**Strands of Common Threads in Questionnaire Data – Ways of Working: Staff Relationships and Support**

Findings from analysis of data collected in the questionnaire were consistent with many of the ideas captured in the strands of common threads developed through the analysis of the interviews with staff. Some new insights and further nuances of the strands were also evident in the questionnaire data set. Questionnaire data will now be presented in relation to the strands of common threads in ways of working: staff relationships and support (see Table 6.1).

Using Likert-type scale responses, questionnaire respondents were asked in five different items to rate their perceptions of the following: sources of professional support; working collaboratively with others; staff collaboration at local sites; and ways of working with others. This data were collated and descriptive statistics of staff perceptions were developed. One item of the questionnaire also asked respondents to write comments on their understanding of collaboration, and thematic content analysis was applied to this data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A second sweep of the data occurred using the lens of the strands of common threads. Due to the focus of the particular questionnaire items in the data set related to ways of working: staff relationships and support, the strands of collaboration, relationships, working with the four principles with staff, and organisational structures that support were most clearly represented. The strand of multidisciplinary practice was only evident to a small extent.
and more often connected to the strand of collaboration with only one specific reference to working across professional disciplines. The strand of seeing the bigger picture was not evident in the questionnaire data analysis. The strand of challenges to support was evident and also supported the findings in the analysis of interview data. How these strands were evident in the questionnaire data will now be outlined.

The strand of collaboration in questionnaire data.

The first strand to be presented will be collaboration. In the questionnaire, collaboration was defined in Item 12 as “staff working jointly with shared values, taking action toward common goals”. Staff were invited to respond to a range of statements about collaboration in their work on a 5 point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The collation of the Likert-type responses across a number of items indicated that there was strong agreement about the perception of collaboration being important and valued. Table 6.2 shows insights into collaboration with examples from Item 12 of the questionnaire.

Table 6.2
Insights into Collaboration with Examples from Questionnaire Item 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Insights into collaboration</th>
<th>Examples from Item 12 in Appendix V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration was important for planning</td>
<td>Items 12 b, 12g &amp; 12q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration was important for problem solving</td>
<td>Items 12d, 12k, &amp; 12p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More collaboration would be preferable</td>
<td>Items 12h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive expectation of peers to be supportive and respectful in answering any questions</td>
<td>Item 12m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration at a local level was strong with a high level of awareness of the expertise of peers</td>
<td>Item 12e, 12o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of awareness of the expertise of staff at a network level</td>
<td>Item 12a, 12i, 12l &amp; 12n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For further details on collaboration see Appendix AC: Items 12 and 13: Results of questionnaire data analysis related to strands of common threads, and Appendix AD:
Item 14: Ways of working with others – results of questionnaire data analysis related to collaboration.

As indicated in Table 6.2, there was a strong sense in the data that collaboration was important for planning and problem solving. Staff generally felt that more collaboration would be preferable. On the whole, staff held positive expectations that their peers would be supportive and respectful in answering their questions. Staff felt a much stronger sense of collaboration at a local level, whereas there were quite mixed responses towards collaboration at a wider level in the network of flexi schools. Staff generally did not have an awareness of the expertise of other staff at the network level of the flexi schools, but felt that at a local level they were aware of their peers’ expertise that could support collaboration in the workplace.

A number of staff felt limited by the lack of time for collaboration and felt that their capacity to collaborate was also limited by this. This was particularly evident in items in which staff were asked about time available for collaboration at their local site (for example, see Appendix AC, Items 13b and 13d). The percentage rate for these two items were noticeably different than for other questions and were more significantly mixed in response, whereas, for other items, there was greater consistency in results.

In items where staff were asked about the willingness and interest of their colleagues to collaborate, at least 90% of respondents indicated that this was the case. When asked about the personal relevance or meaningfulness of collaboration, the response rates were lower, with 77 - 80% supporting this aspect of collaboration (see Appendix AC for further details). This may have been partly due to differences in perceptions about what collaboration meant for different workers and how it was enacted in the workplace.

Of interest in the data were two distinct, yet differing, ideas about collaboration that were evident in the short answer responses where participants were invited to write
any further comments about collaboration. Figure 6.3 highlights two distinct ideas about collaboration.

![Collaboration Diagram]

Figure 6.3. Two distinct ideas about collaboration from questionnaire data.

In keeping with the first notion of collaboration, one respondents’ comment was that:

The staff at my [school site] are very professional and supportive in every aspect of the [site] focus. Most matters/concerns are openly discussed & everyone’s input is constructive and valued. Achievements are acknowledged and celebrated. I feel valued and my contributions across all aspects are of a high standard due to the staff and the common focus our staff share. (Questionnaire Response 2 – QR2)

This sense of collaboration as support and shared focus in problem solving was reiterated by another respondent who said that “Everyone is willing to collaborate and share information or assist at any point. It is great” (QR10). Finally, a third respondent with a similar perception of collaboration stated:

Overall I’m greatly impressed by the openness to collaborate, to share many facets of [school] activities. The staff at my [school] are highly skilled, intelligent, committed professionals. There are little difficulties with ego or power issues. This is one of the best staff experiences I have known. (QR19)
In contrast, the following written responses from the questionnaire captured the other understanding of collaboration as co-operative planning and implementation of curriculum. These comments included some level of awareness of the limitations of time: “Collaboration is a big part of the way we work. Our challenge is finding the time to do collaborative work from planning to delivery” (QR6). One worker commented that:

As an unsubstantiated generalisation, staff are happy to collaborate verbally but have difficulty transforming the verbs into actions. I suppose I see it as giving ‘lip-service’ where nothing actually eventuates. This is probably because of a lack of release/free time. (QR4)

Another educator expressed a sense of frustration in the written comments that stated:

When it [collaboration] happens it is very good (we are highly qualified!). There is not enough time & room for the actual interesting stuff, for example, us (rather than faraway scientists) exploring social-emotional, science, math, how-to-issues. Much of our meetings is “wasted” on some other organisation’s paper needs, not ours. Support team admin needs appear to take priority over ours and they don’t listen to our need. We had two terrific professional development meetings and three good curriculum meetings in three years (meeting 3 times per term). Those numbers say it clearly. (QR5)

The distinction between two different ideas about collaboration was evident in another respondent’s comment stating that:

Staff seem willing to share resources but I’m not sure of the level of collaborative planning in terms of classroom stuff. All staff have meaningful contribution into how school runs in other aspects. (QR14)

Some comments on collaboration also captured the strand of relationships, and included a sense of the importance of relationships in doing the work: “A collaborative staff is critical to our work at this [school site]. In an environment such as this one, isolation of staff members is extremely counter-productive” (QR17). Similarly, the notion of collaboration as supportive relationships was expressed in the following comments:
Collaboration is best achieved when work staff have a history of working together. This friendship is building so the collaboration is improving. The staff are very good and a pleasure to work with. (QR15)

The work is very challenging at a personal level. I believe that we survive individually because we share our experiences and problem solve collaboratively. Young people can contribute through their generosity of spirit. The sense of belonging here can be healing for staff and young people alike. (QR18)

**The strand of relationships in questionnaire data.**

In ways of working with staff, within the strand of relationships (see Appendix AB), support was one of the common threads identified. Whilst another strand captures the notion of organisational structures that support, other aspects of support enacted through personal relationships, for example, emotional and professional support experienced in interactions with colleagues, were included as part of the strand of relationships. Questionnaire Item 10 asked staff about their main sources of professional support. Staff were presented with a list of sources of support and asked to rate how frequently they accessed these. A five point frequency scale was used. For example: never; rarely (1-2 times per year); sometimes (1-2 times per term); regularly (fortnightly or monthly); and often (1 time per week or more). Table 6.3 shows the range of responses for the six most frequently accessed sources of support.

**Table 6.3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of support</th>
<th>Rating Often 1/week or more (%)</th>
<th>Rating Regularly Fortnightly or monthly (%)</th>
<th>Rating Sometimes 1-2/term (%)</th>
<th>Other responses (%)</th>
<th>TOTAL (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My colleagues</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The coordinator of my [site]</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My own expertise</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration support staff at my site</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The young people in my care</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other workers with similar roles to myself</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst some of these sources of support were linked to organisational structures that support, other sources of support were more personal in nature and included...
colleagues, their own expertise and the young people. It appeared that the importance of relationships influenced professional support and the frequency with which it was accessed. The most identified sources of support experienced by staff were at local sites and included fellow colleagues as the most frequently accessed source of support (73% of respondents indicated they accessed this support on a weekly basis), followed by the coordinator of the site (60% of respondents indicated they accessed this support on a weekly basis). Staff also had a strong sense of self-reliance with 57% of workers identifying their own expertise as a source of support that was accessed weekly. Support from site administration staff appeared to be appreciated and was accessed by over 50% of staff on a weekly basis. It is also of interest to note that 43% of staff viewed ‘the young people in my care’ as a source of support and drew on this on a weekly basis. The emphasis on supportive relationships this caused shifts in traditional power dynamics in adult and young person relationships (Nabavi & Lund, 2012), may have contributed to this sense of support from young people experienced by workers. One worker described this kind of support in the following comment:

But the young people are actually are the ones that are the biggest [support]. I find that, sometimes I'll go in and feel like I'll doubt my ability and then I walk into school and the young people help me recognise that. (INT 15, p. 4)

In Item 11, respondents were asked to rank their three most important sources of professional support in order of priority from most important to third most important. Figure 6.4 shows the most important sources of professional support listed by respondents. The first two rankings were similar to those prioritised in Item 10. However, another category of support listed as ‘other’ was an option and staff who chose this were asked to add an explanation of who or what things supported them. Responses such as peers, co-worker, teacher aide, family, personal life, friends, local area network, other schools and forums, were listed as sources of support in the ‘other’ category. This ‘other’ category was listed as the most important priority for 10% of
respondents and captured more of the relational aspects of professional support valued by respondents.

The strand of *relationships* was also evident in data from Item 14 of the questionnaire which asked participants to rate their perceptions on ways of working with others in response to given statements. The high response rate for the following three statements were indicative of safe and respectful relationships amongst colleagues:

- having personal experience and perspectives valued by colleagues;
- having ideas and perspectives listened to; and,
- feeling comfortable presenting viewpoints to other staff with confidence of being heard.

Appendix AD outlines responses to Item 14 of the questionnaire according to strands of common threads.

**The strand of working with the four principles with staff in questionnaire data.**

Within the domain of practice of ways of working: staff relationships and support, *working with the four principles with staff* was another strand of common threads (see Figure 6.1) identified in the data analysis of interviews that was also
evident in the questionnaire data analysis. In the interview data, staff perceived that
the four principles were clearly experienced in relationships between staff. Item 14 of the
questionnaire had five statements related to the four principles being enacted between
staff. See Table 6.4 for results.

Table 6.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements About Working with the Four Principles with Staff, with Likert-Type Scale Responses from Questionnaire Item 14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working with the four principles with staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) The Four Principles are usually enacted between staff at my [flexi school]. 97% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) My ideas and perspectives are listened to (Respect). 97% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) I am comfortable presenting my viewpoint to other staff and am confident I will be heard (Safe &amp; Legal). 90% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) I feel respected and valued by other workers at my FLC (Respect). 97% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l) My colleagues value and actively support my cultural perspective (Respect). 83% Agree/Strongly agree 17% Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) Staff meetings are an opportunity for me to share ideas and contribute suggestions freely (Safe &amp; Legal). 87% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l) The Four Principles are not regularly enacted between staff at my FLC. 93% Disagree/Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n) My cultural perspective is not always appreciated or taken into account by my colleagues (Respect). 80% Strongly Disagree/ Disagree; 16.66% Unsure; 3.33% Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage rates of response in support of positive staff perceptions of genuine
enactment of the four principles were very high (two response rates were 80 and 83%,
whilst three response rates were over 90% - 93%, 97%, and 97% respectively). These
responses indicated that staff perceived that the four principles were realised in action in
staff relationships.

The strand of organisational structures that support in questionnaire data.

In ways of working: staff relationships and support, the most important source of
support in the strand of organisational structures that support (see Figure 6.1) was the
local site coordinator. More frequently accessed sources of support included local
forms of support such as colleagues, site coordinator, admin support staff, their own
expertise, young people and other workers with similar roles. Beyond local level
support, organisational structures of support acknowledged by respondents included administration support through the network support team.

In Item 10, staff were asked about how frequently they accessed a range of support mechanisms, and the network support team assistance was acknowledged in some responses. Results indicated that 43% of respondents acknowledged they sometimes (once or twice per term) accessed this support and 20% of respondents acknowledged that they regularly (fortnightly or monthly) accessed this support.

Another organisational structure of support was highlighted in the comments on collaboration in Item 13. One respondent recognised the importance of regularly meeting at a site level for the purpose of collaboration and support, a notion that was also reiterated in interview data. This comment acknowledged that:

At our [local site] there is a staff meeting every morning between 9am and 9.30am. This helps everyone to keep up with what is going on. Teaching staff have regular meetings with each other and the coordinator. The coordinator delegates a lot and takes an interest in every aspect of the operation of the school and encourages everyone to be interested in aspects of the school other than their own. (QR22)

**The strand of challenges to support in questionnaire data.**

The final strand of common threads *challenges to support* in ways of working: staff relationships and support (see Figure 6.1) was evident in the questionnaire data in the comments respondents wrote about collaboration. These comments supported results in the interview data related to challenges for paraprofessionals and the dominance of the educational model. When discussing the challenges of finding time for collaboration, one respondent mentioned the different awards that impacted on work hours of those in teaching roles compared with those in community services roles and how this made collaboration challenging, especially for those in non-teaching roles such as paraprofessionals. The respondent commented that:

The complexities of our work require as much cooperative planning & working as we can fit. It seems the different awards under which people function can
limit the time available after 3pm and prior to 3pm we are limited by needing to be with young people. When we can find a 2-3 hour session and follow up we accomplish so much more than 2 or 3 single hour sessions. (QR9)

At issue in this instance may have been the interpretation of industrial awards that dictate levels of pay and are associated with qualifications and years of experience working in a role. As a generalisation, many teaching staff in conventional school contexts would not finish school at 3pm but would be involved in other meetings and professional responsibilities. This interpretation of the award may have become a local practice that impinged on staff capacity to collaborate, rather than being a feature of an award system. However, the issue of finding common meeting times for collaboration remained a concern. Another worker felt that the voice of teachers was sometimes “valued over others”, highlighting the sense that an educational model dominated the context. This was evident in the following statement:

I think there are a number of teachers who freely share their work, ambitions & failures. I think this voice is sometimes valued over others in the [school site] (youth workers, aides etc). (QR12)

**Summary of Questionnaire Data – Ways of working: Staff Relationships and Support**

When considering data from the staff questionnaire in relation to the strands of common threads identified in the data analysis of interviews in ways of working with staff, the strands of multidisciplinary practice, collaboration, relationships, working with the four principles with staff, organisational structures that support and challenges to support, were clearly evident in the questionnaire data, showing a consistency of findings across the two data sets of the questionnaire and the interviews. The strand of seeing the big picture was not evident in the questionnaire data. This was in part due to the nature of the questions that sought responses from staff participants on matters such
as sources of professional support; working collaboratively with others; staff collaboration at local sites; and ways of working with others.

Although the general sense from staff expressed in questionnaire data was that collaboration was valued and supported by most staff, it was not understood in a consistent manner: for some it was equated with a general sense of co-operation and support, and for others it was more about working in a shared way on a particular task such as planning units of work. In the questionnaire data, comments about collaboration were elicited, but the notion of multidisciplinary practice that implicitly includes collaboration was not mentioned explicitly except in one instance. This may indicate that the idea of multidisciplinary practice may not be fully understood by many workers at local sites. This lack of awareness of the different perspectives between those workers with a teaching background and those who have a community services background was also flagged in interviews.

The strand of relationships was once again evident in the questionnaire data with staff perceiving that the quality and genuineness of relationships enhanced support and collaboration. Participants expressed that they felt valued, listened to and freely able to contribute their own perspectives within staff groups and meetings. The quality of relationships among staff was directly linked to the strand of working with the four principles with staff. Respondents consistently indicated strong agreement with the notion that the four principles were enacted and valued amongst the staff.

For the strand of organisational structures that support, the data indicated that sources of professional support varied across participants. However, the data clearly indicated that staff experienced support more consistently at a local level, rather than across the network of flexi schools. Most commonly prioritised sources of professional support included immediate colleagues and the local site coordinator.
Finally, the strand of *challenges to support*, was evident in a few comments on collaboration and highlighted the common threads of challenges for paraprofessionals and the perceived dominance of the education model in the flexi schools’ context. Further details of interview extracts grouped in common threads in ways of working: staff relationships and support can be seen in Appendices Y, Z and AA.

**Strands of Common Threads Across this Domain of Practice**

Strands of common threads were identified in the data analysis for ways of working (see Figure 6.1). Strands of common threads were also identified in data analysis for ways of professional learning and these will be communicated in Chapter Seven. The strands of common threads provided a synthesis of each domain of practice. Across the strands of common threads in both domains of practice, three overarching themes including *Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection*, and *Holding complexity* are seen to be consistently evident. In the final section of this chapter, in which the results from interview and questionnaire data analysis related to ways of working with staff have been presented, the strands of common threads across this domain of practice will be discussed using the three overarching themes. The manner in which these overarching themes influence educator identity and development in practice will be considered.

**How Ways of Working Influence Educator Identity and Development**

The data presented in this chapter outlines educator perceptions of their ways of working with other staff. A range of different perspectives are evident in the data. Not all educators have one common view of their identity and development in relation to their ways of working. Identity is multifaceted for the individual and varies from one individual to another. There are many ways of being and becoming educator that are captured in the data. In the processes of exploring these various ways of working with other staff – of being and becoming educator in this context – staff make certain
shifts in how they see themselves as educators and how this is expressed in their practice. The stories of educators’ work with other staff, and their perceptions of what it means to be an educator in the context, give particular insights into the processes involved in navigating personal and professional identities – the journeys of being and becoming educator.

**The Influence of Relationships in Ways of Working: Staff Relationships and Support**

The first overarching theme of *Relationships* gives insights into how this aspect of practice in ways of working with staff in the flexi schools’ context, influences educator identity and development. When presenting findings for ways of working: staff relationships and support in this chapter, seven strands of common threads were identified (see Figure 6.1). Two of those strands of common threads that connect to the theme of *Relationships* will be considered in this section of the discussion. These two strands include *relationships*, and *working with the four principles with staff*. Table 6.5 shows the shifts in educator identity and development that relate to the notion of productive relationships with staff.

**The strand of relationships.**

The importance of relationships among staff is identified in the interview data analysis. Some staff identify certain qualities that they feel are important for developing productive relationships with colleagues and these are similar to those outlined in relationships with young people. They include dispositions that are mentioned in interviews, such as openness, honesty, patience, friendliness, being able to admit mistakes and being able to make amends.
Table 6.5

Ways of Working - Staff Relationships and Support: The Influence of Relationships on Educator Identity and Development in Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching theme and strands of common threads</th>
<th>Shifts in educator identity and development in practice influenced by relationships in ways of working with staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Movement from task orientation to greater people orientation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The strand of relationships

- Importance of relationships
  - Shift to valuing relational ways of being that supported productive relationships amongst staff e.g., relational dispositions such as being open, being honest, being respectful of difference, being patient
  - Shift to valuing time to get to know and understand colleagues e.g., in RPGs

- Support
  - Shift to valuing productive relationships within staff teams, creating a supportive culture or place in which people felt safe to ask for support and to offer support

The strand of working with the four principles with staff

- Using the four principles
  - Shift to appreciating that the four principles apply equally to all people in flexi schools i.e. between young people and their peers and with adults, and between adult workers
  - Shift for adults to be prepared to resolve conflict and negotiate differences with other adults using the four principles – did not negate the reality of conflict and differences between adults, but provided a model to support understanding and appreciation of diversity

- Flexible and honest ways of working
  - Shift towards flexibility and honesty within adult relationships in varying degrees
  - Shift to deliberate ways of working in partnership with other adults
  - Shift to being able to be honest about challenges, struggles and difficulties and letting go of the need to know all and be able to do all.

The primacy of relationships is viewed as important in working with colleagues, as well as with young people. The need to feel comfortable and safe in relationships with colleagues is emphasised, especially as staff recognise they would need the support of their colleagues to do their work effectively and that they may be in a position to offer support to others. In this regard, the importance placed on developing productive staff relationships is no different to the importance placed on relationships with young people. This emphasis requires the same shift from task orientation to more people orientation in the work context.

Productive relationships between colleagues offers much needed support. The sense of support being enacted in relationships between colleagues is clearly evident in interview and questionnaire data. Support is mentioned in different ways but includes practical support, emotional support and professional support in terms of accessing the
expertise of workers from other disciplines. The notion of support influences educator identity and development in practice in terms of the capacity of staff to contribute to the creation of a culture where offering support and asking for support are normalised. One participant perceived that “there was a mentality within the network about nurturing and making sure people [staff] are feeling comfortable and that they’re OK” (INT 09, p. 15-16).

In the staff questionnaire, the most important sources of professional support identified by participants are from peers and colleagues at local sites. These productive relationships among staff seem to influence educator identity and development in flexi schools. The shift from being an isolated, individual worker to being and becoming a worker who can be part of a supportive team, accepting the responsibility of being able to receive support and being willing to offer support to others, is an important influence on educator identity and development in practice in the context of flexi schools.

Another worker talked about the diversity amongst staff that is recognised as a source of support stating that:

I also think that it’s great that within that team we’ve got a range of people, there’s people who have been here for years and years and who are a bit older and more experienced and then there’s a group of I guess, younger workers as well and we all bring different things to the table as well so we can all support each other in different areas. (INT 06, p. 7)

The strand of working with the four principles with staff.

One of the significant features of using the four principles incorporating respect, participation, safe and legal, and honesty is that it applies equally to young people and adults in the flexi schools and, therefore, it also guides relationships between adults who are working in the flexi schools. This requires that staff are able to shift into working in a more collaborative way with other staff, and that they are able to enact respect with colleagues and “be open honest if things aren’t working” (INT 01, p.17). Staff perceive that it is important for young people to be able to see the role modelling of adults using
the four principles in relationships with other adults. It gives them practical examples of the principles in action and supports their own capacity to negotiate relationships and conflict in a constructive manner with their peers and adult workers.

The flexibility staff experience within their work is viewed as positive. For example, staff are given flexibility as workers with regard to personal or family issues. One worker’s experience of this flexibility when serious personal health circumstances impacted on hours of work was discussed. These issues were considered in decisions made regarding work hours and leave arrangements. The worker appreciated this and said:

Coming back in first part-time and then full-time, the [coordinator] has been excellent and has kept on my replacement for the afternoon program so that I don’t have to jump in 100% and that’s been really supportive. (INT 04, p. 10)

Another person felt encouraged to be flexible to try out new ideas in their work with young people. This is captured in a comment stating that:

I think working with people at the network has allowed a greater freedom of information sharing and a greater flexibility “OK let’s give this a go” rather than “Oh I don’t think this is gonna work”. (INT 08, p. 14)

Several staff interviewed feel able to take risks, “run with new ideas” (INT 11, p.15) and try something creative. The sense of being able to “have a go; who cares if it stuffs up; relationship is the most important thing” (INT 12, p. 10-12), appear to be a commonly held sentiment.

The aspect of honesty in ways of working with colleagues is evident when staff feel safe to admit they are experiencing difficulties in their work, or are struggling to connect with certain young people. The culture within the flexi schools, where adults are expected to work within the operation by principles, impacts on educator identity and development in practice. Flexibility and honesty are part of the relational culture that has developed between young people and adults and this seems to influence
relationships between staff in terms of their own sense of being and becoming able to offer this flexibility and honesty to other colleagues. One interviewee recognised that unless adults were prepared to be open and honest and have the difficult conversations, it is not realistic to expect young people to do this. She said that:

We can’t ask young people to have a conversation about a difficult thing . . . agree to have a conversation on something that’s not working, if we don’t. And the other thing is being very open when you’ve made a mistake or you’ve just completely forgotten something and the deadline has come up. There, just be out there and open and honest and apologise and make up as quickly as you can with workers and young people. (INT 01, p. 18)

Some staff feel enabled to admit mistakes and one participant commented that “the respect and the chance to do better and learn from your mistakes has been genuinely practiced” (INT 04, p. 22). For another worker, the awareness of supporting new staff to acknowledge their struggles is apparent when the following encounter with a new worker was described:

I basically say, ‘you know it is OK to be struggling with this’ and they go ‘Oh God, I thought I was the only one’. And I say, ‘look I’ve had all this experience and I’m struggling’, you know, so I think they relax a little bit more when they can hear that people [struggle]. (INT 05, p. 21)

In the questionnaire and interview data analysis, staff express a genuine sense that they are working in partnership with other adults, and that they are endeavouring to negotiate and come to some shared understanding and appreciation of difference when necessary. When issues of conflict arise between workers there is an expectation within the flexi school culture that staff would seek to work within the four principles. The challenge of differences between adults means that tensions and disagreements are evident at times. However, through using the four principles there is generally a sense that negotiated pathways through difference and conflict are possible. This is of course not always the case and outcomes vary.
The Influence of Changing Perspectives through Reflection in Ways of Working: Staff Relationships and Support

The second overarching theme of *Changing perspectives through reflection* gives insights into how this aspect of practice in ways of working with staff in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development. Seven strands of common threads were identified in data related to ways of working with staff (see Figure 6.1). Three of those strands of common threads that connect to the theme of *Changing perspectives through reflection* will now be discussed. These three strands include *multidisciplinary practice*, *collaboration*, and *seeing the bigger picture*. Table 6.6 shows the shifts in educator identity and development that relate to the theme of *Changing perspectives through reflection*.

**The strand of multidisciplinary practice.**

A high degree of self-awareness, excellent interpersonal skills and awareness of the complex needs of young people is especially necessary for educators working with young people in the flexi schools’ context (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006). Workers in this context may include teachers, education support workers, youth workers, and social workers, as well as other workers with particular skills to support young people to re-engage in education. Therefore, in flexi school sites, multidisciplinary practice between workers is necessary in order to support the development of positive educational pathways for young people (Edwards, 2004; Edwards et al., 2009). Within a multidisciplinary context, reflective practice becomes a strategy for enhancing staff awareness regarding the ideas and practices involved in working with young people as they negotiate educational futures and pathways.
Table 6.6

**Ways of working - Staff Relationships and Support: The Influence of Changing Perspectives through Reflection on Educator Identity and Development in Practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching theme and strands of common threads</th>
<th>Shifts in educator identity and development in practice influenced by changing perspectives through reflection in ways of working with staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changing perspectives through reflection</td>
<td>Movement from doing and knowing to being and understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The strand of multidisciplinary practice**

- Partnering with and learning from other workers
  - Shift to appreciating how another professional perspective can enhance skills for engaging young people e.g., youth workers influencing teachers
- Different frame of mind between teacher and community services workers
  - Shift to greater awareness of the impact of language (both verbal and nonverbal) in educator discourse that reflected attitudes towards young people that impacted on relationships between adults and young people
- Training/networking together across disciplines
  - Shifts in educator identity and development through training across disciplines to cultivate common vocabulary and shared understanding about the work with young people

**The strand of collaboration**

- Working with interests/ strengths of workers
  - Shift to working as part of a team rather than as an individual
  - Shift towards commitment to team dynamics including reflecting on practice through meetings and debriefs, for the benefit of accessing shared expertise across professional disciplines in work with young people
- Collaboration

**The strand of seeing the bigger picture**

- Safety for risk taking
  - Shift towards feeling safe in relationship with colleagues and young people to try new ideas, enact innovations, knowing that if strategies fail there will be opportunities to reflect with colleagues and learn from the experience
- Seeing the bigger picture
  - Shift towards young peoples’ needs rather than institutional and system needs – through reflection on practice, educators recognised the need to work holistically with young people to support engagement and optimal learning

Generally speaking, critical reflective practice is more widely part of the practice of workers from community welfare backgrounds but not so embedded in teaching practice in multidisciplinary alternative education contexts (Morgan et al., 2012). The tradition of reflective practice that emphasises social inclusion and social justice is adopted within this study (McGarr & Moody, 2010; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). It supports the development of “critical awareness and emotional insight alongside self-knowledge and deepening understanding of the other” (West, 2010, p. 66). The emphasis in reflective practice in the flexi schools’ context reported in this research is aligned with an approach more consistently adopted in community welfare sectors.
Reflective practice occurs in a range of settings including informal and formal staff debriefs, group supervision, one on one supervision and RPGs. Reflective practice provides opportunities for teachers to partner with and learn from other workers across professional boundaries, particularly those workers from the community welfare sector. Interview participants commented on the benefits they experience in their work when they are able to access the expertise and complementary skills of workers from other professional backgrounds. For some staff this is a regular occurrence. The perspectives of workers from community welfare backgrounds support teaching staff to consider other priorities in their work with young people that are more relationally focussed. An example of this occurred when a youth worker was discussing working with the four principles. The youth worker recalled the commitment that he made when he agreed to work with the four principles as part of his employment contract. He emphasised the importance that he placed on all staff working with the four principles saying:

> We all sign up for the principles. I think staff have to, well I believe that staff should adhere to the principles all the time . . . And if I think people and members of staff are not adhering then sort of . . . I will stir it and say, “hey, yea, this is your role as a teacher– you’ve got to work from the four principles as well”.

(INT 02, p. 12-13)

Several teachers acknowledged that youth workers provide a good sounding board for them as they sought advice, support and ideas from both trained and untrained youth workers. One teacher stated:

> Youth workers are gold, ’cause their skills . . . their skills in just working through what to say to a young person [that] is appropriate. And as a teacher, I've learnt a lot and my experience has given me a lot . . . we've got some teachers who were youth workers and [I often] go “ Is this appropriate?” or “ what should I do?” Cause if I think I'm not right or if I’m a bit worried about something I would definitely go and ask if not the boss, then someone I know who has that experience. (INT 14, p. 11)

These opportunities to reflect on the work with young people also support a shift in educator identity from task orientation to greater people orientation. The
priority of relationships is highlighted by a worker who said that “Staff really need to be aware that the curriculum is second and the relationships are first. [New teaching staff] come in with it the other way round” (INT 12, p.13). When reflecting on this lesson learnt during the first few years of working in the flexi schools’ context, this teacher noted that if staff live and model the importance of relationships with each other, this filters down to what happens with the young people. This is captured in the following comment:

So it’s the relationship building [among staff], which is quite ironic, because when I started here I would never have thought that that would be the case. I didn’t really know what to expect to be quite honest, but yea. And so those relationships, which I s’pose filters down to what happens with the kids . . . ‘cause that’s where the trust comes. (INT 12, p. 10)

Most staff from a teaching background recognise the learning opportunity that exists for them in a multidisciplinary work context. Sometimes the different frame of mind between workers means that the language used around aspects of work is different. A small, yet interesting example of this difference is when youth workers refer to ‘young people’ whilst teachers often refer to ‘students’ or ‘kids’. For some teachers this different language influences their identity and development by causing them to consider adopting more young person-centred language that expresses a greater sense of equality in the relationships between adults and young people. Teachers in conventional school contexts generally use the term ‘students’ and, in the research context, whilst ‘young people’ was the term most commonly adopted, some teachers use ‘students’ or ‘kids’ to refer to the young people. In reflecting on this, one teacher recognised that youth work discourse influences the wider educator discourse in the network context in a positive way. He described his reflections stating that:

Their [youth workers’] language was a different discourse. It really is significantly different, like the language used in education. And it will be interesting to see in the [school sites], what will be the language incorporated in the [school sites]. There’s already, not a conflict, but there’s already a tension
around the word young people and students. Um, and I think, I probably have been sold on the word young people. (INT 05, p. 38)

Youth worker discourse influences the wider educator discourse in the flexi schools creating a deeper appreciation of how language can reflect hierarchies in relationships and aspects of conventional schooling that are not emphasised in relationships with this group of young people in the flexi schools’ context. For example, a young social worker in a flexi school observed that some teachers more commonly adopt directive language and the use of imperatives when speaking with young people. This compares with the relational language expressed in appreciative inquiry, such as making requests and inviting responses from young people, that she had learnt about and observed in her professional practice.

Differences in body language and physical interaction with young people were also observed. Some teachers develop awareness around these aspects of practice through reflection and dialogue with workers from other backgrounds. Shifts in educator identity occur as some teachers develop a higher level of self-awareness regarding the impact of spoken language and body language in interactions with young people in flexi schools. The different frame of mind between teachers and community service workers was highlighted by this community services worker who observed that certain ways of speaking, such as using more directive language, including the use of imperatives, and certain body language adopted by some teachers, tends to reinforce more authoritarian/traditional roles. Whilst this is not generally widespread amongst all teachers in the context, it had come to the attention of the community services worker at her school site. For example, during a small group meeting, a teacher stood in front of a group in the classroom at the whiteboard whilst young people sat. Not being part of a circle of discussion at the same level, highlights a different awareness between the teacher and the community services worker regarding communication with young
people, particularly non-verbal communication and the dynamics of power. The community services worker recognises that differences are not necessarily problematic if awareness accompanies the choices made for specific purposes in certain situations. She commented that:

I do notice that there’s different ways that the people who have a background in education would occasionally approach things than people with a background in social work or community services. And I’m not necessarily saying one way is wrong or right but there’s definitely differences. (INT 06, p. 18)

This worker was wondering whether teachers learnt about these aspects of practice in their teacher education when she stated:

It’s just the whole manner, the body language and everything, um, is very different. And there were times when I was wondering you know I go, now where is it in a teaching degree do they even teach about body language? And you might be saying it in a nice way but what is your body language expressing? (INT 06, p. 19)

For staff who are able to engage in professional learning with other workers from different professional backgrounds, there is a sense that their identity as workers is enhanced and broadened. Developing an appreciation of complementary skills and processes from other professionals gives staff the capacity to draw on the expertise of other workers. Some interview participants recognise the benefit of working across professional boundaries and experience support through drawing on the expertise and complementary skills of workers from other professional backgrounds. Sharing of knowledge across professional disciplines occurs regularly for some and is described by an educator who said:

I think the biggest thing has been collaboration. Collaboration with other workers - really sharing on a very regular basis. You know, how’s it going? What’s going on? Yeah. Collaboration with the other workers here and really sharing of our knowledges, you know, across disciplines, across learning areas. (INT 01, p. 9)
This worker also acknowledges the benefit of shared training amongst staff. In some instances where this occurs, workers develop a common vocabulary in their practice that proves useful. The valuing of training and study, whether done individually or in teams, provides opportunities for workers to be supported and/or challenged in their current concepts around working with young people. This experience of shared professional learning is captured in the following comment:

Another thing I guess is that we’ve specifically done training together. So that we can relate our own discipline areas to the training that we’re doing and it forms a communication arc across to other colleagues who have different backgrounds. So really specifically, the teacher educators communicate with the social worker educators. We did training that gave us . . . a common vocabulary so that did really help. (INT 01, p. 11)

The workers’ relational agency or capacity to recognise and utilise the resources within the workplace, including people, (Edwards, 2005) to support their work to enfranchise young people, is increased. The shared training opportunities help staff reflect on their work, develop a common vocabulary around aspects of practice and change their perspectives on how they work with young people. This change in perspective increases their capacity to work effectively across professional disciplines.

The strand of collaboration.

Collaboration is at times associated with workers’ sense of being part of a team. For example, in interview data the idea of team support is expressed in the following comment:

Well I think having a really good strong working team is really supportive and that’s been really useful over the time. . . but when we’ve got good regular supervision, and we’re working as a team and we’ve got sort of, that sense of cohesion, and shared vision, then it’s fine. (INT 03, p. 7)

Some situations require workers to be prepared to blend their skills and strengths and to work with the interests and strengths of other workers within their team. In this regard,
there is at times a blurring of roles and blending of the skills and strengths of workers for the interests and needs of the young people. For those who are able to be flexible to make this work within a team, there is a sense in which their educator identity and development in practice is expanded.

Working with the interests and strengths of workers is particularly relevant in outreach situations where the staffing generally consists of a youth worker and a teacher with up to 15 young people. Boundaries between roles are not as marked in these settings with the flexibility for workers to draw on the strengths of each staff person, rather than strictly working according to roles such as teacher and youth worker. There is a sense of “blending of each others’ strengths. A sort of balancing” (INT 08, p. 15) and working where the strengths are which appears to also suit the needs and interests of workers, as well as young people. Workers recognise that if they are working in an area of interest and passion, this also impacts on young people. The focus in these situations is still clearly on the needs of the young people and how those needs can be most effectively met. In larger sites workers make reference to drawing on the strengths and interests of co-workers, even those from other sites, especially in relation to planning units of work for young people. When describing such a situation, one worker commented that:

Those that are keen to do it will do it [sharing ideas]. And by now, like I’ve got in my head say the name of five people who I would contact about ‘xyz’. And that I know are keen to talk about that. And they are typically the ones who also put things on the forum [online sharing space]. (INT 04, p. 16)

Some interview participants recognise the benefit of working across professional boundaries and experience support through drawing on the expertise and complementary skills of workers from other professional backgrounds. Sharing of knowledge across professional disciplines occurs regularly for some. Another educator talked of her experience of this and said:
So, there’s a lot of partnering and learning from our social workers and youth workers. Yea – cause you’re often helping some young person with a Centrelink [Government welfare]item of some kind, um it could be homelessness, threatening homelessness that sort of thing. (INT 01, p. 2)

Collaboration in multidisciplinary practice also requires that workers have a commitment to working as part of a team and are prepared to develop a sense of cohesion and shared vision in order for the team to reach its maximum potential for working with young people. This requires a shift in educator identity from being an individual worker to being a team player, conscious of the benefits and advantages of working across professional boundaries. The experience of collaboration is spoken about in terms of having “a strong working team, a sense of cohesion and shared vision” (INT 03, p. 7). It is felt that there needs to be a sense of unity and a “solid team for a place to flourish” (INT 13, p. 19). The development of a sense of team partly occurs as a result of “sharing on a regular basis” (INT 01, p. 9). For example, this sharing occurs formally in morning meetings, afternoon debriefs and at staff meetings, and also informally through giving time to incidental, work-related conversation and sharing. It also requires a commitment to share, reflect and debrief regularly with other team members in order to ensure cohesion and a common approach to the work with young people, which can initially be time consuming but beneficial in the long term.

**The strand of seeing the bigger picture.**

The capacity to see a broad view of the work with young people, supported by productive relationships among staff enables a sense of seeing the bigger picture about the purpose of work and the holistic nature of education. This impacts the way they view their work as educators on a day to day level. This is captured when staff recognise that education is broader than curriculum and that, in their work of enfranchising young people, relationships are always the first priority. At a wider
organisational level, *seeing the bigger picture* entails staff having awareness that they are part of a network of schools beyond their local site and that they can access support and resources through this wider network. This awareness is described by a worker when he said:

I think the (network) is, it’s a godsend. It’s a whole network of youth workers, teachers, [support staff], coordinators – everyone supports one another. You only need to say the word. I’m having problems in this area or, you know for everyone to give you as much support as you need. (INT 08, p. 8)

Beyond the organisation, *seeing the bigger picture* includes aspects of networking that enable staff to move beyond the boundaries of the organisation into a wider sphere of support and expertise within local communities and with other agencies. This aspect of practice is mentioned by a worker who said:

I guess I do a lot of sort of networking stuff, so I’ll, like in the past I’ve worked for things with [other agency]. . . I’m on a couple of reference groups – one’s about [the youthwork] sector . . . so what sort of support and development for youth workers. And I’ll go on another one about engaging, how to engage young people who are disengaging, from education. (INT 03, pp. 2-3)

In a political and ideological sense, *seeing the bigger picture* involves offering a challenge to the notion of what education entails and how it can be enacted. *Seeing the bigger picture* supports workers to develop their educator identity into more of an activist educator identity (Sachs, 2003) that recognises the need to highlight the lack of emphasis that is given to the human/social domain of being educator in the current reform agenda with its narrowing educational focus (Fielding & Moss, 2011; Wyn, 2008). Such an activist identity is captured by an educator who stated that:

Places like this need to exist to challenge other systems, so in that kind of hegemonic sense, they are extremely important as a political and pedagogic point of difference. (INT 16, p. 9)
The agency of educators to maintain their emphasis on working holistically and relationally with young people is eroded in contexts that privilege the institutional needs rather than students' needs (Lasky, 2005). The capacity to see the bigger picture through reflecting on practice and the needs of young people in flexi schools enables a shift in educator identity and development in practice away from a purely “technical rationalist” emphasis on teacher standards (O'Connor, 2008, p. 119) to being more relational and caring in the first instance as an educator of young people.

**The Influence of Holding Complexity in Ways of Working with Staff**

The overarching theme of Holding complexity (see Figure 6.1) gives insights into how this aspect of practice in ways of working with staff in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development. When presenting findings for ways of working with staff in this chapter, seven strands of common threads were identified. Two of those strands of common threads that connect to the theme of Holding complexity will be considered in this section of the discussion. These two strands include organisational structures that support, and challenges to support. Table 6.7 shows the shifts in educator identity and development that relate to the notion of Holding complexity.

**The strand of organisational structures that support.**

Many of the organisational structures that support staff in their work with young people and colleagues have embedded within them a range of strategies to support staff in their complex work with young people. Regular meetings on site are in place to support staff and all are expected to attend these meetings. For example, these meetings include morning meetings, informal and formal debrief meetings, general staff meetings, community and learning choices meetings, as well as site staff days for strategic review and planning. Apart from the range of formal and informal support mechanisms in place at local sites, such as support from the site coordinator, peer support, and the support staff experienced from young people choosing to re-engage,
other mechanisms for support are available at a wider network level in the flexi schools. These support strategies include accessing network support team staff and participating in reflection or supervision. These support mechanisms are not imposed on staff but are optional.

Table 6.7

*Ways of working - Staff Relationships and Support: The Influence of Holding Complexity on Educator Identity and Development in Practice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching theme and strands of common threads</th>
<th>Shifts in educator identity and development in practice influenced by holding complexity in ways of working with staff</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holding complexity</td>
<td>Movement from managed outcomes to more emergent outcomes</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strand of organisational structures that support</th>
<th>Shift towards being and becoming a more critically reflective practitioner - developing self-awareness and interrogating own practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Organisational structures that support</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Local site support</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Network team support</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Reflection/supervision: individual and group</td>
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<tr>
<th>Strand of challenges to support</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Challenges for paraprofessionals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Dominance of education model</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The challenge of *Holding complexity* means that at times some staff do not become aware of their need for support until a moment of crisis. For other staff, their use of support mechanisms tends to be more preventative in terms of managing the demands of the work and include clear notions of self-care and recognition of the need to engage in some level of reflection and supervision. In the strand of *organisational structures that support*, a range of structures that support staff in their work are identified by interview participants. These include regular meetings such as: morning meetings; staff meetings; community and learning choices meetings; staff days for strategic review and planning; debriefs; induction days; whole staff days; and supervision meetings. These organisational structures are used by staff at different
times and for different purposes. Preferences for some options over others are expressed depending on individuals’ circumstances and needs.

At some sites group supervision for the whole team is adopted as a way for staff to develop a priority around reflective practice that supports them to be able to change perspectives when necessary and be adaptive and responsive to the complexities in the work. For those from a teaching background where the notion of reflective practice and supervision are infrequently part of the culture in conventional school settings, a shift in educator identity and development in practice is required. This is not as dramatic for those workers from the community welfare sector who have an awareness of the importance of engaging in supervision and reflective practice as a safety mechanism for their own wellbeing. For teaching staff who have made this shift to being and becoming a more critical reflective practitioner in terms of developing self-awareness and interrogating their own practice (Fook, 2010), feedback is positive and these opportunities are valued.

Written evaluations of RPG sessions emphasise the relevance and meaningfulness of opportunities to take time to reflect on practice. One participant said she valued reflective drawing “because it helped me look at a situation from a number of different angles’ (RPG, May 2010, Q1K). One worker stated that reflective drawing “was interesting and helped me to remember to breathe and stop and recall how much debriefing with staff on a daily basis is amazing” (RPG May 2010, Q4F). The strategy of exploring and understanding feelings related to the work was appreciated by another participant who said that “I found that the drawing expressed feelings at the time and how I feel in regards to work” (RPG, May 2010, Q4A).

**The strand of challenges to support.**

At times, workers experience challenges in the context that stymie the level of support they experience. This sometimes occurs in relation to paraprofessionals and
youth workers or social workers, many of whom have high levels of cultural and social capital that enable them to engage with young people in ways that are not possible for other workers. The education system with its industrial award is not as flexible as perhaps required for this context and does not always acknowledge or recognise through remuneration, the cultural and social capital that some paraprofessionals bring to their work with young people. This is challenging at times in terms of equity and recognition of skills and expertise that are essential in re-engaging marginalised young people. Some staff feel that this work should also be valued in an economic sense given its significant contribution to the effectiveness of the work in the context. One worker described this challenge in the following terms:

    The teachers, you know they do the relationship stuff and the bit of youth work and stuff but their focus is pretty clear . . . Whereas the others, the youth workers, the social workers and those people, it’s not that clear . . . you know they’ll take classes, they’ll take kids out and do stuff, so they’ll link it to the curriculum or they’ll use that as a vehicle to move it along to the next thing to work out some issues with some young people. So it gets really blurry. And then I s’pose there’s pay issues, there’s holiday issues. There’s all those sorts of things that come into play that makes it very muddy. (INT 12, p. 16-17)

    Whilst the general feeling towards multidisciplinary practice and collaboration from the interview participants is positive, some participants highlight that the common boundaries between paraprofessionals, such as teacher aides and education support workers in mainstream contexts, are not always as clearly apparent in the network context. When describing the work of paraprofessionals another teacher commented that:

    There are times where maybe a lot has been expected of them. Or we take them for granted, perhaps . . . But I think they take on an awful lot, outside their role here. And I don’t know if I would actually like to be in their shoes, being a teacher aide. (INT 14, p. 12)

    As the network of flexi schools has grown over time, some staff are concerned that the education model easily dominates other perspectives of ways of working with
young people. This is particularly the case with youth worker and social worker practice. The contribution of these professions to the development of using the four principles in ways of working to enfranchise young people has been highly significant. This subtle shift towards the education model dominating flexi schools could be seen as a real threat to multidisciplinary practice. This way of working across professional boundaries has been a major contributing factor to the success of this model of education to enfranchise marginalised young people. Appreciating the value of multidisciplinary practice as a feature of best practice of alternative education (Aron, 2006; de Jong, 2005; de Jong & Griffiths, 2006; Tobin & Sprague, 1999) requires a shift towards recognising the tendency for traditional models of education to dominate. This shift also requires the enactment of strategies to ensure multidisciplinary perspectives are valued and maintained, thus, influencing educator identity and development in practice.

**Summary of Ways of Working in Flexi Schools**

The strands of common threads across the domain of practice of working with young people and with staff are deeply interconnected, complementary and complex. These strands form the basis of a rich profile of the ways of working of educators in the flexi schools’ context and contribute to a deep appreciation of the complex nature of this work. This chapter has presented insights from questionnaire and interview data analysis resulting in a profile of ways of working: staff relationships and support, in the flexi schools’ context. The findings were informed by two snapshots of educators: first, those who completed the staff questionnaire; and second, those who were interviewed. The two snapshots incorporated descriptive statistics that captured basic demographic details of educators who participated in the research (see Appendices I and J). Data extracts from interviews related to ways of working: staff relationships and support, which were organised in common threads, were presented in Appendices Y, Z and AA.
Following this, the strands of common threads evident in the analysis of the two data sets of interviews and the questionnaire were presented in such a way that captured staff perceptions of their work to enfranchise young people in the flexi schools’ context. The ways of working: staff relationships and support, that were presented in this chapter, have formed the background for the exploration of one other domain of practice in the research context.

Chapter Seven will present findings and discussion related to ways of professional learning in response to the second research question about how ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice. The findings and discussion will be presented in a similar fashion to the way they were presented in this chapter. Chapter Seven will draw on the same two sets of interview and questionnaire data, as well as two other data sets that were the result of the implementation of Stages Two and Three of the design experiment related to RPGs for new staff.
Chapter 7
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:
WAYS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Introduction

When planning for professional learning, notions such as: including the knowledge and strength of participants; acknowledging the workplace context; exploring values; being inclusive, social and collaborative in nature; fostering critical reflective learning; and, providing opportunities to challenge underlying assumptions of practice; are important considerations (Bolam et al., 2005; McArdle & Coutts, 2010). This chapter presents data related to staff perceptions of how professional learning occurred in the research context and what educators perceived was necessary for staff induction when people started working in the flexi schools. Educators’ perceptions of effective ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context will be presented in this chapter. These perceptions were captured in interview data analysis when educators considered their own experiences of coming to work in this context and what they felt new staff needed for induction purposes to support their work of re-engaging young people in education. Some aspects of professional learning were also drawn from analysis of questionnaire and RPG data. The findings and discussion presented in this chapter contribute to a developing understanding of practice relevant to the second research question about how ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development in practice.

Overview of Ways of Professional Learning in the Flexi Schools

Staff perceptions of effective professional learning in the flexi schools’ context frequently incorporated situated learning – learning by doing, by shadowing, and by being mentored – “the processes by which newcomers become part of a community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). In the flexi schools’ context, situated learning was particularly relevant for educators who were learning to work within the operation
by principle model, including respect, participation, safe and legal, and honesty. Using the four principles often required some degree of professional learning for workers as it was characterised by reciprocal and non-authoritarian relationships between adults and young people and required a skill set related to negotiation and dialogue with young people. The roles of learner and teacher were not static, but were interchangeable and included young people and adults as co-learners (Vadeboncoeur, 2011). This relational perspective on being educator was not the common experience in conventional education settings of those who were interviewed.

Four data collection methods were used to explore staff perceptions related to ways of professional learning. In Stage One of the design experiment, the staff questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with 16 educators produced relevant data to address the second research question about how ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development in practice. In Stage Two, the data collection method was the researcher journal entries that described the experiences of co-facilitating RPGs. In Stage Three of the design experiment, the data collection method was a series of written evaluations of RPG sessions from consenting participants.

The first part of this chapter will present a profile of staff perceptions of ways of professional learning drawn from interview data. The coding scheme applied to the data drew on Lave and Wenger’s notion of situated learning (1991), and from aspects of the literature review that highlighted that formal teacher preparation programs were often not adequate for the demands made of educators in this education sector (Myconos & Duizend, 2010; te Riele, 2012). Four codes were applied to the interview data for ways of professional learning. This coding scheme was developed by the researcher in consultation with one of her supervisors (see Chapter Four: Methodology, and Appendix G). Data for each code were collated into data sets. A second level of data
Analysis was applied to the coded data sets using thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Three levels of themes were identified from most basic key ideas, to common threads or organised groupings of key ideas, then finally to strands of common threads which were a more global synthesis of a number of common threads. The second level of themes identified as the common threads for each code in ways of professional learning can be seen in Appendix AE. Figure 7.1 presents a diagram representing the thematic network analysis of ways of professional learning applied to 16 interviews with educators. The diagram shows the process for arriving at the strands of common threads in this domain of practice of ways of professional learning.

Figure 7.1. Diagram of thematic network data analysis of ways of professional learning in interviews.
Organising the data presentation using strands of common threads.

Strands of common threads across the four codes for ways of professional learning were synthesised from the common threads (see Figure 7.1 and Appendix AE for strands of common threads). These strands of common threads will be presented and discussed as key aspects of practice related to ways of professional learning. In some instances, strands of common threads were evident in data analysis of other data sets including the questionnaire and the RPG data. The findings from this data analysis will also be presented and considered in relation to the strands of common threads synthesised from the interview data analysis (see Figure 4.2: Data analysis tools and how they were applied in each stage of the design experiment, in Methodology Chapter).

Finally, the strands of common threads identified in the second domain of practice of ways of professional learning will be compared with the strands of common threads from the first domain of practice of ways of working: supporting young people, presented in Chapter Five, and ways of working: staff relationships and support, presented in Chapter Six. This data analysis will be presented using the framework of the three overarching themes synthesised from the strands of common threads across all domains of practice. These themes included Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection, and Holding complexity. In this way a rich profile of practice has been created that includes interconnected strands of common threads from ways of working (both with young people and with staff) and ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context developed from staff perceptions of their practice. The manner in which these strands of common threads relate to the overarching themes identified in the data analysis will be demonstrated, showing how the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development in practice.
Exploring Ways of Professional Learning in Flexi Schools

When exploring ways of professional learning, staff perceptions were elicited through interview questions about what they felt new staff needed for induction purposes. Conversations about their own experiences of induction and other professional development frequently emerged in response to the question about staff induction. The four codes applied in the data analysis included: situated learning; transformation of professional identity; critical reflective practice; and staff induction and professional development (see Figure 7.1). Data for each code were collated and key ideas noted. Common threads of key ideas were then identified. Interview data extracts related to the common threads identified in each of these four codes can be seen in Appendices AF, AG, AH, and AI.

Strands of common threads.

The common threads identified by the researcher in the four codes applied in the interview data analysis related to the domain of practice of ways of professional learning have been clustered into strands of common threads in order to see emergent patterns, similarities and/or differences in the ways of professional learning that were considered effective in the flexi schools’ context. Table 7.1 shows six strands of common threads across the four codes applied to data for ways of professional learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strands of common threads across four codes</th>
<th>Critical reflection</th>
<th>Aspects of the organisation</th>
<th>General recommendations for professional development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Situated learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning in and through relationships</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness and inner work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strands of common threads were identified through repetition of common threads across two or more codes or, in some instances, because they represented an
important idea that may have appeared only in one code. The process of arriving at strands of common threads can be seen in Appendix AJ.

**Strands of Common Threads in RPG data: Ways of Professional Learning**

Findings from analysis of RPG data were consistent with some of the ideas captured in the strands of common threads identified through the analysis of Stage One interviews with educators. Following a brief summary of the purpose of RPGs within the broader project and an overview of the underpinning philosophy of RPGs, findings from analysis of RPG data will be presented in relation to the strands of common threads that were identified across four codes in ways of professional learning. Further details on data collection methods associated with RPGs, including details of participants and procedures used can be seen in Chapter Four: Methodology.

**Brief summary of the purpose and origins of RPGs.**

The purpose of RPGs was to enhance aspects of staff induction across the network of flexi schools. A feature of design experiment methodology is the improvement of an aspect of practice that emerges through iterative cycles of data collection and reflection with stakeholders. RPGs were initiated as a result of a member checking group consultation process in which a small group of staff were presented with educators’ perceptions of induction needs of new staff drawn from interview and questionnaire data (see Chapter Four: Methodology for further details). Four volunteers and the researcher, all of whom worked in flexi schools in a number of different roles, gathered for a day to consider data related to staff induction. As a result of identifying priorities for staff induction in the member checking process with the consultation group, a series of RPGs were conducted once per term for three terms across five sites involving new staff in their induction year (N=20). The first three prioritised themes
and their definitions are presented in Table 7.2. The themes were arranged in descending order from highest to lowest staff reported priority.

Table 7.2

Prioritised Induction Themes and their Definitions from Member Checking Process in Consultation Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Themes for induction with definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The young person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young peoples’ stories and needs are complex, impacted by social, economic, cultural and historical factors of multiple exclusion. Appreciating and understanding this complexity and how it impacts on young people is essential for all educators in the research context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Personal reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The capacity to be reflective and aware of one’s own values, beliefs, emotions and assumptions regarding the nature of education and how these interact with the young people and their families/carers in the alternative schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Critical reflection on professional practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The processes of reviewing one’s experience and practice, both individually and collectively with colleagues, considering relationships with others in the social, cultural and historical aspects of the work context.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next section of this chapter, the underpinning philosophy of RPGs will be explained, then findings and discussion will be presented.

**Underpinning philosophy informing RPGs.**

The values of democratic participation and inclusive education (Lumby & Morrison, 2009) and the values of cultivating peace (Toh, 2004) and nonviolence (Stuart, 2004) underpinned the processes used in RPG sessions. These values included equality, dignity, security and justice (Lumby & Morrison, 2009) building respect, reconciliation and solidarity, peaceful resolution of conflict, justice and compassion, cultivating inner peace, promoting human rights and responsibilities (Toh, 2004), and reflective work practice, caring relationships, commitment to social change and a focus on “power with” (Stuart, 2004, p. 28). These values were expressed through processes such as active listening, genuine curiosity about others’ perspectives, ensuring all participants were able to have a say and express a viewpoint, and a willingness to engage in critical reflection privileging values such as social justice, social inclusion, an appreciation of human rights and the rights of the child. New staff in their first year of working in the network of flexi schools were being inducted into the operation by
principles, incorporating the four principles of respect, participation, safe and legal, and honesty. Working with the principles underpinned RPG processes and a strengths-based approach (McCashen, 2005) to working in community contexts was adopted in group processes. This approach privileged the positive attributes and potential of participants rather than focusing on their perceived shortcomings. Descriptions of kinds of activities used for RPGs can be seen in Appendix AK.

**Feedback from written evaluations of RPG sessions.**

RPG participants were invited to complete a written evaluation at the end of the first two sessions, to rate the relevance of the activities for their work with young people. A five point Likert-type scale was used with 1 representing ‘of no relevance’ and 5 representing ‘highly relevant’. A summary of the results can be seen in Table 7.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 1 Questions</th>
<th>Mean Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity 1: Explanation of purpose of reflective practice group–sharing your understanding/ experiences</td>
<td>4.6 Highly relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 2: Sharing stories exercise (collective timeline)</td>
<td>4.3 Relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 3: Values Cards – what is important to you?</td>
<td>4.7 Highly relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 4: Metaphor exercise – how do you see yourself as a worker?</td>
<td>4.5 Highly relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 5: Explanation of Reflective conversation tool</td>
<td>3.9 Relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall relevance of today’s session for you</td>
<td>3.2 Indifferent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 2 Questions</th>
<th>Mean Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity 1: What’s on top for you today?</td>
<td>4.4 Highly relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 2: Reflective conversation</td>
<td>4.5 Highly relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 3: Reflective drawing</td>
<td>4.8 Highly relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 4: The Tree of Work</td>
<td>Activity not done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 5: Metaphor cards – a review</td>
<td>4.2 Highly relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall relevance of today’s session for you</td>
<td>3.8 Relevant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of participants rated the activities as relevant or highly relevant for their work with young people. In summary, the mean rating for the relevance of all activities associated with the first two RPG sessions was 4.4 indicating that all written evaluation respondents found the activities relevant or highly relevant. The overall
ratings for the entire sessions were lower (mean rating of 3.5 on the Likert-type scale for for two sessions). This may have been due to the fact that approximately one quarter of participants made no response to the final questions asking for an overall rating for the sessions (75% response rate). On the other hand, the response rate for other written evaluation questions over the first two sessions was 81%. Reasons for this lower response rate to the question seeking an overall relevance rating for each session are unclear.

As well as rating activities and sessions on a five point Likert-type scale, participants were asked to write short open responses to a number of questions. Thematic content analysis was applied to these short open responses and key themes related to the usefulness and relevance of the RPG activities for professional learning were identified. They included an appreciation of the opportunities for getting to know self/others/colleagues/team; consideration of challenging issues in practice; and developing skills and strategies for reflective practice. Aspects of professional learning in the RPG sessions, described in written evaluations and researcher journal entries, that aligned with some of the strands of common threads will now be presented.

Strands of common threads were synthesised from interview data analysis in the domain of practice of ways of professional learning. Of the six strands of common threads identified (see Table 7.1), three were consistent with RPG data including *learning in and through relationships, self-awareness and inner work,* and *critical reflection.*

**The strand of learning in and through relationships in RPG data.**

Interview data analysis identified that the strand of *learning in and through relationships* was an important aspect of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context. This strand was identified in all four of the coded data sets in the domain of practice of ways of professional learning (see Table 7.4). In Table 7.4 each code is
represented in one column and the common threads for that code can be seen in the column below. The strand of *learning in and through relationships* was synthesised from all of the common threads across the four codes.

**Table 7.4**

*The Strand of Learning in and through Relationships Synthesised from Common Threads Across Four Codes in Professional Learning (PL)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE STRAND OF LEARNING IN &amp; THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code: PL1 Situated learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning through being part of a team – sharing ideas, experience &amp; resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning through finding own passion &amp; networking with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code: PL2 Transformation of professional identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Movement towards relationships as a priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Movement away from control and fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code: PL3 Critical reflective practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflection as a dimension of team collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code: PL4 Staff induction and professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emphasising relationships, community and working with the Four Principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Practical learning guidelines for working with young people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The RPGs created a space in which participants had an opportunity to reflect on their practice in local site groups and to develop relationships with colleagues. In the written evaluations of the RPG sessions, feedback from staff indicated that activities incorporating the processes of storytelling, exploring identity metaphors and values in the RPG sessions were perceived in the majority of participants’ comments from the first session to be a valuable opportunity to get to know themselves and other colleagues. Storytelling activities required staff to relate their own experiences of what drew them into this work whilst the metaphor exercise made use of a series of metaphor cards expressing aspects of educator identity through drawings with accompanying explanations. These cards were developed from data in the questionnaire when staff were asked to choose or create a metaphor of themselves as educators in the flexi schools’ context. Descriptors of each metaphor were provided by respondents and the metaphors were illustrated by an artist. A set of cards incorporating the illustration and descriptor of each metaphor were produced then used in RPG sessions.
In identity work, the significance of metaphors has been highlighted by a range of scholars (Alsup, 2006; Bullough & Stokes, 1994; Grbich, 2007; Saban, 2006; Vadeboncoeur & Torres, 2003). Participants in RPGs had the opportunity to choose a metaphor card and discuss how it connected with an aspect of their own identity, the values that underpinned their work and/or aspects of practice that may have been relevant at the time. They could give their own explanation of the metaphor or use the one provided by other workers in the context. These cards were used in a number of sessions and evoked different responses, highlighting the multi-faceted nature of educator identity and the significant influence of context. Other activities using values cards encouraged dialogue and finding common ground on shared values related to the work with young people. Most comments from participants had a positive tone and were consistent with the generally high levels of satisfaction that were expressed in the Likert-type scale ratings of the relevance of RPG activities.

Data analysis of researcher journal entries (n=13) reflecting on the process of co-facilitating the sessions also indicated that learning in and through relationships was a feature of these groups. The RPGs provided an opportunity for staff to get to know themselves and each other, especially in terms of understanding their own and others’ motivation, the values that underpinned their work and through exploring metaphors of themselves as educators. The small group contexts provided spaces for developing relationships with other staff and opportunities to learn from colleagues as they discussed aspects of practice. Conversation with the co-facilitator following an RPG session captured in a researcher journal entry, called attention to the valuable “opportunities for professional learning and sharing of wisdom that can happen in a group setting” (Researcher journal, Site 5, Session 1).

Findings from analysis of researcher journal entries also indicated that in RPGs learning in and through relationships included reflection on relationships with young
people. As staff explored their educator identity through the metaphor and values activities, deeper insights into understanding the needs of this cohort of young people were developed in some staff. The importance of *learning in and through relationships* and prioritising relational pedagogy with young people was emphasised through certain metaphors that were chosen. For example, one worker chose the metaphor of a ‘horse whisperer’. A horse whisperer can be defined as “a horse trainer who adopts a sympathetic view of the motives, needs, and desires of the horse, based on modern equine psychology” (Anonymous, 2012). This choice of metaphor exemplified respect for the horse, not working with force but through “gentle coaxing rather than moving into the horse’s space”, inviting connection through establishing a trusting relationship (Researcher journal, Site 5, session 1). Such a metaphor captured the importance of listening to young people and, therefore, recognising their agency. Within this metaphor other aspects of ways of working with young people were reflected, such as trusting young people, giving them choice and enacting non-authoritarian relationships with young people.

**The strand of self-awareness and inner work in RPG data.**

In order to be an effective educator in flexi school contexts, a high degree of self-awareness, excellent interpersonal skills and awareness of the complex needs of young people is necessary (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006). For some participants RPGs enabled a deepening awareness of self in practice that supported meaning making and influenced the negotiation and co-construction of educator identity. The strand of *self-awareness and inner work* was identified in the data analysis of three of the four coded data sets in the domain of practice of ways of professional learning (see Table 7.5). In Table 7.5, each code is represented in one column and the common threads for that code can be seen in the column below. The strand of *self-awareness and inner work* was synthesised from all of the common threads across the three codes.
Table 7.5

The Strand of Self-Awareness and Inner Work Synthesised from Common Threads Across Three Codes in Professional Learning (PL)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE STRAND OF SELF-AWARENESS &amp; INNER WORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code: PL1 Situated learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code: PL2 Transformation of professional identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code: PL3 Critical reflective practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning through reflection and debriefing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Movement towards greater self-awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal reflection for self-awareness and inner work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the RPG activities were designed with the intention of enabling reflection that may lead to deeper awareness of the needs of young people and self-awareness of participants through reflection on identity, values and practice. One participant indicated that the sharing stories activity was most useful for her stating:

I loved the sharing stories exercise. It was a ‘lightbulb’ moment for me to think about an early life experience that motivates me career-wise. (And enlightening to hear my colleagues share theirs!). It made me have compassion for myself and the others, to comprehend their deep reasons for their choices. (RPG, May 2010, Q3C)

In relation to the values cards activity one participant commented on how this exercise was a “great reflective point for myself and within the school” (RPG, May 2010, Q8H). The activity incorporating values cards also helped a participant to remember what was important in their work and their “passion for the young people” (RPG, May 2010, Q10J) and another participant related that it was “really important for someone new to the organisation” (RPG, May 2010, Q6F). In addition, the metaphor exercise was mentioned as being relevant for another participant who commented that it enabled her “to reflect on her journey with [her school site] to date” (RPG, Feb 2010, Q1J).

In the written evaluation responses from session two, one third of the participants recognised the value of the reflective conversations that enabled
consideration of challenging issues of practice. One participant stated that what was of most value was:

The reflective conversation. One worker initiated the discussion, which then swelled into a full and fleshed out sharing about some challenges we are feeling being new. [The facilitators] guided the conversation very safely, with great insights drawn out that were helpful. (RPG May 2010, Q1B)

Another response mentioned that it was “good to voice issues of concern” (RPG, May 2010, Q1C) whilst a participant from the same session mentioned that “the opportunity to share in a safe space, to be heard, validated and treated as a professional” was useful for them (RPG, May 2010, Q1H). In another site, an issue of concern that was discussed related to work/life balance. When asked what aspect of the session was most useful, this participant commented on the “conversation around separating home and work life” (RPG, May 2010, Q6F).

Similar concepts of self-awareness and inner work were evident in the analysis of researcher journal entries noting that the storytelling, metaphor and values activities supported enhanced self-awareness of educators. As participants engaged in reflective practice, they became clearer about how their educator identity was influenced by the values that underpinned their practice. Within the group setting, the affirming dynamic between participants was evident in feedback offered and received from colleagues. Within supportive relationships, participants were enabled to change perspectives regarding certain situations, or develop appreciation of the character and possible motivation of other workers.

In some RPG sessions, group dynamics between participants seemed to enhance the self-awareness of those who reflected on challenging aspects of practice, enabling new insights and possible ways forward to emerge. Not all staff experienced this in RPG sessions. Some staff voiced frustration about aspects of practice and situations where they perceived they did not have a credible voice due to being a new member of
staff. In some groups, participants viewed RPGs as a place to ‘vent’ or unburden frustration without exploring solution-focussed perspectives. The facilitators appreciated that in some ways “there is some validity in this, [but] it is of concern if this is where it remains . . . trying to move the groups through to a position of individual ‘action’ that would be empowering was challenging” (Researcher journal, Site 2, Session 2). For some participants in RPGs, interrogating their own practice was difficult. There was a tendency to project blame on others when conflict occurred. They indicated that they wanted the situation fixed and expected that “a hard line needs to be taken with certain staff” (RPG, May 2010, Q5C).

For participants in other sites where there seemed to be an appreciation that “the reflective practice process is more about self-awareness rather than trying to fix or change others” (Researcher journal, Site 3, Session 2), there was an openness to work through challenges and find new perspectives that enabled workers to “turn around a challenging and personally confronting situation into a learning opportunity” (Researcher journal, Site 1, Session 2). Some workers had developed the capacity to negotiate these situations and appeared to have an open disposition, being able to recognise that they were both learners and experts in a new work setting. The capacity to reflect was captured in a researcher journal entry describing how RPG participants were supported to:

[A]cknowledge different ways of approaching situations and [they] were able to recognise that there were positive learnings as well as opportunities to push boundaries, redefine ways of operating in a more gentle, less confrontational manner. (Researcher journal, Site 1, Session 2)

The creative aspect of many activities, for example drawing, was mentioned by a number of participants. Sometimes the space to use another modality of learning and reflection, such as visual mediums like drawing, can give new insights into the self (Fischman, 2001; Hunt, 2006; Jordi, 2011). A number of participants commented on
the reflective drawing activity. “It was great to express [myself] through drawing, as it’s something I hardly ever take the time to do” (RPG participant, Session 2, May 2010). This sentiment was reiterated by another participant who said that the most useful or relevant activity was the “reflective drawing because it helped me look at a situation from a number of different angles” (RPG participant, Session 2, May 2010).

In a similar fashion a different participant stated that “the drawing activity brings aspects of current situations into new light” (RPG participant, Session 2, May 2010). These examples of activities conducted in RPGs that developed the capacity of workers to become more self-aware, influenced the identity and development of educators by enabling them to find new perspectives on challenging issues of practice.

**The strand of critical reflective practice in RPG data.**

Using reflective practice as a strategy to enhance staff induction in the flexi schools’ context has largely been shaped by ideas and practices of individual and group supervision in community welfare, social work and counselling and draws on notions of critical reflection (Fook et al., 2006; Gardner, 2009; Morgan et al., 2012). Critical reflective practice requires participants to understand how their own values and assumptions, reactions and responses can at times interfere with understanding and responding to the needs of the young people in a respectful manner that acknowledges young people’s capacity to exercise agency, make choices and take responsibility for their own learning. RPG sessions provided participants an opportunity to consider challenging issues in practice and supported educators in the development of “critical awareness and emotional insight alongside self-knowledge and deepening understanding of the other” (West, 2010, p. 66). The strand of critical reflective practice was identified in two of the four coded data sets in the domain of practice of ways of professional learning (see Table 7.6). In Table 7.6 each code is represented in one column and the common threads for that code can be seen in the column below. The
A strand of critical reflective practice was synthesised from the common threads across the two codes.

Table 7.6

The Strand of Critical Reflective Practice Synthesised from Common Threads Across Two Codes in Professional Learning (PL)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code: PL2 Transformation of professional identity</th>
<th>Code: PL3 Critical reflective practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Movement towards equality, openness and trust</td>
<td>Reflection on practice as a dimension of professional supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement towards advocacy and activism for and with young people</td>
<td>Critical reflection for interrogation of own practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The capacity of educators to interrogate their own practice and be aware of the assumptions that have shaped their understanding of the nature of education and the nature of learners is an important feature of critical reflective practice (Fook, 2010). Critical reflective practice supported new workers to develop the capacity to interpret organisational cultures and avoid “victim blaming” or “system blaming” in order to find a more integrated understanding of the place of the individual in social context (Fook, 2010, p. 39).

In daily practice, the young peoples’ perspectives and responses informed the educators and influenced how they worked with the young people. In the flexi schools’ context where many young people had experienced multiple complexities in their lives, some educators were challenged to re-evaluate how they worked with the young people. A greater level of understanding of the young people and an ability to be responsive to their needs, rather than reactive to their behaviour, was required. Staff who may have experienced success and effectiveness in their work with young people in other more conventional education contexts, had to interrogate their own practice and assumptions about the nature and purpose of education and the nature of learners, and find other ways to support and engage the young people given their particular needs.
Conversations shared with more experienced colleagues in RPGs, supported staff to become more self-aware and to challenge their practice. Through having to emphasise relational pedagogy above curriculum delivery, educators’ identities were influenced and changed by the young people. In a researcher journal entry written after an RPG session, this idea was expressed in the following statement:

The agency of the young people, their capacity to resist mainstream practices of teachers in an alternative school setting actually changes the social context. The learners impact on their social world through their resistance and through the willingness of staff to reflect and interrogate their assumptions/expectations of young people in their practice and their own sense of professional identity. (Researcher journal, Site 3, Session 3)

**Summary of RPG Data: Ways of Professional Learning**

RPGs provided new staff with an opportunity to engage in professional learning at their local site with colleagues. The strands of *learning in and through relationships*, *self-awareness and inner work*, and *critical reflective practice* (see Table 7.1) were evident in the RPG data analysis. The importance of relationships with colleagues for professional learning was reiterated, and complemented findings in questionnaire data where staff rated colleagues at their local sites as the most important source of professional support in their work with young people. Developing a commitment to ongoing inner work appeared to provide staff with strategies to learn from debriefing and reflection and to develop capacities to interrogate their own practice, an important feature of critical reflective practice in the flexi schools’ context.

**Strands of Common Threads Across Two Domains of Practice**

The strands of common threads across the two domains of practice will be considered in this next section of the chapter (see Figure 7.2). Whilst this linear representation highlighted particular strands, Figure 7.3 shows the web-like
interconnections that were more representative of the complexities and interconnection of aspects of practice of educators within the research context. The strands were interconnected across the domains of practice and intersected with each other in web-like ways. For this reason the identified strands could be considered central to the practice of educators in the research context. The main overarching themes identified across the strands that appeared in both domains of practice will be discussed as a way of synthesising staff perceptions of the most important aspects of practice that have been captured in the interview data analysis. These themes included: Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection, and Holding complexity.

How Ways of Professional Learning Influence Educator Identity and Development in Practice

The ways in which educators engaged in professional learning in the flexi schools’ context were explored through staff perceptions of how they learnt in the workplace and their ideas of what new staff needed when they started working with young people in the flexi schools’ context. Some staff perceptions of effective professional learning in the workplace included situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation or learning by doing (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Professional learning occurred through engaging in critical reflection and participating in a range of organisational structures and activities designed to support professional learning.

The next section of the chapter will consider the influence of ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context on educator identity and development in practice, using the three overarching themes synthesised from the strands of common threads identified in the data analysis of interviews.
Three overarching themes identified in strands of common threads across two domains of practice:

**Relationships**
- Relationships
- Listening to young people
- Strengths-based practice
- Agency of young people

**Changing perspectives through reflection**
- Re-engagement
- Connections
- Changing perspectives
- Structure & Boundaries
- Taking time
- Holding complexity

**Holding complexity**
- Relationship
- Working with the Four Principles with staff
- Multidisciplinary practice
- Collaboration
- Seeing the bigger picture
- Organisational structures that support
- Challenges to support

**Ways of working:**
- Supporting Young People
- Staff Relationships & Support
- Ways of Professional Learning

**STRANDS OF COMMON THREADS**

*Figure 7.2.* Three overarching themes identified in strands of common threads across two domains of practice.
Figure 7.3. Strands of common threads interconnected in a web of practice.
The three themes of *Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection*, and *Holding complexity*, will frame the discussion related to the influence of ways of professional learning in the flexi schools context on educator identity and development in practice.

**The Influence of Relationships in Ways of Professional Learning**

The overarching theme of *Relationships* influences educator identity and development in practice in the network of flexi schools. When presenting findings for ways of professional learning in this chapter, six strands of common threads were identified (see Table 7.1). Two of those strands of common threads connected to the theme of *Relationships* will be considered in this section of the discussion. The strands connected to the theme of *Relationships* include *situated learning*, and *learning in and through relationships*. Table 7.7 shows the influence of *Relationships* in ways of professional learning on educator identity and development in practice.

**The strand of situated learning.**

The opportunity to learn by watching and observing others in practice, or situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), is seen by those interviewed as an important element of staff induction for working in the network of flexi schools. Being able to shadow other more experienced workers and gradually take on more responsibility is seen as an important way to show people the work, rather than telling people about the work. When asked about staff induction, one participant talked about the importance of giving people an opportunity to learn by watching, being part of the group, and seeing other workers modelling the four principles in action with young people. When asked what he felt he would like to tell new workers coming in to the network of flexi schools his response captures an important aspect of learning through being part of a community of practice, what Lave and Wenger refer to as legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1998). This participant stated that:
I would like to show them, it’s not tell them. You don’t, I mean telling someone is a different tactic – seeing the work in action is a different story – it’s a whole complete picture on its own . . . (INT 02, p. 16)

Table 7.7

*The Influence of Relationships in Ways of Professional Learning on Educator Identity and Development in Practice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching theme and strands of common threads</th>
<th>Shifts in educator identity and development in practice influenced by relationships in <em>ways of professional learning</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Movement from task orientation to more people orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strand of <em>situated learning</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learning by watching/observing</td>
<td>• Shift towards gradual attainment of expertise, experience and confidence in doing the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learning by doing and through experience</td>
<td>• Shift towards being a learner and a worker at the same time, creating a sense of safety through the support of relationships with more experienced workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learning by being present in the work – being around the work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strand of <em>learning in and through relationships</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learning through being part of a team – sharing ideas, experience and resources</td>
<td>• Shift towards being an interconnected and independent worker rather than relying on being an independent worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Learning through finding own passion and networking with others</td>
<td>• Shift towards increased energy and enthusiasm in work influencing colleagues and young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Movement towards relationships as a priority</td>
<td>• Shift towards the realisation that the primacy of relationships was central to this work of enfranchising young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Movement away from control and fear (having freedom to risk, becoming a co-learner)</td>
<td>• Shift towards letting go the need to control outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Reflection as a dimension of team collaboration</td>
<td>• Shift towards positive risk taking, free from fear of failure through negotiation and collaboration with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Understanding young people</td>
<td>• Shift to commitment to giving necessary time to reflect in teams and learn from this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Emphasising relationships, community &amp; working with the four principles</td>
<td>• Shift towards developing a deep understanding of the needs of this cohort of young people was supported by establishing relationships with young people and being accompanied by and learning from young people and more experienced workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Practical learning guidelines for working with young people</td>
<td>• Shift to recognising the primacy of relationships and the nexus between relationships, community and the four principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Shift to developing relationships with young people in the first instance without having definite outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Shift to fostering relationships with other experienced workers to collaborate, debrief and plan innovative learning choices</td>
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</table>

The influence of situated learning on educator identity and development in practice occurs as staff develop an understanding that confidence and expertise develop gradually over time, as they are supported by the presence and modelling of more experienced others. One educator described this in the following terms:
I was exposed to a lot of people's ideas around how this could work and how to be in places like this . . . so I guess over time, you soak that stuff up. (INT 16, p. 4)

This way of learning emphasises relationships with more experienced workers and with young people. Relationships with other workers that develop over time seem to give new workers a sense of trust and safety that they will be supported as they learn. An example of this support was expressed by a teacher who said:

[My teaching partner] has been so monumental in that [support] thank goodness – I hope he would agree, we have a really solid relationship . . . and he’s had to take on so much responsibility . . . but I slowly feel that I’m becoming more capable and we’ve fallen into our roles nicely. (INT 09, pp. 10-11)

An important way of learning is by doing the work and gaining experience by being involved in the work with young people. This experience could be discussed in relationship with other more experienced workers. The opportunity to debrief and discuss the experience of doing the work appears to be a powerful way to learn. One worker talked about her experiences of providing constructive feedback to colleagues or young people as an aspect of her work and described it in the following terms:

Things that they’re doing that seem to be really benefiting others or perhaps they’re not aware, there are practical things that they’re not aware of – if I can reflect back to them and in a way, they take ownership of it and their influence . . . the way they go forward. (INT 01, p. 4)

The influence of situated learning is that it is supported by relationships within the work setting. If trust and honesty have developed in mentoring relationships, the quality and depth of learning seems more significant. One worker talked about this and stated that:

[I]t’s the relationship building [among staff] . . . and so those relationships, which I s’pose filters down to what happens with the kids . . . ‘cause that’s where the trust comes. (INT 12, p. 10)
Educators’ identities are influenced by their experiences of watching and observing more experienced practitioners as they adopt and model relational pedagogy. Educators have room to grow in confidence and expertise over time, rather than being expected to know and do the work immediately. When new workers are involved as observers, they are able to notice situations and ask questions for clarification. This immediacy of feedback seems to be another valuable way of learning how to be a practitioner in the context. It was described by a worker who said:

I feel completely comfortable to just stick up my hand and say, ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about, can you help out?’ And so to have a team of people, that you’re that comfortable with . . . and we all bring different things to the table as well so we can all support each other in different areas. (INT 06, p. 7)

**The strand of learning in and through relationships.**

The strand of *learning in and through relationships* is particularly evident when working in teams. Mentoring and support are generally more readily available in a team context although this is dependent on the established culture within each team. The influence on educator identity and development in practice of learning in and through relationships requires a shift towards interdependent working, rather than only relying on working independently. This is particularly important in the flexi school context where young people face multiple complexities. Staff are able to draw on a wider range of expertise and skills within a team when they position themselves as part of a team rather than as an isolated worker. In relation to this, one participant commented that:

I think having a really good strong working team is really supportive and that’s been really useful over the time . . . but when we’ve got good regular supervision, and we’re working as a team and we’ve got sort of, that sense of cohesion, and shared vision, then it’s fine. (INT 03, p. 7)
The multidisciplinary aspect of teamwork is also influential on educators as they realise the benefits of being able to learn from working with others from another professional discipline. This seems to increase the capacity of staff to support the needs of young people. In a written comment on collaboration in the questionnaire, a respondent stated that:

The high level of collaboration is what ensures that the transdisciplinary practice of the centre remains strong. Further, it brings different perspectives to the planning table. The collaborative work is also useful in promoting healthy professional relations. (Questionnaire, Item 13, n.9)

Finding one’s own passion in a learning community and networking with others who share this passion is seen to be an important aspect of situated learning. This learning occurs through networking within a school site or across the network of flexi schools. When adults and young people are able to find their own passion, learning occurs. The influence on educator identity is related to a shift towards increased energy and satisfaction in doing the work with young people. Working through passion has a flow on effect to other workers and young people in terms of generating positive energy and enthusiasm in the work. This passion was described by a worker who commented that:

I really enjoy the kind of adult, young adult to adult kind of model. You’re here ‘cause you want to be’ . . . not kind of trying to force people to do things . . . Just helping people find their passion. Once they’ve got a passion . . . you do support and stuff, but when they’ve got a passion then they’ve got a drive, they’ve got a reason to do stuff. (INT 03, p. 5)

This shift requires moving away from needing to control outcomes of learning and having the freedom to take risks and try new things without fear of failure. Productive relationships with other experienced workers support this shift. In interviews, several staff felt able to take risks, “run with new ideas” (INT 11, p. 15) and
try something creative. The sense of being able to “have a go; who cares if it stuffs up; [and] relationship is the most important thing” is a commonly held sentiment (INT 12, pp. 10-12).

Through being in and around experienced workers, the importance of the primacy of relationships becomes evident more easily than when a person navigates this work with young people alone. Traditional educational discourses are highly individualistic (Bingham, 2004) and generally do not prioritise relational pedagogy. Shifting to the realisation that the primacy of relationships is central to this work of enfranchising young people is reinforced through situated learning. New workers can see relational pedagogy enacted and are able to learn through engaging in safe and supportive relationships with young people and co-workers.

The shift from working in an authoritative paradigm requires workers to change their thinking around curriculum delivery and enter into partnerships of collaboration, negotiation and dialogue with other workers and young people. This was described by a worker who said:

I guess I don’t want to be seen as an authority person. I’m not above them, we’re all people in this community and that’s how I’m gonna approach it in a respectful way and not that I’m a senior person in this environment. I don’t want to be seen or approached in that way. (INT 06, p. 17)

The importance of incorporating reflection as a dimension of team collaboration creates space and time for learning in relationship with others. Reflective processes help workers to deal with diversity within the group of young people and within staff groups. It involves a commitment to support the capacity of colleagues to also engage in reflection on practice. There are always increased accountability demands that can be used as excuses for not having time to reflect in teams. However, the commitment to reflect on practice in teams is seen as vital. One worker identified the importance of
incorporating reflection in all aspects of team work. She shows a commitment to reflective practice in the way she works with young people and her colleagues and commented that what was important in this work is “Taking time to reflect – a lot of reflection, especially on our processes with young people (INT 01, p. 9).

In the research context of this study, reflection occurs in a number of different ways including general conversations with colleagues, more formal debriefing at staff meetings and through structured supervision, a common practice of workers within the community services sector that focusses on reflection on practice. Being supported by more experienced workers through supervision was appreciated by one worker when she first started in her role and was learning about the work. “I found [supervision] essential and really great for anyone and particularly for any new practitioner (INT 06, p. 8).

Through engaging in relationships with young people in contexts where other workers are close by and able to act as mentors, guides and role models, the shift towards developing a deep understanding of the needs of this cohort of young people is supported. Relationships with young people develop over time. Having a more experienced worker able to give feedback and insights into the needs of young people is seen as valuable when staff talk about learning in and through relationships. The first-hand encounters and relationships with young people are significant in moving towards greater understanding. These relationships are vital but are enhanced by the opportunity to learn from more experienced workers.

When considering learning to work with young people in flexi schools, one of the most consistently repeated notions in interview data is the emphasis on relationships within community that are guided by the use of the four principles. Supporting staff to make the shift to prioritising relationships, and understanding the significance of the community to support those relationships is important. Learning that the principles are
not a set of rules, but rather tools for negotiation requires time to engage, look, listen, learn and dialogue with more experienced workers who understand the primacy of relationships. The need to support staff as they come to this awareness of the priority of relationships, was mentioned by a participant who said that:

It is within the community that a number of relationships are actually made, so support, I suppose for when a staff member comes in, that the relationships are started within the actual school community by you know, they have a responsibility as well as the young people have an opportunity to make some sort of relationship that can be a helpful relationship. (INT 07, pp. 9-10)

Whilst there is no singular curriculum that all young people are mandated to engage with, individual learning plans are developed for each young person. There was a sense from one worker that being able to have practical learning guidelines for working with young people would be useful. The most consistently expressed guideline for working with young people is the need to develop authentic, safe and trusting relationships in the first instance. Fostering relationships with more experienced staff where ideas about learning choices could be discussed, experiences debriefed and possibilities for new innovations explored, is recommended by experienced practitioners as a valuable way of learning about working with young people. This requires a shift to working more collaboratively with others despite the additional time required. This was described by a questionnaire respondent who stated: “Collaboration is a big part of the way we work. Our challenge is finding the time to do collaborative work from planning to delivery” (Questionnaire, Item 13, no.6).

The Influence of Changing Perspectives through Reflection in Ways of Professional Learning

The overarching theme of Changing perspectives through reflection experienced in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development in practice.
When presenting findings for ways of professional learning earlier in this chapter, six strands of common threads were identified (see Table 7.1). Two of those strands of common threads connected to the idea of *Changing perspectives through reflection* will be considered in this section of the discussion. The strands include *self-awareness and inner work*, and *critical reflection*. Table 7.8 shows the influence of the theme of *Changing perspectives through reflection* in ways of professional learning, on educator identity and development in practice.

Table 7.8
The Influence of Changing Perspectives through Reflection in Ways of Professional Learning, on Educator Identity and Development in Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching theme and strands of common threads</th>
<th>Shifts in educator identity and development in practice influenced by changing perspectives through reflection in ways of professional learning</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changing perspectives through reflection</td>
<td>Movement from doing and knowing to being and understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The strand of <strong>self-awareness and inner work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning through reflection and debriefing</td>
<td>• Shift towards greater self-awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement towards greater self-awareness</td>
<td>• Shift towards a commitment to engage in reflective practice to develop greater self-awareness regarding one’s values, beliefs, emotions and assumptions regarding the nature of education that interact and possibly interfere with work with young people and their families/carers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal reflection for self-awareness and inner work</td>
<td>• Shift towards understanding one’s own boundaries and self-care needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection and discussion for awareness</td>
<td>• Shift towards interactive social reflection among peers as ways of meaning making in the flexi school context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The strand of <strong>critical reflective practice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement towards equality, openness and trust</td>
<td>• Shift to letting go of need to be authority figure and become a co-learner promoting a sense of equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Shift towards emotional, spiritual, physical and intellectual sense of safety for all created a sense of openness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Shift to trust by welcoming change, challenges and disturbances as opportunities for creativity and innovation can emerge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement towards advocacy and activism for and with young people</td>
<td>• Shift towards embracing more holistic education paradigms to be able to offer more relevant learning choices to young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection on practice as a dimension of professional supervision</td>
<td>• Shift for teacher educators to regularly engage in supervision (individual, external or within staff groups) to support reflection on practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical reflection for interrogation of own practice</td>
<td>• Shift to recognising one’s own privilege in order to interrogate one’s practice including the values, beliefs and assumptions about the nature of education and the young people and their families/carers who engage in flexi schools</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The strand of *self-awareness and inner work*.

Whilst situated learning is an important dimension of ways of professional learning in the network of flexi schools, it is enhanced when educators engage in reflection on what they are observing, and on the experience of shadowing another more experienced worker. Reflection allows a greater sense of self-awareness to develop. This is also enhanced through informal and formal opportunities to share and reflect with colleagues and supervisors or in staff teams. Educators seem to appreciate that doing their own inner work enhances their capacity to engage with young people in a relational way.

Self-awareness is a necessary capacity of workers recognised in the literature related to re-engaging marginalised young people (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006). When staff are committed to engage in reflective practice to develop self-awareness, this sometimes leads to a shift towards greater awareness of one’s values, beliefs, emotions and assumptions regarding the nature of being educator and how this understanding interacts, and at times interferes with working with young people and colleagues. This was particularly evident in RPG sessions when workers explored challenging situations. In a researcher journal entry it was noted that:

> [As this worker] had a strong sense of self and a developing level of self-awareness and reflection, [she] was able to acknowledge different ways of approaching situations . . . [Her] disposition is an interesting combination of recognising [her] “learner” self and [her] “expert” self, and how these interact with the new context. (Researcher journal, Site 2, Session 2)

Understanding one’s own boundaries, and how inner strength from life experience supports workers to continue engaging in challenging work with young people, is expressed as a dimension of reflection. *Self-awareness and inner work* are seen as important for self-care and being able to sustain working in the flexi schools’ context. For some workers, a sense of detachment enables them to continue their work in flexi
schools that is at times complex and challenging. This detachment was described by an educator who said:

I’ve built up a really good detachment from the young people, even though I love them dearly, and I want the best for them, but they’ve still got to make their choices and, they’ve got to live their lives, so. But I’ve learnt that in my own life, I’ve got my own ‘how to deal with it’. (INT 02, p. 8)

Other strategies that support the development of self-awareness and inner work leading to self-care and inner strength are evident in another response. “I think first you have to be strong within yourself. You have to know what you’re about” (INT 02, p. 7). This worker’s inner strength comes from various life experiences and learning along the way that prompt reflection and lead to greater self-awareness. It supports his work with young people. He reiterated aspects of his own journey of self-reflection and said, “I guess to get to that point I did a lot of searching myself. I did a lot of soul searching, yea absolutely” (INT 02, p. 10).

Reflection on aspects of practice, such as having an awareness of different working styles, being able to appreciate the diversity of young people and of staff, are enhanced through engaging in discussion with peers and supervisors. Being able to ask questions, meet with colleagues, share stories and experiences with young people contributes to the development of a supportive culture. It also enhances the ability to reflect on practice to increase awareness of the nature of the work and the personal reactions to the work that may block or interfere with one’s capacity to re-engage young people. This was summarised in a participant’s response during an interview when they stated that:

Time to reflect’, whether in meetings with young people or time with colleagues is paramount, because the diversity of our young people and ourselves needs due recognition. To move beyond acknowledgement of diversity to practice with diversity requires a high proportion of communication and reflection. (INT 01, p. 26)
Reflection for awareness helps address the issues of isolation in moments of struggle. Finding ways to honestly share with professional colleagues about challenging aspects of the work with young people is a key focus of reflection and discussion for awareness. For one worker this involves the capacity to ask and get help when needed, “I think yea, as I said before having an openness to people to be able to ask and to get help . . . every person works so differently and it works for different people in different ways” (INT 06, p. 8).

Reflection for awareness is viewed as an important aspect of professional learning that demonstrates a shift towards interactive social reflection among peers and freedom to ask questions as ways of meaning making in the flexi schools’ context. This way of reflecting requires certain conditions in the workplace and was described by a worker who commented that:

I guess enough space to talk about why, why do you do it like that? Why do you do this? What would you do in this situation? So I guess a lot of time for reflecting on how things are done and why things are done that way. Where that idea comes from? (INT 03, p. 10)

**The strand of critical reflective practice.**

Educators’ movement towards equality, openness and trust involves shifts in perspective and ways of seeing situations that are enabled through critical reflection. For example, shifting towards a greater sense of equality in relationships with young people and adults requires that workers challenge traditional patterns of relationships between adults and young people. This requires adults who are prepared to let go of the need to be an authority figure and become a co-learner with peers and young people. One teacher identified that her experience of working in the network was a “backflip from the authority model of being teacher” that had been experienced in a mainstream
education setting (INT 09, p. 6). Another worker expressed her perspective by stating that:

I feel I have as much to learn from the young people here as they have to learn from me. [There is] that real feeling that we’re all on a level playing field. (INT 06, pp. 20 - 21)

This sense of equality contributes to the emotional, spiritual, physical, social and intellectual safety experienced within the learning place that enables adults and young people to engage fully and freely. For example, one interviewee who described safety in the above terms, continued by emphasising the importance of:

Being safe to have your own mind, to say your own piece, safe to express yourself the way you want to express yourself, and fundamentally we're all looking for that, and that's why I think adults like these places as well. (INT 16, p. 8)

Critical reflection enables changes in perspective and attitudes to situations in the work environment. One worker talked about this when faced with a challenging situation in which a valued staff member was leaving. Being able to see possibilities in the workplace enables this worker to broaden her perspective. Rather than only seeing loss and disappointment in the situation, she finds opportunities through adopting strength-based perspectives. This ability requires a sense of openness and trust that workers can draw on the resources within their teams to face whatever situations arise. It also connects with the idea of welcoming the complexity of challenges and disturbances and seeing these situations as potential catalysts for creativity and innovation (Holman, 2010; Holman et al., 2007).

Frustration with the perceived injustice of systems motivates some workers to find different ways of being educator. One worker described his experience of mainstream in the following terms: “I guess it’s very regimented like, um, it’s black and
white . . . it’s very hard, like suffocating and restricting” (INT 11, p. 14). Opportunities to work in a different way are available in flexi schools where educators can find alternatives to dominant education paradigms and offer something more relevant to this cohort of young people. This was described by a worker who said:

I mean the trust we place in the young people, like I give mine a fair bit of rope and just say well you know, and you’ve got to the end of it, or you might find the end of it, hopefully not - you won’t, but some of them will find the end of that rope . . . and you place trust in them. (INT 11, p. 15)

This worker’s own experiences of learning through working with the young people was highlighted when he stated:

Well as an educator, as I said to you in the past, I’ve learnt more in the last two and a half years than I have - about people, and their wants and needs and all that than I have in a lifetime. (INT 11, p. 17)

These shifts in perspective require educators to be able to see themselves as advocates, for and with young people, supported by engagement in critical reflective practice.

For teacher educators in the flexi schools, the practice of engaging in regular supervision is not as common as it is in the practice of community service workers. The practice of supervision varies and it is understood and approached differently in a range of professions (Grauel, 2002). Within the helping professions, supervision involves meeting regularly with an experienced professional who often has counselling or social work experience. This person acts as a mentor, guide and sounding board for a practitioner to debrief and explore complex situations in the work context. This shift towards engaging in supervision to support reflection on practice requires a changed perspective. Some educators engage in professional supervision externally. Others experience one-on-one supervision with their site coordinator, and some experience it in regular group sessions at local sites. Engaging in regular supervision seems to support workers to be and become reflective practitioners.
One of the teachers talked about supervision as a mechanism of support that he uses. This practice is not commonly mentioned by teachers as a source of support but is more prevalent within community service workers as they take time to discuss their work and reflections with a professional supervisor. However, this teacher did make use of professional supervision and stated that:

One of the things is that I actually have a professional supervisor who I can use and he just sits and basically listens and lets me put it out. I think that that’s important. I think it’s important, that people are able to say ‘How are you going?’ and provide that listening ear. (INT 07, p. 7)

Interrogating one’s practice through critical reflection requires a shift in perspective. This is particularly relevant for workers whose own experience of privilege due to being a member of the dominant culture of being white or middle class or university educated, may not have enabled them to immediately understand the lived experience or perspectives of the young people with whom they are working. In particular, critical reflective practice supports staff to consciously engage in ‘deschooling’ (Illich, 1972), in order to resist traditional education practices that may have caused complacency amongst staff. One worker describes the challenge of remaining open to the needs of the young people and valuing a more humanistic approach to education, rather than imposing an industrial model of education (Robinson & Aronica, 2009). She admitted that:

You’ve gotta check in. So that’s really quite um difficult. Cause you can be really seduced you know, really seduced. Like on any one day I’ll look around and everything’s quiet and people in class and teaching happening and learning happening, presumably kids are on task and you go, “ohhh Good job!” (INT 10, p. 22)

This worker appreciates the critical importance of asking the hard questions such as “Who’s not here?”, “Why aren’t they here?” and “Who are we shutting out?” (INT 10,
p. 22) as she was reminded of those young people who, for complex reasons such as being a ward of the State Government for a decade of their lives, found the demands of traditional schooling overwhelming. Becoming aware of the need to interrogate one’s own privilege and practice – including the values, beliefs and assumptions one may have about the nature of education and the nature of the young people engaging in flexi schools – requires a shift in perspective influenced by the context of flexi schools. This shift in perspective was described by another worker who said:

I think these places actually offer and stand in front of a fair bit of what can be seen in the current economic climate, as being a revisionist kind of approach to education . . . they are extremely important as a political and pedagogic point of difference. (INT 16, p. 9)

**The Influence of Holding Complexity in Ways of Professional Learning**

The overarching theme of *Holding complexity* influences educator identity and development in practice in the flexi schools. One of the six strands of common threads that was identified for ways of professional learning (see Table 7.1) connected to the theme of *Holding complexity*. This strand is referred to as *aspects of the organisation*. Table 7.9 shows the influence of *Holding complexity* on educator identity and development in practice in ways of professional learning.

**The strand of aspects of the organisation.**

Staff support is required in order to be able to manage the demands of the work environment and the inherent complexity in the context. Experienced workers feel that an awareness of what is available to support staff at a local level and at the wider network level are important aspects of staff induction.
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<th>Overarching theme and strands of common threads</th>
<th>Shifts in educator identity and development in practice influenced by holding complexity in ways of professional learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holding complexity</td>
<td>Movement from managed outcomes to more emergent outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The strand of aspects of the organization

- Aspects of the organisation
  - local level
  - network level
- Shift towards active self-care through regularly engaging with a wide variety of support mechanisms both locally and across the network, rather than only accessing support for crisis management
- Shift towards understanding the philosophy and foundational stories of the organisation through shared reflection on the application of these in practice

As staff engage in debriefing and conversation with peers, they gradually become aware of the mechanisms for support and professional learning that are available to them locally and across the network of flexi schools. This awareness was described by an educator who said:

> Workers need to understand how they can use those [staff] meetings to bring things up. I think the other thing too, we offer lots of reflective space, you know with, one on one with the coordinator. If we need external supervision we can call on the [Network support worker] and they give workers other options for individual professional supervision. We do group supervision as well. That's been an ongoing practice ah, before I came here. That’s really helpful where we can discuss issues. (INT 01, p. 15)

The capacity to hold complexity requires that staff be proactive in using and engaging with a wide variety of support mechanisms in regular and preventative ways, promoting self-care, rather than using these support mechanisms as a last resort in crisis situations. This shift towards active self-care through regularly engaging with support mechanisms is recognised by experienced workers as important. For example, one worker stated that:

> And um, supervision’s really good, like I just actually went on Monday night, I hadn’t been for months or maybe a year and it was really good, it was like ‘oh yea, this is really good’, Makes you just stop and think about stuff. (INT 03, p. 9)
A similar sentiment was expressed by another worker who mentioned supervision as a support for her work commenting that:

Having regular supervision I found was, with um, just with[coordinator]-and also when I first started with[more experienced social worker] as well. I found it . . . essential and really great for anyone and particularly for any new practitioner. (INT 06, p. 8)

This shift towards more active self-care seems to influence educator identity and development in practice.

_Holding complexity_ appears to be supported when staff became familiar with the underlying philosophy and foundational story of the organisation and this work in flexi schools. Engaging in reflection with colleagues about how the philosophy and foundational stories impact on daily practice, supports staff in their experiences of vulnerability and frustration. Early stories from the founders of the first flexi school demonstrate how the nature of the work emerged in response to the needs of young people and direct requests from them. This scenario is described by one of the founders of the flexi schools in the following way:

I was simply someone who had “come in”, who was looking around but with no particular axe to grind or solution to offer. The standpoint of the “guest” is a very vulnerable and at times frustrating one, but I am now convinced that it is the most appropriate way to enter a situation of relationship because ultimately any response is a response with and for people, involving relationships, and that, must have its beginnings in some sort of invitation from them. (Terry, Jules, Cathy, Chris, & Staff, 1996, p. 2)

During the foundational stages of this work, the way ahead to create a flexi school was not clear or obvious but the initial response is primarily made out of relationship with young people. Considering this relational response, one educator commented that the work in general is also:
A bit like how the first centre sort of started with [one of the founders], you know, young people basically coming to him after a bit of time saying, "well, you're a teacher, we don’t, we can’t for all these reasons, we can't fit into high school, but you teach us!". And [founder’s name] went “Oh, OK” So you know, it's pretty fundamentally basic, but I kind of like how that happens, and that, it's interesting how that keeps happening. (INT 16, pp. 6-7)

Being aware of their own stories of coming to this work, and the stories of how colleagues came to this work, supports staff in Holding complexity through developing relationships and understanding. Two written comments from participants in RPGs captured this when it was stated:

I loved the sharing stories exercise. It was a ‘lightbulb’ moment for me to think about an early life experience that motivates me career-wise (and enlightening to hear my colleagues share theirs!). It made me have compassion for myself and the others, to comprehend their deep reasons for their choices. (RPG Session 1, February, 2010)

I enjoyed hearing others’ stories. I believe that it helped me to better understand those I work with. (RPG Session 1, February, 2010)

The three overarching themes identified in the data analysis of interviews, including Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection, and Holding complexity, were used as a framework to discuss the influence of the context on educator identity and development in practice. These themes provided insights into how practice in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development. This influence of context on educator identity and development became more apparent as the themes were specifically applied to the foci of the two research questions, namely, ways of working and ways of professional learning.
Relooking at Interview and Questionnaire Data through the Lens of Relationships

As the overarching theme of Relationships was so consistently represented in the strands of common threads across both domains of practice in the data, the researcher was compelled to relook at the interview and questionnaire data specifically using the lens of relationships to determine whether there were other insights to be gained regarding this prominent feature of practice. During the process of analysis, a range of dispositions of educators became apparent throughout the data. In this study dispositions were understood “as a capacity to engage, which is embedded in social practices which enable that engagement” (Dreier, 1999; Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004, p. 148). Edwards and D’Arcy link dispositions with the notion of relational agency or a capacity to connect with the perspectives, interests and capabilities of others to enable enhanced action in and on the immediate social context for a particular purpose including problem solving and meaning making (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004) or “supporting the trajectory of a young person” (Edwards, 2005, p. 171). Such a capacity to engage in this way may occur with colleagues or with young people in a learning space.

Dispositions are also described by Diez as something that matures in an incremental way “developing over time . . . influenced by context, experience and interaction” (2007, p. 390). Whilst Diez (2007) highlights that different perspectives on the interpretations of dispositions have been disputed in the literature, she argues that a more integrated approach does not view dispositions as part of a fixed entity or feature of character in a moral sense. An integrated approach to understanding dispositions of educators is relevant for this study as the approach perceives the development of dispositions being closely connected to the context of practice and recognises that the development of various dispositions is enhanced through reflection on practice.
In interview data where educators were describing themselves in their work – in their relationships with young people and with other staff – and in discussing what they valued and the kinds of professional learning and induction they felt new staff needed, certain educator dispositions became evident. Staff frequently talked about themselves as educators in ontological terms (about ways of being), and in axiological terms (about ways of valuing), more so than talking about themselves in epistemological terms (about ways of knowing). For example, ways of being and ways of valuing were described by staff in the following statements:

- “be very open and honest if things aren’t working, you know, we need to say” (INT 01, p. 17);
- “you have to be strong within yourself. You have to know what you’re about” (INT 02, p. 7);
- “being true to yourself” (INT 05, p. 22);
- “being a little bit vulnerable” (INT 07, p. 10);
- “I think that we’ve got to be accountable ah, we’ve got to hold ourselves accountable to those four principles” (INT 07, p. 11);
- “I’ve got to be someone that’s approachable, open, understands, sits down, talks the same language as them” (INT 12, p. 12);
- “being firm and caring. Just be respectful” (INT 14, p. 8); and
- being able to “respond to the needs of those that are marginalised” (INT 16, p. 4).

Such dispositions developed within educators working in this context have been associated with the last two dimensions of the Four Pillars of Education for the 21st Century “learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together” (Delors, 1999). These ways of being and becoming in relationships, captured in the data extracts above, were underpinned by the values held by educators within the context, in particular the values informing the operation by principles, incorporating respect, participation, safe and legal, and honesty. These values include caring,
community, and advocacy – for and with those who are disenfranchised. In reflecting on the nature of the work over time, one educator commented that:

Our experience over the past 20 years would indicate that the sense of dislocation for a – it’s a small cohort of people really if you look at national statistics – but a cohort that is extremely complicated and complex and it’s across the nation and um, the legacy of the Christian Brothers order and the vision of Edmund Rice Education Australia, is to respond to the needs of those that are marginalised or in their words, those who are in some sort of physical or literal poverty, and to respond to the signs of the times. So from an organisational perspective, I read that as being, this is the work that the organisation wants us to do. (INT 16, pp.3-4)

Of significance in exploring relational dispositions is Gergen’s (2009) notion of relational being or ways of being and becoming in relationships. Relational being defines an individual in terms of relationships with others: the individual is not perceived as a separate, bounded being (Gergen, 2009, p. 7). Gergen reiterates this stating that, “For the relational being there is no inside versus outside; there is only embodied action with others” (2009, p. 160). An individual in relationship is the basis of all ways of being. An individual’s mental functioning is not separate from others but rather “mental discourse originates in relationships”, has a function that is “relational in nature”, is an expression of “culturally prescribed performance”, which is “embedded with traditions of co-action” (Gergen, 2009, p. 97).

**Data analysis for identifying dispositions.**

The researcher conducted another sweep of the interview data and identified 80 quotes from the staff who were interviewed. These quotes contained some expression of particular dispositions. Selected quotes varied in length between approximately 20 and 240 words. The researcher looked for statements in the quotes where participants used the verb ‘to be’, indicating reference to particular ways of being that links to Wenger’s notion that “the experience of identity in practice is a way of being [researcher emphasis] in the world” (1998, p. 151). The verb to be, or its various
grammatical forms including ‘am’, ‘are’, ‘is’, ‘was’, ‘were’, as statements of being and becoming were explored in interviews. Statements of educator actions in practice were also included. For example, “we have listened to young people” was interpreted as being able to listen; and “I think it’s respecting the dignity of each person” was interpreted as “being respectful”.

An independent researcher acting as a critical friend (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) was asked to conduct the same data analysis on the quotes extracted from interview data. Dispositions were identified in the text by both researchers by underlining the selected text then creating an accompanying statement to describe the disposition contained within the text. The main researcher met with the independent researcher to compare their analysis and come to a common agreement regarding the dispositions that were identified. Coming to a common agreement on what the quote meant, in terms of a stated disposition, was a matter of consensus around syntactic expression, rather than an argument of meaning. Complementary material in the Appendices may enhance the reader’s understanding of how dispositions were derived from the data. (For detailed references to interview quotes from which dispositions, ways of being and becoming, were derived by two researchers, see Appendix AL).

Following the data analysis in which dispositions were identified, they were sorted according to themes and then these themes were categorised according to the three overarching themes that were a synthesis of the Strands of Common Threads across all domains of practice. These three overarching themes included: Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection, and Holding complexity. The two levels of categorisation were once again shared with the independent researcher for verification. Agreement on the categorisation was reached according to best fit for each statement (see Appendix AM: Dispositions identified in interviews, arranged in themes and categorised according to three overarching themes, and Appendix AN: Narrative...
explanation of dispositions with interview data extracts and grouped according to three overarching themes).

**Identifying dispositions in questionnaire data.**

The findings reported in the next section of this chapter identify dispositions or ways of being and becoming in relationships as described by educators in the context. Initially, dispositions were identified in Item 8 of the questionnaire data and subsequently through extracted quotes from interviews conducted in Stage One of the Design Experiment. In Item 8 of the questionnaire, staff were asked to list the five most important aspects of their work. A number of these could be identified as dispositions. For example, staff wrote statements such as: ‘being available and listening to young people’; ‘being present to young people’; ‘being present/listening to young people’; ‘being available for young people’; ‘being present to each moment’; ‘being consistent for young people’; ‘being accessible to young people’; ‘being tolerant of external influences for example, family’; ‘being open’; and, ‘being professional with how I teach’. Such statements of priorities of most important aspects of work identified certain dispositions or capacities to engage with young people and staff in particular kinds of ways that were primarily relational, supporting the significance of relationship as a central feature of practice for educators in the context.

**Identifying dispositions in relation to overarching themes.**

The three main overarching themes synthesised from the strands of common threads that appeared across all domains of practice, namely *Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection,* and *Holding complexity,* were also evident in the dispositions identified in interview data. This data will be presented in these groupings. Table 7.10 shows the dispositions in relation to the overarching themes across the strands of common threads in interview data. Appendix AN presents a narrative
explanation of dispositions with interview data extracts incorporated. The narrative explanations are also grouped according to the three overarching themes across the strands of common threads.

**Personal, interpersonal, and organisational capacity building through understanding and developing dispositions.**

In the analysis of dispositions identified in interviews, three different kinds of capacities for relational being were apparent. First, was the personal capacity for relational being, initially connected to a sense of relationship with self, but never entirely separate from others. Second, the interpersonal capacity for relational being, connected to a sense of relationship with others in “embodied action” (Gergen, 2009, p. 160). Third, the organisational capacity for relational being, connected to a sense of relationship with others within an organisational framework.

Table 7.10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Underpinning ideas across Strands of Common Threads</th>
<th>Themed Dispositions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Dispositions of embodying the principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dispositions of respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dispositions of safety</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dispositions of honesty</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dispositions of being relational</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dispositions of openness</td>
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<td>Dispositions of commitment</td>
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<td>Dispositions of generosity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dispositions of caring and compassion</td>
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<td>Dispositions of hospitality</td>
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<td>Dispositions of role modelling</td>
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<td>Dispositions of support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dispositions of authenticity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dispositions of understanding and patience</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dispositions of consistency</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dispositions of spirituality and justice</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changing perspectives through reflection</th>
<th>Dispositions of awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Holding complexity</td>
<td>Dispositions of holding complexity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7.11 shows the breakdown of these three capacities as they appeared in the disposition statements from the interviews. The percentage rating of disposition statements were derived from frequency counts of disposition statements in the process of data analysis with a peer researcher. Once the dispositions were identified they were reviewed and categorised according to whether they were connected to personal, interpersonal or organisational dispositions.

Table 7.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacities</th>
<th>Percentage of disposition statements in each area of capacity for relational being (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These three kinds of capacities for relational being indicated, yet again, the importance of relationships within the two domains of practice including ways of working: supporting young people; ways of working: staff relationships and support; and ways of professional learning. Only one quarter of all disposition statements were personal in nature. For example, ‘being able to embody the principles’ (Quote 31, Appendix AL); ‘being consistent in applying the principles to own behaviour and attitudes’ (Quote 13, Appendix AL); ‘being honest with self about not knowing everything’ (Quote 26, Appendix AL), ‘being able to learn from mistakes’ (Quote 78, Appendix AL); ‘being committed’ (Quote 80, Appendix AL); and ‘being able to recognise personal responsibility’ (Quote 27, Appendix AL). These personal dispositions were important in enabling and supporting the expression of positive relationships between staff and young people and between colleagues. In one sense, they were a starting point and possibly supported the enactment of the next area of capacity, that of interpersonal dispositions. For example, the personal disposition of
‘being authentic’ (Quote 6, Appendix AL) supported the interpersonal disposition of ‘being authentic in relationships’ (Quote 75, Appendix AL) or ‘being authentic and consistent in living the principles’ (Quote 10, Appendix AL).

The majority of all disposition statements were interpersonal in nature. Relationships were supported by interpersonal dispositions such as ‘being authentic in relationships’ (Quote 75, Appendix AL), ‘being respectful and gentle’ (Quote 39, Appendix AL), and ‘being safe to express yourself’ (Quote 79, Appendix AL). Interpersonal disposition statements also included ‘being able to apply the four principles to self and others’ (Quote 1, Appendix AL) and ‘being willing to build genuine relationships’ (Quote 25, Appendix AL). The number of dispositions connected to developing positive and healthy interpersonal relationships far exceeded the other dispositions categorised in areas related to personal and organisational capacity.

Less than one tenth of the disposition statements could be identified within the organisational category. Organisational capacity was expressed through dispositions such as ‘being able to embody the principles as a unified staff team’ (Quote 54, Appendix AL) or ‘being accountable to the school community’ (Quote 31, Appendix AL). These dispositions were often linked to notions of the common good and what was best for the community in terms of being loving, inclusive, just, able to express solidarity and take political action for those who had been marginalised.

This data analysis capturing three areas of capacity including personal, interpersonal and organisational capacity, demonstrated once more the primacy of relationships expressed through dispositions that fit within the interpersonal domain within the context. One could deduce that according to the perspectives of experienced educators captured in interview data, being and becoming a capable and effective practitioner in this context required a high degree of interpersonal relational capacity.
This was convincingly supported by looking at three areas of capacity for relational being expressed through the dispositions and the predominance of the interpersonal capacities. Personal dispositions mainly included the capacity to ‘embody the principles’ (Quote 9, Appendix AL), ‘be authentic’ (Quote 6, Appendix AL), ‘self-aware and able to find inner resources’ (Quote 7, Appendix AL), and ‘self-reflective’ (Quote 68, Appendix AL). These dispositions captured the individual’s inner resources that animated and enabled the external expression of positive interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal capacities expressed through such dispositions as ‘being able to enact and embody the principles’ (Quote 27, Appendix AL), and those dispositions that were about being relational through being open, committed, generous, caring and compassionate, were common dispositions talked about by interview participants. On the other hand, organisational dispositions expressed at a more collective level, included the capacity for school communities to recognise political, social and economic forces that shaped the flexi schools context within the broader field of education. For example, organisational dispositions such as ‘being able to recognise democracy and equity through the principles’ (Quote 77, Appendix AL) and ‘being able to recognise social justice and responsibility of solidarity and political action’ (Quote 78, Appendix AL), reflected the underpinning values of practice that were privileged within the network to promote the common good. Other organisational dispositions connected to ‘being critically reflective’ (Quote 43 & 80, Appendix AL) and being aware of the ‘dynamic nature of the work in the flexi schools context’ (Quote 12, Appendix AL). In this way, opportunities to challenge, develop and change practice and the nature of education as it was expressed within the flexi schools context were evident at the organisational level. This data analysis outlining three areas of relational capacity
including personal, interpersonal and organisational capacities, clearly supported the
notion of the primacy of relationships within the flexi schools context.

**Summary of Ways of Professional Learning in Flexi Schools**

This chapter presented data related to the domain of practice of ways of professional learning. Common threads were identified within the various codes applied to the data for this domain of practice in order to explore and capture the key ideas about the particular ways of professional learning that occurred within the flexi schools’ context. Extracts from interview and questionnaire data demonstrated how ways of professional learning were understood and experienced by staff within the network. The strands of common threads across this domain of practice were then considered in relation to the strands of common threads identified in the other domain of practice from Chapters Five and Six, including ways of working with young people and ways of working with staff. The strands of common threads across all of these domains provided a synthesis of the common features across both domains of practice.

Three overarching themes, including *Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection,* and *Holding complexity,* were seen to be consistently evident in the strands of common threads across both domains of practice. The influence of these overarching themes on educator identity and development in practice were explored. In particular, the primacy of relationships became more significant through the additional data analysis using the lens of relationships and the idea of building relational capacity through the cultivation and development of dispositions that were personal, interpersonal and organisational in nature. In this aspect of data analysis, the three overarching themes of *Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection,* and *Holding complexity* were used as a framework to identify and present a range of dispositions of educators that were influenced by the context. It was apparent that the
development and acquisition of these dispositions reflected personal, interpersonal, and organisational areas of relational capacity that could encapsulate some of the empirical means for someone to be and become a capable practitioner in the flexi schools’ context.

**Brief Overview of Chapter Eight: Discussion and Implications**

The next chapter will present a discussion on the significance of the findings from data analysis presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven of this thesis. Wenger’s (1998) notion of communities of practice and the researcher’s theoretical construct of relational dynamics will be considered in relation to the findings and their significance in addressing the research questions. Vygotsky’s ZPD will also be considered in the discussion chapter in order to further address the two research questions about how ways of working and ways of professional learning in the research context, influence educator identity and development in practice.
Chapter 8
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Introduction and Overview

This study set out to explore educator identity and development in practice in a network of flexi schools using a sociocultural theoretical lens. Making aspects of staff perceptions of their practice more explicit and exploring the ways in which certain domains of practice in the flexi schools’ context influenced educator identity and development was the primary objective of this study. A second and complementary objective was to improve an aspect of educational practice in the realm of staff induction processes. This study advances a sociocultural model of educator identity and development in practice exploring the influence of ways of working and ways of professional learning that were privileged in the flexi schools’ context. These domains of practice were explored through the perspectives of practitioners.

This chapter will present further discussion of the findings and discussion reported in the previous three chapters in which data related to the research questions that this study set out to address were presented. The theoretical and conceptual advances made by this study will be presented through consideration of three sociocultural theoretical constructs: Wenger’s (1998) social theory of learning in communities of practice through four key components; the researcher’s own construct of relational dynamics, a relational model of identity and development in practice in multidisciplinary communities of practice; and Vygotsky’s (1978) construct of the ZPD and how learning is mediated through social practices and in social relationships.

The implications of the sociocultural theoretical perspectives underpinning the exploration of educator identity and development in practice in the research context will be further discussed in this chapter. The manner in which these theoretical perspectives and advances were translated into strategies and techniques for collecting and producing
data, and the ways in which they influenced the systematic reading of the data through the conceptual language of the thesis will be made evident. To conclude this chapter, the boundaries of this study will be discussed and the possible options for further research in this sector of education and field of research will be identified.

**The Research Questions that Informed this Study**

In the exploration of educator identity and development in practice in the network of flexi schools, this study seeks to explore one overarching research issue: how practice in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development. Two questions were formulated and relate to two specific domains of practice, viz:

- How do ways of working in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice?
- How do ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice?

**How Responses to Research Questions Advanced Knowledge in the Field**

Responses to research questions highlighted how aspects of practice related to ways of working and professional learning and influenced educator identity and development in a system of flexi schools, thus, offering alternative expressions of educator identity and development in practice. The research questions generated specific details of two domains of practice explored through the perspectives of practitioners. Insights have been gained into the kinds of shifts and movements involved in the negotiation and co-construction of educator identity and development that were commonly experienced by educators in this context.

A framework of practice in the flexi schools outlining a range of effective ways of working with young people and with staff to support the enfranchisement of young people has been developed. Possible pathways for being and becoming educator have
been identified through consideration of ways of professional learning that were experienced as meaningful and relevant by educators in the context. More significantly, responses to the research questions have identified how these ways of working and professional learning have influenced educator identity and development in practice, providing a detailed overview of how the particular research context has shaped the negotiation and co-construction of educator identity and development of those who worked there.

Three main overarching themes that captured the influence of practice in this context on educator identity and development were identified in the findings chapters. These themes included: Relationships; Changing perspectives through reflection; and Holding complexity. These overarching themes offered insights into the emerging field of multidisciplinary practice in flexi schools including the dispositions, capacities and skills that were most germane to supporting the young people who were choosing to re-engage in flexible learning choices. A variety of ways to develop and nurture these dispositions, capacities and skills within educators were made evident through staff perceptions of their experiences of ways of professional learning. The responses to the research questions provided insights into the different ways of being and becoming educator to enfranchise marginalised young people who have experienced multiple complexities and social exclusion from conventional education settings.

How responses to the research questions encapsulate key components of a social theory of identity and development.

The first section of this discussion chapter will make evident the applicability of a social theory of identity and development in practice, based on Wenger’s (1998) components of a social theory of learning, in relation to the sociocultural exploration of educator identity and development in the flexi schools’ context. The reconfigured model was included in Chapter Three and has been duplicated in Figure 8.1.
Identity and development as ‘practice’, or ‘doing’, were expressed in this study through the first research question enquiring about how ways of working with young people and with colleagues influenced educator identity and development in practice. Wenger suggested that “the experience of identity in practice is a way of being in the world” (1998, p. 151). Educators’ ways of being in relationship with young people and staff in the context, and the ways in which they negotiated their identity and development through these relationships, were profoundly linked to practice or ‘doing’ as ways of working.

The second component of the social theory of identity and development was ‘learning’, or identity and development as ‘social participation’. This component incorporated the processes of learning and knowing through social relations. In this study, it was connected to the second research question about how ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influenced educator identity and development in practice. Much of the professional learning that educators described in the data as being significant was clearly located within local flexi school sites. It mainly comprised situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), or learning in and through practice in social relationships, and learning through reflection on practice. The other two components of the social theory of identity and development were meaning and community. These notions were implicit in educators’ perceptions of their ways of working and professional learning through consideration of the values that underpinned practice. However, these two components of the model have not been a significant focus in this research study which explored educator identity and development with an emphasis on ways of working as practice or ‘doing’ and ways of professional learning as ‘social participation’ (Wenger, 1998).
Figure 8.1. Wenger’s model of a social theory of learning reconfigured to become a model of a social theory of identity and development in practice.
The influence of practice on educator identity and development.

Educators described their practice and their multiple and varied experiences of being and becoming effective practitioners to enfranchise young people in multidisciplinary professional settings. These ways of working and professional learning, commonly described by participants as being different to past experiences of being educator in other contexts, impacted on educators’ sense of identity and development in practice. Through exploring educators’ perceptions of their ways of working and professional learning, the findings presented in the data analysis chapters have made explicit two domains of practice in this context. For the purposes of analysis and to highlight each of the research questions, these domains of practice were treated separately in the findings chapters. In reality, these aspects of practice were not separate. This was demonstrated in the data analysis where “thematic networks” (Attridge-Stirling, 2001) or strands of common threads creating clear connections and intersections were identified across the two domains of practice. Both domains of practice were shown to be intrinsically connected as exemplified in Wenger’s components of a social theory of learning and in the components of the reconfigured model of a social theory of identity and development in practice.

Theoretical Contributions of this Study

Overview of contributions.

This study drew on Wenger’s (1998) original components of a social theory of learning including practice, learning, meaning, and community. The components were reconfigured as the components of a social theory of identity and development in practice by translating the original central focus of learning through one of the peripheral components, that of identity, as per Wenger’s own suggestion (1998). The reconfigured model informed the construction of the research questions. This translation has proven to be robust in providing a framework for the exploration of educator identity and
development in practice in the flexi schools’ context. The second theoretical construct that influenced this study was the researcher’s construct of relational dynamics, a social theory of identity and development in multidisciplinary communities of practice. This study was also influenced by Vygotskian sociocultural theories of learning, in particular, more recent interpretations and developments of Vygotsky’s ideas related to mediated action (Wertsch, 1991) and his notion of the ZPD. The spatial dynamics of the learning environment, predominantly constituted as relational spaces within the flexi schools’ context, were also considered with respect to the ZPD. Theoretical contributions of this study will now be outlined in relation to these three influences.

**The Influence of Wenger’s Model of a Social Theory of Learning**

As outlined in the beginning of this chapter, the four components of Wenger’s model of a social theory of learning (1998) were reconfigured into a model of a social theory of identity and development in practice that was used as a framework to formulate the research questions of this study (see Figure 8.1). Figure 8.2 shows how the flexi schools embody this social theory of identity and development in practice: as educational sites, relational spaces and educating communities of practice. The arrows on the border of the figure indicate the dynamic flow of elements within the diagram. For the purpose of explanation, each element is independent but within the context each element and/or component is interdependent. As can be seen in Figure 8.2 the formation of educator identity and development in practice in the flexi schools’ context was a process that involved the interaction between the four components of the model. The results from the data analysis emphasised how the two components explored in this study, namely practice and learning, were mutually defining and interconnected.
Figure 8.2. How the flexi schools embody a social theory of identity and development in practice, as educational sites, relational spaces and educating communities of practice.
The reconfigured model reinforced the findings that educator identity formation occurred in connection with the four components of practice, learning, meaning and community. As people engaged in practice in the context through doing the work with young people and with other staff, they made meaning of their experiences through the values that underpinned their social relationships in the flexi schools’ context and informed practice. For example, using the four principles influenced educator identity and development in practice. Educator identity was also co-constructed through the processes of learning as people engaged in social participation. For example, in professional learning contexts, such as the RPGs, educator identity was co-constructed as workers experienced a sense of community in the social relationships available within the context in their work with young people and staff. This kind of professional learning can be described as situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Situated learning included learning by observing, by doing, by shadowing, by being mentored and by gradually taking on more responsibility in the presence of more experienced others. In this way learners became part of a community of practice as a newcomer or a person adopting a new role (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In the flexi schools’ context situated learning occurred as staff learnt how to use the four principles through modelling other staff. It also occurred when staff willingly mentored new staff, offering guidance and support. Situated learning occurred when staff visited other flexi school sites or welcomed others and gave of their time to share their experiences with those who came seeking mentoring. All of these examples of situated learning demonstrate educator identity and development in practice occurring through social participation.

The results of the data analysis specifically responding to the research questions were presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. These findings generated a practice framework authenticated by multiple data sources gathered in the various stages of the
design experiment. The components of Wenger’s model were integrated into this practice framework in the following ways:

- through ways of working: supporting young people, as described in Chapter Five, related to the component of practice, or identity and development ‘as doing’;
- through ways of working: staff relationships and support, as described in Chapter Six, also related to the component of practice, or identity and development ‘as doing’; and
- through ways of professional learning, as described in Chapter Seven, connected to the component of learning, or identity and development as ‘social participation’.

In this study, the two components of meaning and community in the model were not emphasised in the same way as practice and learning. Although they were not the primary focus in this study, they were evident as educators discussed their ways of working and ways of professional learning as aspects of practice. For example, reference was made to meaning making and community when educators discussed the underpinning values of their practice and the strong sense of community they experienced in the work with young people and staff.

The findings chapters presented data that were gathered using the chosen data collection methods for each stage of the design experiment. These data were analysed using descriptive statistics (Babbie, 2004), thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001), leading to the development of an interconnected practice framework that supported Wenger’s own premise that the components of his social theory of learning were “deeply connected and mutually defining” (1998, p. 5). The description of how the nature of practice explored through ways of working and professional learning in the system of flexi schools, shaped and influenced the negotiation and co-construction of educator identity
and development in practice, demonstrated the robustness of the model as it was applied to the exploration of educator identity and development in practice in the context of flexi schools. Further details of how the theoretical advances of the reconstructed model were translated into data collection methods and data analysis tools will be discussed later in the chapter.

**Relational Dynamics: A Relational Model of Identity and Development in Practice in Multidisciplinary Contexts**

Educator identity and development in practice in the context of flexi schools involved an interplay of the particular ways of working and ways of professional learning expressed through social relations in social practices. In order to capture the dynamic interplay that existed in practice between ways of working and ways of professional learning, a sociocultural theoretical construct called relational dynamics was devised and used as a model of a social theory of identity and development in multidisciplinary communities of practice such as the flexi schools. This theoretical construct was outlined in Chapter Three. In the initial discussion of relational dynamics, it was stated that the trustworthiness of the construct would be considered in relation to the data gathered from on-the-ground practitioners. The aim of this consideration was to determine whether the construct of relational dynamics contributed to a deeper understanding of educator identity and development in practice, and in what particular ways this occurred.

As a result of the findings that were presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, some additional modifications to the original construct of relational dynamics were made. The revised theoretical construct will be outlined and explained. Relational dynamics makes a contribution to sociocultural theories of learning and identity that have particular relevance for multidisciplinary communities of practice.
Relational dynamics: An interplay of relational agency and relational equity

The first iteration of this theoretical construct incorporated the two components of relational agency (Edwards, 2005) and relational equity (Boaler, 2008). Figure 8.3 duplicates the original iteration of the model that was presented in Chapter Three. Relational agency was particularly relevant for multidisciplinary practice that was identified as a key feature of practice in the research context and supported by research identified in the literature review. It involved the process of learning through working with others to interpret and respond to challenges in practice. It involved skills such as the capacity to collaborate, work across professional boundaries, cooperate, include diverse perspectives, draw on diverse experience, act for improved outcomes, offer support and ask for support, work with difference, and influence others and be influenced by others (Edwards, 2005).

![Relational Dynamics](image)

Figure 8.3. Relational dynamics: A relational model of identity and development in multidisciplinary communities of practice.

Developing relational agency enhanced the capacity of educators to learn from
the difficulties and challenges of their practice through collaboration and the sharing of issues with other workers – especially those from other professional backgrounds.

Relational agency expanded educators’ understanding of challenging issues and allowed expertise to be responsively expressed in actions. Through exercising relational agency, responsive professional identities were formed (Edwards, 2005). Relational agency was evident in findings from data analysis of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and reflective practice data. It was evident in staff perceptions of ways of working when relationships with young people were given primacy and when productive relationships with staff peers were seen as essential in terms of achieving better outcomes for young people. This was especially the case when teacher educators described the importance they placed on learning from young people and from educators whose backgrounds were youth work, social work or counselling, or when they described the importance of working closely with Indigenous workers whose cultural capital and expertise was vital in terms of learning to re-engage Indigenous young people in culturally appropriate ways.

The second component of the initial iteration of relational dynamics was relational equity (Boaler, 2008). Relational equity was clearly evident in the data analysis. Relational equity explicitly defines values-based practices, the ways that people treat each other as they work together (Boaler, 2008). Ways of working that were socially inclusive and equitable, based on ethics derived from human rights principles and notions of participatory democracy, aligned with the values that underpinned practice in the system of the flexi schools. These underpinning values included the four principles of respect, participation, safe and legal, and honesty, and the values of caring and community.

In Chapters Five and Six when looking at how ways of working in the context influenced educator identity and development, it was evident that these values shaped
how educators negotiated and co-constructed their identity in relationship with young people and staff. The values underpinning practice were expressed through social interactions characterised by equitable ways of working that included valuing diversity, valuing active listening, giving voice to all, acting in equitable ways, valuing genuine curiosity, respecting others, enacting care for others, valuing different perspectives, and having concern for the common good.

The first two components of relational dynamics, namely relational agency and relational equity, were identifiable in the practice of educators in a dynamic interplay. Educators in the context negotiated their professional identities, interpreting and negotiating aspects of practice with others as they attempted to be responsive to challenges in their practice. Shared interpretation of challenging issues was supported when practitioners adopted equitable ways of working and ways of treating others. The identification of educator dispositions or ways of being and becoming, which emerged in the additional sweep of the data in the final stages of data analysis (see Chapter Seven), caused the researcher to relook at the model of relational dynamics.

When considering education for the 21st Century and the impact of contemporary economic, social and cultural shifts requiring new ways of understanding and providing education (Wyn, 2008), a particular model of education from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has relevance for the flexi schools’ context (Delors, 1999). The four pillars of education for the 21st Century, “learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together” (Delors, 1999, p.14) resonates with the model of education that had been described by practitioners in the context and that equally applies to the formation of educator identity and development in practice.

In this study, this framework was viewed through a relational lens. For example, ‘learning to know’ and ‘learning to do’, were experienced in the context through
participation in social relationships. Educators learnt how to know and do, through working with others, especially those from other professional backgrounds. Their broadened interpretations of challenging aspects of practice (learning to know), and their increased options for action (learning to do) were developed as they exercised relational agency. ‘Learning to live together’ was experienced in the context as people engaged with the four principles, enacted caring relationships and fostered a sense of community that supported relationships in an ongoing way. ‘Learning to live together’ was experienced when relationships were given primacy, when staff were willing to change their perspectives through reflection, and as they increased their capacity to hold complexity. Learning to live together was clearly aligned with relational equity.

It became apparent that three pillars of education for the 21st Century were represented in the model of relational dynamics. Only one pillar, ‘learning to be’, was not specifically represented in the model. The data analysis findings, presented at the end of Chapter Seven, showed that staff had discussed their experiences of enacting, observing and living out certain dispositions in their relationships with young people and with staff in a range of ways. These were described as dispositions or ways of being that recognised the interconnectedness of all aspects of relationships in flexi schools. This notion of relational being was described by Gergen (2009). It was referred to in the literature review when discussing trends in education that were more relational (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Noddings, 1992; Sidorkin, 2000; Smyth, 2006), participatory and democratic (Apple & Beane, 2007; Ayers, 2009; Dewey, 2010), appreciative of the dignity of every human person (Freire, 2000; Noddings, 1992) and inclusive of difference (Lederach, 2005; UNESCO, 1994). These ideas reflect an observable trend in contemporary human thinking regarding the understanding of notions of identity and self.
A shift in conceptualising identity and the self is evident as outlined in Chapter Two: Literature Review. This shift can be described as a movement from viewing the self as a separate entity, an individual bounded being, towards viewing and understanding the self as constituted in relationships (Gergen, 2009). This shift in thinking is apparent in the field of science through the work of physicists, biologists, and environmentalists, and in the ideas of those who are systems thinkers and complexity theorists (Capra, 1975, 1997, 2004; de Chardin, 1959; Suzuki et al., 2007). Interconnectedness of life and relationships is a significant feature of Indigenous knowledge and worldviews (Gair et al., 2005; Knudston & Suzuki, 1992; Matthews et al., 2005; Sheehan & Walker, 2001). A shift towards the interconnectedness of relational ways of being is evident amongst some leaders and innovators in the business world (Covey, 2011; Holman, 2010; Holman et al., 2007; Owen, 2008; Scharmer, 2008; Senge, 2006; Senge et al., 2004; Wheatley, 2006), through social psychology (Gergen, 2009), psychiatry and interpersonal/relational neurobiology (Perry, 2009; Siegel, 2006), and through philosophies and spiritualities that emphasise nonviolence and nondualistic thinking (Berry, 2006; de Chardin, 1959; Lederach, 2005; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). The common thread emerging in these diverse disciplines and fields of learning and practice is the notion that relationships and interconnectedness are central, defining aspects of life, influencing ways of being in relationship with self, others, earth and life force, regardless of the many and varied ways ‘life force’ may be defined.

This relational view of being has implications for the practice of educators in the flexi schools’ context. The purpose of developing the model of relational dynamics was to see if it was relevant to educators in the research context. Educators described how their ways of being in relationships enhanced their capacity to work more effectively with young people and staff, supporting their capacity to enact relational agency and relational equity. Given the strength of educators’ perceptions regarding relational
dispositions in the data, and the links to various philosophical traditions, and the underpinning values expressed in the ethos and principles of the educational tradition that the flexi schools were originally founded upon, this aspect of practice described as relational being was added to the model of relational dynamics as a third component (see Figure 8.4. Revised theoretical construct of Relational Dynamics – A model for a social theory of identity and development in multidisciplinary communities of practice).

Additionally, findings indicated that educators perceived the importance of being reflective in their practice. Findings from data analysis indicated that practitioners appreciated that reflective practice significantly influenced them as they negotiated and co-created their sense of identity and development and as they made
observable shifts in their educator identity in practice. When educators were willing to engage in critical reflection in and on practice, these reflective processes acted like catalysts for developing relational agency, relational equity and a greater sense of relational being. For this reason, the notion of critical reflective practice was also incorporated into the model of relational dynamics representing the dynamic interplay between the three main components of relational agency, relational equity and relational being.

Critical reflection supported the interplay and enactment of relational agency, relational equity and relational being in multidisciplinary communities of practice in the research context. It was the influence of multidisciplinary practice that supported some teacher educators in the flexi schools’ context to shift towards a commitment to engage more actively in critical reflective practice. This seemed to support the development of greater self-awareness around their values, beliefs, emotions and assumptions regarding the nature of education and the nature of learners. Critical reflection also supported some workers in the flexi schools’ context to enact relational equity. As workers were faced with challenging issues in practice, some accepted the invitation to interrogate their own assumptions and reactions in different situations. Consideration of how these assumptions and reactions interacted with and impacted on their practice was the starting point for conversation, dialogue, negotiation and co-construction of educator identity and development in practice. Those workers who were open to engage in dialogic processes with other staff and with young people, who valued diversity and were open to be inclusive of difference, seemed to be more able to hold complexity in the midst of the work with young people.

**Vygotsky’s ZPD.**

Vygotsky’s theories of mental functioning and his construct of the ZPD have been conceptualised as processes in which the distance between a learner’s current...
experience and their potential capacity is bridged through the influence of, and interaction with, a more experienced other (Vygotsky, 1978). A central notion of Vygotsky’s theorising of mental functioning associated with the ZPD was that it was specifically related to learning as an expression of child development, rather than the attainment of certain skill for a particular task (Chaiklin, 2003). Vygostky’s construct of the ZPD helped to develop an appreciation of how mental functioning is mediated through cultural tools and social practices (Wertsch, 2007). An appreciation of social or relational influences on mental functioning is difficult to fully appreciate unless the pervasive individualist paradigm that has shaped Western thinking around identity and self, have been interrogated (Ageyev, 2003).

The depth to which Western cultures embrace and reify the “bounded self” and “ideals of autonomy, individual reason, personal conscience, liberty, free competition and self-knowledge” (Gergen, 2009, p. 5), and the influence of this thinking on people’s lives and on cultural institutions cannot be underestimated. This individualist perspective of bounded-self is pervasive and has influenced ways of living, social systems and institutions such as education (Bingham, 2004; Fielding & Moss, 2011; Gergen, 2009; Macy, 1991; Macy & Johnstone, 2012). Other trends in thinking aligned with the notion of interconnected self-in relationship have also challenged this individualist perspective. Macy (1991) claims that:

The self is the metaphoric construct of identity and agency, the hypothetical piece of turf on which we construct our strategies for survival, the notion around which we focus our instincts for self-preservation, our needs for self-approval, and the boundaries of our self-interest . . . the conventional notion of the self which we have been raised with and to which we have been conditioned by mainstream culture is being undermined. (p. 183)

The ZPD has been considered and applied within educational contexts predominantly influenced by an individualist worldview and this has significantly shaped attitudes about the purpose of education and the nature of learning. As
mentioned in the theory chapter of this thesis, Vygostsy’s sociocultural theories on mental functioning and the ZPD, including more recent interpretations of these theories, emphasise more fully that mental functioning existing in the individual (intramental plane) is derived in the first instance from the social (intermental plane) (Wertsch, 1991). The shift to fully appreciating the implications of Vygotskian thought and how it influences conceptualisations of mental functioning as being constituted and situated in social relations is challenging for Western mindsets, so deeply influenced by an individualist cultural paradigm (Ageyev, 2003; Hofstede, 1997). If the potential of the interconnected self-in-relationship were to be realised more fully in education, other more integrated ways of describing lived experiences of learning and development could be given more serious consideration.

This study provided an opportunity to consider the impact of valuing relationships first, and demonstrated how this influenced educator identity and development in practice. Making educational practice more personal aligns with sociocultural theory influenced by a more ‘collectivist interpretation’ of Vygotsky’s ideas shaped by the cultural context in which they emerged (Ageyev, 2003). The way in which relationships mediate the learning of young people in educational contexts needs further consideration and greater understanding (Ageyev, 2003; Panofsky, 2003). In flexi school sites, the ZPD can be construed as a place of relational learning, a place of potential development connected to the identity formation of educators and of young people as co-learners. If learning as a mental function is mediated through social relationships and inseparable from processes of identity formation, bridging the ZPD can occur in a variety of ways.

Bridging the ZPD may occur through dialectic and/or dialogic processes, depending on the needs of individual learners and the experience of educators, and on the choices made in terms of how they negotiated and formed their educator and learner
identities at any given time (Renshaw, 2004). Identities can be expanded, extended and co-created through appreciating that identity is constituted in and mediated through relationship with others. As a relational being, experiences of learning are constituted in being an interconnected self-in-relationship. Experiences of learning and development constituted from the perspective of being an individual bounded-self are limited. Learning and development defined predominantly as individual mental functioning is equally limited.

Mental functioning has often been interpreted in a limited way in educational settings with an overemphasis on academic learning expressed in formal, rational/logical thinking. From a Vygotskian perspective, learning and development are defined as founded upon the full range of psychological functions including “emotions, perception, motivation, logical reasoning, intelligence, memory, imagination, language and personality” which are “collectively constructed and distributed” (Ratner, 2000, p. 10) and part of an interconnected integrated cultural system that is mediated in and through relationships (Panofsky, 2003). Therefore, the ZPD conceptualised as the distance between the potential of the learner and a more experienced other in learning processes for the purpose of development, may be experienced as a combination of different kinds of human functioning including mental, emotional, physical, spiritual and social functioning. As the distance between the current capacity of the learner and their potential development is reduced through the support of a more experienced other, the range of human functions directed towards learning and development are mediated in and through relationships in the ZPD. It is the emphasis on relationships and how they intersect with a range of psychological functions (Alpert, 1991; Thompson et al., 1992) that is of primary significance in this sociocultural research project. The results of this study emphasising the relational dynamics of all learning functions, expressed as
interconnected ways of being and becoming, can be further explored as an emerging potential of holistic education and research.

As staff in the flexi schools performed and developed their educator identities, they drew on the voices available to them from their experiences of social relationships in a wide range of social contexts. At times, these voices reflected centripetal sociocultural forces drawing towards unity and conformity or constraint, whilst at other times the voices reflected centrifugal sociocultural forces moving towards disorganisation and potential transformation or affordance (Bakhtin, 1981; Gergen, 2009; Penuel & Wertsch, 1995; Vadeboncoeur, 2009). The relational dimension in learning processes did not demand uniformity, but rather created potential for diversity and difference. These wider constructs of identity and self, defined through a sense of deep interconnection with all life (Gergen, 2009; Macy, 1991), have the capacity to shift the way the potential of relational being is understood as an emerging metaphor through which to understand identity formation as an expression of, or a dimension of, learning and development. Relational being has the potential to broaden the conceptualisation of learning and development and how it is supported. From a sociocultural perspective learning and development may occur as psychological functioning mediated in and through relationships. It equally could occur in interaction with other kinds of human functioning mediated in and through relationships. All of these psychological functions may be developmental in nature and mediated through relationships, but scholars coming out of traditions of education and psychology have tended to give primacy to individual cognitive functioning, positivist paradigms and worldviews that privilege logical/rational thought above other thought processes and ways of being.

According to Wertsch, the individual operating with mediational means is the unit of analysis for developing a sociocultural understanding of mediated action (Wertsch, 1991, 1998). In the construct of relational dynamics, psychological
functioning in its fullest form is located alongside other kinds of human functioning, yet always occurring in, and being inseparable from relationship with others. This perspective offers an added dimension and focus to sociocultural theories of learning. The relational aspect of psychological functioning is implied in Wertsch’s (1991) interpretation in that he recognises that it exists in the individual on the intramental plane, but acknowledges that it derives from the social or intermental plane. In the construct of relational dynamics, the relational dimension is deliberately made explicit as a central element of a broader, integrated notion of human functioning, whether expressed internally in the thinking mind or through emotional, physical, spiritual or social dimensions of human functioning or ways of being. All expressions of human functioning— including mental, physical, emotional, spiritual and social functioning— have the capacity to support learning and development, and are primarily mediated in and through relationships and cultural tools or mediational means. Relationships may be physically present or embodied in the memory and identity of an individual, but they are nonetheless present in some way. The limitation of an education system still deeply entrenched in an understanding of learning predominantly defined as cognitive processes in an academic sense, confined to an individual bounded self, needs to be challenged and expanded. These limitations were heightened for those who have experienced multiple complexities in their lives and social exclusion from conventional schooling. The struggle to appreciate the breadth and potential of all levels of human functioning and its capacity to support learning is a limitation of a system operating from paradigms that are no longer constructive for the health, wellbeing and inclusion of all (Wyn, 2008) or a model of education for the 21st Century (Delors, 1999).

Relational being increases the capacity for people to exercise agency as they negotiate and co-create their identities and learning capacities through a wide range of human functions. If the potential agency to act on the world enabled through identity
formation in relationship was recognised, the significance of relationships in learning could be further explored and privileged in ways not frequently experienced in conventional education settings. The repertoires of identity performance or relational being and becoming are multiple (Gergen, 2009). This widening of relational repertoires for identity formation was exemplified as people in the flexi schools found safety to negotiate their identities in more flexible ways than what they had experienced in more traditional contexts. The potential for creative innovation was broadened.

Various shifts and movements in educator identity and development in practice were made possible in the context through the emphasis on relationships, reflection and holding complexity. Identity formation, as an experience of learning and development, embedded in interconnected relationships with young people and other staff, provided access to a wider repertoire of ways of being educator. This contrasts with the more limited options for being educator that are available when identity is construed from an individualist perspective, understood within notions of a bounded self (Gergen, 2009), and limited to a narrow conceptualisation of cognitive processes.

The repertoire of identity performance for educators in the flexi schools was extended through engagement with the particular group of young people who were exercising agency and choosing to re-engage. The agency of young people, which at times included their resilience and their resistance (Alpert, 1991; Thompson et al., 1992), challenged adults in the context to find other ways of working that were more inclusive and democratic. These other ways of working were supported by using the four principles, including respect, participation, safe and legal and honesty. The four principles provided a framework for educators and young people to enter into dialogue, to listen to understand, and to adopt a strengths-based perspective. They provided relational space for young people to have a voice and make choices in the context of a relationship focussed community. This way of working required educators to navigate
their professional identities in different ways than what they may have experienced in conventional education settings.

For young people as well, opportunities to re-define their identity as learners were created through mutually respectful relationships with adults and peers within the learning community. A young person’s learning identity that may have been fractured through frequent experiences of failure and exclusion, through being blamed and viewed as the source of the problem of non-completion of school, could be re-negotiated within a learning community that adopted and embodied the operation by principles – a relationship focussed way of being and working. Using the four principles shifted the emphasis from the individual as learner, or the individual as teacher, to an individual person constituted in the first instance as a relational being, interconnected through relationships within a community. The four principles called people to accountability within the learning community. The overemphasis on individualism in our culture (Ageyev, 2003; Bingham, 2004; Gergen, 2009) was shifted through the emphasis on relational ways of being that were enacted through operation by principles. Using the four principles enabled a relational perspective on resilience to be adopted (Vadeboncoeur, 2012). Adults and young people engaged in processes of ‘place making’ (Vadeboncoeur, 2012) by creating and strengthening relational and symbolic-spatial connections of meaning and identity. These relational and place making processes supported young people to exercise agency that was mediated through meaning making in relationships, located in place. Young people were supported practically through their capacity to grow and develop in and through relationships over time. Meaning making processes, such as making connections to place, in and through relationships, may enhance their ability to exercise and develop agency in their lives and in their worlds, and may enable them to develop resilience through interconnected relationships.
Engaging with the four principles emphasised a relational perspective on the nature of communication in education to be enacted through shared meaning making in conversation and dialogue (Biesta, 2004) and in the co-construction of narratives of meaning. Enacting the four principles and understanding that they applied equally to young people and adults enabled a more relational perspective on authority and power in education to be considered and experienced (Bingham, 2004). Similarly, adopting a relational perspective on learning made caring relationships possible (Thayer-Bacon, 2004) and young person-centred learning a priority. Relational perspectives on curriculum design and pedagogy (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004), that incorporated the enactment of the four principles, supported the development of a young person’s learning trajectory, inclusive of them having a voice and being able to make choices. This relational perspective on learning supported the lived experience of democracy, rather than merely limiting the experience of democracy to learning about democracy. In all of these ways and in many others that have not been captured here, relational perspectives embodying the four principles, informed and influenced the formation of educator identities of adults; identities that were negotiated in and through relational ways of being in the context of flexi school communities.

In these educational sites – these educating communities of practice – the formation and development of educator identities occurred in many intersecting zones of proximal development. Adults and young people alike were both teachers and learners. The distance between a learner and a more experienced other may be changed or bridged through a range of relational strategies for being and becoming, for experiencing and learning. For example, learning may include a breadth of experiences including dialectic processes such as direct instruction, and move through, across, or around the spectrum of learning strategies to other experiences of experiential learning or learning through dialogue and negotiation (Renshaw, 2004). The ZPD in the flexi
schools’ context was firstly an embodied place of relationship for educators and young people alike. Depending on the situation and the needs of the learner, a wide range of strategies could be enacted by educators and young people as they rehearsed, performed, adopted, explored, and experimented with, a range of aspects of their learner and educator identities, both embodied within adults and young people alike. The experience of an educator, the support of the relationships within the community, and the voices of relationship that have shaped each person’s life (Bakhtin, 1981), created a place for relational ways of being to be negotiated. The emphasis on relationships and flexibility within the learning place created a wide range of opportunities to explore identity formation and to create new possibilities of being and becoming. The agency of each adult and young person enabled them, if they chose, to engage in various degrees of negotiation, in order to co-create different ways of being educator and of being learner. This process is captured by Gergen (2009) who states:

Thus the best option is flexibility. Drawing from one’s resources as a multi-being, one should be readied to access many different voices, to move fluidly with the shifting tides of dialogue . . . . one should be able to engage in collaborative dialogue in one situation, serve as a mentor in another, or variously act as a facilitator, an agent of empowerment or a friend. The move towards richer relationships is not intended to obliterate the traditional role of monologic knower and disciplinarian. It is not that the traditional relationship is bankrupt; it is simply limited. (Gergen, 2009, p. 275)

How Theoretical Advances were Translated into the Research Design and Interpretation of Findings

The choice to adopt a sociocultural theoretical perspective for this research has influenced the formulation of research questions, the choice of research design, the strategies and techniques for collecting the data and establishing the parameters for the kinds of data that were collected, for systematically reading or interpreting the data through the choice of data analysis tools used, and how the findings were interpreted through reading the data through the conceptual language of the thesis. These concerns
of how theoretical advances translated into the research design and findings of this thesis will now be discussed in more detail.

**The translation of theoretical advances into the research design.**

The primary research question focused on how practice in the network of flexi schools influenced educator identity and development. Wenger’s (1998) components of practice were explored in the research questions, with particular emphasis on practice and learning. Table 8.1 shows how each of these components were connected to the research questions.

Table 8.1

*Wenger’s Four Components of a Social Theory of Learning Reconfigured into a Social Theory of Identity and Development in Practice and Connected to the Research Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wenger’s Four Components</th>
<th>The research questions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practice (Identity and development as doing).</td>
<td>How do ways of working in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning (Identity and development as social participation).</td>
<td>How do ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community (Identity and development as belonging).</td>
<td>Whilst these components were not emphasised in this study, they were made apparent in the implicit values that underpinned ways of working and professional learning that were privileged in the flexi schools’ context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning (Identity and development as experience).</td>
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</table>

Sociocultural theory expressed in this model of a social theory of identity and development in practice not only shaped the formulation of research questions for this study, it also influenced the choice of research methodology. The choice of the research design – expressed through the kinds of data collection methods used, the data analysis tools chosen, and the organisation and presentation of research findings – reflect an emphasis of the individual self in social relationships within cultural contexts. The ways in which sociocultural theory has been translated into these elements of research design and interpretation of findings will now be discussed.
Choosing the methodology of design experiment enabled the two domains of practice, namely ways of working and ways of professional learning, to be explored through a range of data collection methods in a range of contexts, whilst still recognising their implicit interconnection. Design experiment methodology enabled a profile of practice to be developed gradually, over a period of time, through different stages, influenced by different stakeholders, using a variety of data collection methods in a range of contexts. The insights gained from each stage contributed to the design of the subsequent stages. For example, practitioner perspectives from questionnaire and semi-structured interview data were presented to participants in the group consultation process for their consideration of strategies to enhance staff induction. These data were directly related to ways of working and professional learning that practitioners felt were significant in this context to enfranchise young people, emphasising the social dimensions of learning.

The idea of implementing RPGs in Stage Two of the design experiment was the outcome of discussions during the group consultation process, and influenced by data from the first stage of the design experiment. This data consisted of practitioner perspectives and recommendations about what was effective in working with young people in this context, and what staff needed in terms of induction. These perceptions heightened awareness of the individual, social, and cultural aspects of practice in the flexi schools' context.

Another example of the influence of sociocultural theory on the research design and implementation was when data from the initial questionnaire influenced how the interviews were conducted and the kinds of questions asked. Sociocultural theory emphasises the individual in social, cultural and historical realms of the research context. For example, the questionnaire gathered demographic details and a range of staff opinions on a number of topics through responses using rating scales, as well as
some short open responses. To complement and expand these questionnaire responses the semi-structured interviews gathered narrative data on individual educator’s experiences of how they came to this work, what was important to them in this work, what they valued and what they perceived new staff needed for induction purposes.

By using a range of data collection methods, more detailed responses evident in interview data provided insights related to individuals’ perceptions of practice, and how these were shaped and influenced by the social context of the flexi schools. Educator identity and development were considered in relation to wider cultural notions of what it means to be educator in more conventional school settings and differences were noted through the exploration of the two main components of the model: practice (identity as doing or ways of working) and learning (identity and development as social participation or ways of professional learning). The other two components of meaning (identity and development as experience) and community (identity and development as belonging) were made evident through the implicit values that underpinned practice and professional learning. In this way, the choice of design experiment allowed the perspectives of individuals in social relationships within a specific educational culture to be explored. The historical foundation of the practice of being educator in the research context was evident in the emphasis on the operation by principles that was a defining feature of practice in the multidisciplinary flexi schools’ context developed in its inception almost 30 years ago.

The setting for professional learning in which Stage Two and Three data were collected, required staff who attended RPG sessions to engage in professional learning through social participation. The activities and experiences of RPGs drew on data from previous stages. For example, the questionnaire data provided a snapshot of the social and cultural features of the education context. In addition, metaphors of educator identity in practice, which were generated in the questionnaires, were illustrated and
made into cards then used for various activities in RPGs to induct new staff into the ways of working and professional learning in the culture of the flexi schools. Consideration of how these metaphors influenced educator identity and development was the focus of several RPG activities. Professional learning through social participation highlighted the individual self in relationship with others. The application of this model of a social theory of identity and development in practice was evident in the design of data collection methods, demonstrating how the social, cultural and historical realms of the research context in a system of flexi schools influenced identity formation and development of individual educators.

Wenger’s reconfigured model has proven to be robust in terms of its capacity to be applied as a framework for the purpose and aims of this sociocultural exploration of educator identity and development. The model supported the exploration of educator identity and development in practice at every stage of the research design, implementation, analysis and discussion of results. Wenger’s reconfigured model – focussing on identity and development in practice – continued to function in its application in this study. The conceptual framework was applied in the data analysis and the results provided insights into educators’ perceptions of their practice in flexi schools. The application of this model of identity and development in practice incorporating Wenger’s (1998) four components has supported a new understanding of how the context of flexi schools influences educator identity and development in practice. The perspectives of individual educators in the social, cultural and historical realms of the context were explored through this model.

The re-configured model has potential to be applied to other contexts where the objective is to understand the influence of a particular social, cultural and historical context on the formation of individuals’ identity and development in practice. The application of the model has made evident the ways in which educator identity and
Individual educator identity and development were mediated through relationships with others in the cultural and historical context of the flexi schools.

**The translation of theoretical advances into the interpretation of the findings.**

Data analysis tools were specifically adopted with the intention of exploring individuals’ perceptions of educator identity and development in practice with a view to understand the embedded social, cultural and historical features of the context. This was achieved through examination of educators’ perceptions of self and ways of working and professional learning captured in the descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis of open-ended responses in a number of items in the questionnaire. It was apparent through thematic content and thematic network analysis of narratives of being and narratives of practice gathered in semi-structured interviews highlighting particular ways of working and professional learning. Exploring educator identity and development also occurred through thematic content and thematic network analysis of researcher journal entries and participants’ written evaluations of RPGs that were collected in Stage Three of the design experiment.

Data analysis incorporated iterative cycles of reflection that enabled the participation of various stakeholders in social contexts to contribute to the interpretation of findings from the data analysis. This was evident through the group consultation process and through the use of peer researchers in the process of co-analysing data. These processes depended on conversation and dialogue. Meaning making occurred in social relationships. For the main researcher, the process of becoming a researcher was supported through social interactions with more experienced others. Similarly, the experienced researchers became co-learners of the social, cultural and historical context.
of the flexi schools, which was for most, a new and different context in which to conduct research.

The data analysis tools and processes used produced interconnected networks of ideas and patterns of themes that reflected the social, cultural and historical context of the flexi schools. The researcher drew on individual perceptions and considered these in the context of social relationships with practitioners and other researchers. The social, cultural and historical realms of education practice in a system of flexible schooling were explored and considered in relation to each researchers’ social, cultural and historical experiences of conventional educational practice and research as a point of reference. This required interrogation of research practice through reflection in order to become aware of particular bias and perspectives in approaches to data collection and interpretation of the findings.

The Boundaries of this Study and Implications for Further Research

Identity and development in practice and in discourse.

This study has focussed on educator identity and development in practice with minimal reference to educator identity in discourse. Identity and development in discourse could have effectively been explored offering a complementary perspective to understand the ways in which the context influences identity and development of educators. However, the scope of this study was not broad enough to address identity and development in discourse in any meaningful depth. A choice was made in this research to focus on making the practice of educators in the research context more explicit and to identify the key influences of practice in the context on educator identity and development.

It must be acknowledged that this research has been a starting point for developing evidence-based research on educator identity and development in this educational context, and in this field of research. The scarcity of research on educator
identity and development in the flexi schools’ context and more widely in the field of learning choices programs and flexible education options to enfranchise marginalised young people (te Riele, 2012) highlights the need for further research. This in-depth focus on staff perceptions of their identity in practice could, therefore, form the basis of further research into educator identity in discourse in the system of flexi schools and more widely in this sector of education. These two complementary lenses could offer a more complete picture of what it means to be educator in this context and the kinds of shifts in identity and development that can occur as a result of the influence of context and the impact of social practices on the processes of negotiation and co-construction of educator identity and development in practice and in discourse.

**Engaging with local sites through action research.**

This study explored educator identity and development in practice across a system of flexi schools. One of the boundaries of this study was that it was designed and implemented across a system that incorporated five unique local sites. Documenting the perspectives of practitioners across this system was a priority, as was gaining insights into the wide range of influences of the flexi school contexts on educator identity and development in practice. Whilst there were common features of practice that were identifiable across sites, and some common experiences of educators, there were limitations in terms of being able to generalise findings across all sites.

Engaging practitioners as action researchers within their own context to explore local and specific issues around identity and development in practice would be an option for further research. Exploring how the application and experiences of relational dynamics, including relational agency, relational equity, relational being and critical reflection, influence educator identity and development in local site specific contexts, could be another option for further research. How these relational ways of being influence the identity and development of young people as learners, in particular how
their learner identities are co-constructed and re-formed in social relationships, also has potential for further research.

**Research into professional learning and development.**

This qualitative research captured educator perceptions of their identity and development in practice generated through the research questions of this study. Findings from this study could inform the design and implementation of staff induction and teacher education programs for the network of flexi schools and other learning choices programs for this cohort of young people. The design and implementation of these programs could form the basis of further research.

Additionally, the exploration of different ways of being educator through the examination of ways of working and ways of professional learning that were negotiated within specific social contexts may highlight the potential for enhanced agency as educators develop an understanding of relational dynamics. An understanding of the dynamic interplay between relational agency, relational equity, relational being and critical reflection, as outlined in the concept of relational dynamics, could be further developed through professional learning. This has the potential to contribute to the capacity of an individual in the process of being and becoming educator in flexi schools to enfranchise young people and may inform educators in other settings who find themselves working with young people who are at-risk of disengaging. Further research on these areas would be beneficial for educators working with this cohort of young people. The ways in which relational dynamics could be applied in a wider range of educational and other multidisciplinary settings also holds potential for further research.

The research on the efficacy of RPGs as a strategy to enhance staff induction processes in the network of flexi schools requires more in-depth research. Similarly, the ways in which staff relationships and support mechanisms in the context could be enhanced with a more carefully articulated program of mentoring that would enhance
educator’s experiences of situated learning could be further developed and understood through research.

**A Summary of the Findings of the Research Presented in this Thesis**

This study explored the overarching research issue: how practice in the flexi schools’ context influences educator identity and development. Two questions informed the overarching research issue and related to two specific domains of practice, viz:

- How do ways of working in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice?
- How do ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context influence educator identity and development in practice?

These two research questions were addressed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. In summary, the three overarching themes of *Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection,* and *Holding complexity* were evident in the data analysis of each domain of practice. In ways of working with young people and with staff, and in ways of professional learning, these themes were unmistakably noticeable in the findings. The ways in which this was apparent is represented in Figure 8.5, Figure 8.6 and Figure 8.7. These diagrams represent the common shifts in educators’ identity and development that occurred in the flexi schools’ context. A written summary follows the presentation of each figure.
Figure 8.5. The influence of relationships on educator identity and development in practice.
A summary of the influence of relationships on educator identity and development in practice.

Through data analysis of staff perceptions of the ways they worked with young people and colleagues in the flexi schools’ context, a number of shifts in educators’ sense of identity were identified. Initially, these shifts were often connected to the primacy of relationships. Relationships were the starting point for re-engaging young people and for developing supportive relationships with other staff. Relationships were guided by the operation by principles, including respect, participation, safe and legal, and honesty. Authentic relationships with young people and staff were characterised by certain dispositions of educators including being fully human, open and respectful. Safe and supportive relationships were developed through informal education and working outside the boundaries of traditional classrooms. Genuinely listening to young people to focus on their individual learning needs supported the development of learning choices that were young person-centred.

Using the four principles influenced the way educators were prepared to resolve conflict, acknowledge the challenges of the work, remain flexible and be able to let go of the need to know all and do all. These shifts towards collaboration and cooperation seemed to be influenced by the primacy of relationships in the flexi schools’ context. They appeared to influence educator identity and development in practice. The influence of prioritising relationships first in ways of professional learning in the flexi schools’ context also seemed to influenced educator identity and development in practice. Becoming a learner and a worker and working in teams required time and a gradual attainment of expertise in collaboration with more experienced workers. Through relationships with more experienced staff, educators had to shift towards developing a deep understanding of the complex needs of this group of young people.
The Influence of Changing Perspectives through Reflection on Educator Identity and Development

Shift towards:
- A greater focus on listening to young people
- Being able to recognise the agency of young people
- A strengths-based view of young people
- Re-evaluating the nature & purpose of education
- A changed perspective on the meaning of achievement (broader well-being view)
- Being informed by young people
- Becoming critically reflective
- Young person-centred approach to learning
- Greater collaboration with other professionals
- Becoming a co-learner with young people
- Cooperative paradigm
- Power-with young people

Shift towards:
- Appreciating other professional perspectives
- Greater awareness of impact of language
- Working as part of a team
- Commitment to team dynamics
- Safety in relationships with colleagues and young people
- Young peoples’ needs first before institutional and system needs

WAYS OF WORKING: STAFF RELATIONSHIPS & SUPPORT

WAYS OF WORKING: SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE

WAYS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Shift towards:
- Greater self-awareness through engaging in reflective practice
- Understanding one’s own boundaries & self-care needs
- Interactive social reflection among peers for meaning making
- Becoming a co-learner
- Safety – emotional, spiritual, physical and intellectual
- Trust – welcoming change, challenges & disturbances as opportunities for creativity & innovation to emerge
- Embracing more holistic educational paradigms
- Engaging in supervision to support reflection on practice
- Recognising one’s own privilege, to interrogate one’s practice – values, beliefs & assumptions.

Figure 8.6. The influence of changing perspectives through reflection on educator identity and development in practice.
A summary of the influence of *changing perspectives through reflection* on educator identity and development in practice.

*Changing perspectives through reflection* seemed to enable some educators to listen to young people more effectively, to recognise their agency and adopt a strengths-based perspective. This shift in educator identity and development in practice seemed to be influenced by adopting a different paradigm of co-operation and co-learning rather than authority and power over young people. Such a young person-centred approach to learning appeared to facilitate a changed perspective on the nature and purpose of education and promote more student-centred approaches to learning. These shifts required educators to adopt different ways of being educator than what they may have commonly experienced in more conventional education settings (Whitby, 2013).

Appreciating other professional perspectives, for example those of youth workers and social workers, appeared to support staff in shifting towards a greater commitment to working as part of a team. Cohesive team dynamics supported a sense of safety in relationships. This enabled educators to shift towards privileging the needs of young people before institutional and system needs.

In professional learning settings, *Changing perspectives through reflection* influenced educator identity and development in practice when educators appeared to recognise the importance of developing greater self-awareness and self-understanding. Professional learning, which promoted group reflection on practice, seemed to assist staff to make meaning of the complexities of their work with young people in collaboration with their colleagues. This supported staff to develop a sense of safety enabling them to embrace more holistic educational paradigms. Staff appeared more active in interrogating their own practice and the underlying values, beliefs and assumptions about the purpose of education and the nature of learners in the flexi schools’ context.
Figure 8.7. The influence of holding complexity on educator identity and development in practice.
A summary of the influence of holding complexity on educator identity and development in practice.

Holding complexity appeared to enable educators to be more responsive to learners. This occurred as they shifted towards understanding young peoples’ needs as a primary motivation for their work. Such understanding included an appreciation of trauma informed practice. When greater levels of understanding of the multiple complexities of young peoples’ lives informed educators, they appeared more willing and able to develop young person-centred ways of working despite the complexity this involved. Compassion from educators required an appreciation of the need to take time, and the need to establish clear boundaries with young people. Being able to hold complexity supported educators to balance flexibility with the ability to create appropriate boundaries.

The influence of Holding complexity on educator identity and development seemed to draw educators into becoming more critically reflective practitioners aware of the need for self-care to deal with the complexity of the work with young people. Holding complexity appeared to help educators to appreciate the importance of multidisciplinary practice as well as the cultural and social capital of paraprofessionals. As staff became more aware of the foundational stories of the organisation, they seemed able to shift towards greater understanding of the nature and purpose of education for this cohort of young people.

When considered together, the various shifts in educator identity and development – influenced by the three overarching themes of Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection, and Holding complexity – could be described as movements towards enriched states of relational being. The shifts were not linear
movements that could be easily measured or defined. The movements were more wave-like in that at times they ebbed and flowed. They could be described as:

1. Movements from task orientation emphasising externally prescribed outcomes towards more people orientation where the emphasis was on responsiveness to learner’s needs;
2. Movements from doing and knowing emphasising knowledge transmission towards knowledge creation. Knowledge creation emphasises discerning and manipulating ideas to create new knowledge through becoming co-learners with young people and colleagues; and
3. Movement from managed outcomes emphasising teacher and system defined results and measures to more emergent outcomes. Emergent outcomes for learners are shaped by engagement in learning processes that are responsive to the learner’s own interests and needs, rather than predetermined external standards.

**A Summary of the Implications of this Research for Practice in the Flexi Schools**

This research has highlighted the importance of staff induction and professional learning that is situated in practice and that supports the development of a growing appreciation of the significance of relationships, reflection and the ability to hold complexity in ways of working. Through engaging in RPGs in local contexts, some staff appeared to develop greater capacity to be critically reflective and open to shift towards different ways of being educator in the flexi schools’ context. The implications of the findings of this study for practice support further exploration of how to continue to embed critical reflection into everyday work practice, particularly for new staff in their induction period.

Another implication of this research for practice in the flexi schools’ context would be to consider the development of staff mentoring processes that emphasise relational dynamics, the interplay of relational agency, relational equity and relational being. This could be further explored through developing professional learning that
promotes an appreciation of the importance of relational agency, relational equity and relational being. These are linked with the three overarching themes of Relationships, Changing perspectives through reflection, and Holding complexity, in ways of working and ways of professional learning.

The findings that highlight the importance of promoting multidisciplinary practice in the flexi schools have implications for practice in this context. In particular, exploring and reviewing selection and recruitment processes to ensure a balance of workers from complementary professional backgrounds – such as social work, youth work, and other community welfare worker roles – is maintained. Multidisciplinary practice appears to enhance the quality of holistic education offered to enfranchise this cohort of young people.

Another implication of the findings of this research for practice is the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the specific ways in which learning is mediated through social relationships in the flexi schools’ context. This may be supported by exploring and including the perspective of young people as they negotiate and co-construct their learner identities in relationship with others in the flexi schools’ context. Further research on the nature of young peoples’ sense of identity as learners in the flexi schools’ context, could enhance this appreciation. Of interest would be to observe and document whether young people’s perceptions of their identity as a learner has changed since enrolling in the flexi schools, and how this has occurred.

**In Conclusion: A Spatial Metaphor**

The common aspects of practice synthesised from the findings were not intended as a singular representation of educator identity and development in practice nor of the definitive influences of the research context. The synthesis of the common aspects of practice has created a way of contributing further details to the map of the territory of flexi schools and learning choices programs. The metaphor used by te Riele (2012) of a
‘map for the future’ is relevant for this research and has been adopted here for the purpose of drawing conclusions. Some significant landmarks and other key features of the landscape of the practice of educators in flexi school contexts have been identified. These key features have included a range of influences on educator identity and development in practice from the context. The spatial metaphor associated with map making may be useful in so far as it offers an insight similar to early historical attempts to map unfamiliar geographical regions or territories. Early attempts at mapping territories always involved the interpretation of the mapmakers. They were not aided by sophisticated technological instruments such as satellite navigation resulting in an exact representation in a map. In a similar way the sociocultural qualitative exploration of educator identity and development in practice in flexi schools has occurred within a relatively new education sector and within a fairly recent field of research. The process of adding detail to the map of the territory of flexi schools, specifically about how the context influences educator identity and development in practice, was an initial exploratory attempt to add further detail to the map of the field for the future.

The qualitative nature of this study drawing on the stories and experiences of educators as they described their practice has primarily been a twofold process. First, the process of capturing and documenting the stories and perceptions of those who have navigated the journey of being and becoming educators in the context enabled the voice of practitioners to be heard. Second, the research provided opportunities to add more detail to the map of the territory, about educator identity and development in practice in this context. This detail has been communicated in the findings and in the discussion of the findings. It may open up further opportunities for adding finer detail to the map of the territory in the future that will hopefully include more perspectives from young people themselves.
This study has been an initial attempt to explore and document this education sector and field of research specifically through the lens of educator practitioners. This process has added more detail to the map of the territory and provided an accompanying story of those who have navigated the journey of being and becoming educators in the context. As far as the researcher is aware, this task has not been previously conducted in this context in this manner. As an early edition of a map of the territory of educator identity and development in practice in flexi schools, the researcher acknowledges that there will inevitably be different interpretations of the lay of the land, and different perceptions of the authenticity or otherwise of the stories communicated. Well worth considering in this discussion is an awareness of four features of maps as conveyed by Pula:

[T]he map is not the territory
no map represents all of ‘its’ presumed territory
maps are self-reflexive i.e., we can map our maps indefinitely. Also,
every map is at least, whatever else it may claim to map, a map of the map-maker: her/his assumptions, skills, worldview etc. [emphasis in original]

(Pula, 1994, p.xvii)

No amount of documenting or map making of the territory can ever fully capture the experience of being present in the territory, the lived reality of educators in the context. Differences in perception and interpretation are not seen as problematic, but as inevitable. They can become potentially enriching if they are used as a starting point for further dialogue, exploration and research. Some perspectives may not have been included or emphasised in ways that people feel they should have been. This is in part has been due to the researcher’s own perspective that although limited, has shaped the final draft of the map and the accompanying account of practitioner stories documented through the sociocultural exploration of educator identity and development in practice in flexi schools.
There are a number of ways for staff to participate in this research. You can choose to participate in one or several research activities (see below). Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time without question or penalty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Activity</th>
<th>Time required</th>
<th>When do I have to do it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STAGE ONE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing a questionnaire</td>
<td>20 – 30 minutes</td>
<td>At your convenience during the network staff days in April 2009.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being Interviewed</td>
<td>Approximately 1 hour for Interview &amp; 30 minute meeting for follow up and review of transcript.</td>
<td>To be negotiated with individual staff at various sites between May – July 2009 (current staff) &amp; July – Sept 2010 (new staff 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STAGE TWO</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation in group consultation process for new staff induction and professional development</td>
<td>1 full day session</td>
<td>To be negotiated with staff across sites from Aug – Oct 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STAGE THREE</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in new staff induction process, and written evaluations</td>
<td>Proposed 2 days of staff induction (all new staff, 2009 and 2010)</td>
<td>Invitation to new staff in 2009 – end Term 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(This proposal was dependent on the outcome of the feedback from the first stage of the design experiment)</em></td>
<td>Invitation to new staff in 2010 – throughout the first year of employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who is conducting the research?

**Dr Raymond Brown**
Senior Investigator and Primary Supervisor, Senior Lecturer, School of Education and Professional Studies, Gold Coast Campus, Griffith University
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**Ann Morgan,**
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School of Education and Professional Studies, Gold Coast Campus, Griffith University
Telephone: (07) 5552 9789
Mob: 0447 335488
Email: ann.morgan2@griffithuni.edu.au

Why is the research being conducted?
For some young Australians, engagement in traditional schooling is untenable, due to complex social, emotional and intellectual needs and past experiences of failure and exclusion. A system of non-traditional, flexible schools in Queensland is providing an alternative. Educators who work in these contexts develop different ways of ‘being’ educator. In this setting, ‘educators’ may include registered teachers, educational support workers, youth workers, social workers and a range of other workers.

This research is being conducted in order to hear the stories and experiences of workers within the flexible network, and to better understand how their way of ‘being’ educator supports the needs of young people in this context. It is hoped that these stories may be used to inform the collaborative design of professional development and enhance the new staff induction processes within the network.

The research forms part of a Doctor of Philosophy degree at Griffith University. This means that the researcher will have two supervisors, Dr. Raymond Brown and Dr. Debbie Heck, who oversee the work. They are also part of a research team exploring “A Values Approach to School Renewal” which is being conducted within the network.

What you will be asked to do
This questionnaire is part of the first of three phases of the research project and should take approximately 20 -30 minutes to complete. You do not need to answer every question in the Questionnaire unless you wish to do so.

The basis by which participants will be selected or screened
All staff of the FLC Network are being invited to complete the general staff questionnaire. There will be an attempt to get representation from at least three school sites and from a range of staff working in different roles.
The expected benefits of the research
Primarily it is hoped that staff who are working with young people will benefit from hearing the stories of colleagues, through making professional practice explicit. It is also hoped that new staff may benefit from enhanced staff induction and professional development. It is possible that workers in other educational contexts may learn more about the different ways of ‘being’ educator, which could assist in their relationships with young people who are disengaged and at-risk of becoming early school leavers.

Risks to you
This project involves no risk to participants and all research sessions will be conducted at a time suitable to staff.

Your confidentiality
All data collected will be treated as strictly confidential and participants’ identities will not be revealed, their names will not appear in any documents published as a result of this research. However, pseudonyms rather than participants’ names will be used in publications. Confidentiality of participants’ identities will be further secured by ensuring that the data and the pseudonym code key will be stored separately. All data collected will be stored in a secure location and the only people with access to it will be the PhD Candidate and her supervisors, Dr Raymond Brown and Dr Debbie Heck. Data from the questionnaire will be securely stored at the Griffith University, Gold Coast campus, for the duration of the project for the purpose of data analysis, and for 5 years thereafter, at which time they will be destroyed.

Your participation is voluntary
Participation in the research will be by general invitation to FLC staff and participants may withdraw from the study at any time without providing an explanation and without penalty. Your decision to participate, or not to participate in the research, will in no way impact upon your relationship with the FLC Network and Edmund Rice Education Australia.

Mechanism for distribution and return of Questionnaires
The Questionnaire will be distributed at the general staff days in April, 2009 to all staff. It is requested that all completed questionnaires are returned, sealed and posted in the Reply-Paid envelope provided.

Questions / further information
If you have any questions or would like further information about this project, you can contact Ann Morgan on 07 5552 8636 (Griffith University Gold Coast Campus) Mobile: 0447 335488 or email at Ann.Morgan2@student.griffith.edu.au
If you would like to speak to either of my supervisors, you can contact them as listed below:

Dr Raymond Brown
Telephone: (07) 5552 8333
Facsimile: (07) 5552 8599
E-mail: ray.brown@griffith.edu.au

Dr Debbie Heck
Telephone: (07) 55528013
Facsimile: (07) 5552 8599
E-mail: d.heck@griffith.edu.au
The ethical conduct of this research
Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). If potential participants have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the research project they should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on 3735 5585 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

Feedback to you
Results of the questionnaire will be collated and used in the research project. A general summary of research outcomes from this project will be made available to participants at the completion of the study.

Funding of this Research
This research has been funded through an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant and is a partnership between Edmund Rice Education Australia and Griffith University. The PhD candidate is a part-time worker within the Flexible Learning Centre Network. Participation in the research is voluntary and participants can withdraw at any stage without penalty or impact on their relationship with Edmund Rice Education Australia.

Expressing consent
Completion and return of this Questionnaire indicates your consent to participate in the research. Please detach this sheet and retain it for your later reference. Return questionnaire with the REPLY PAID envelope by Friday April 24.
APPENDIX C

ON GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY LETTERHEAD
General Staff Questionnaire

(Please note: responses to this survey will only be used for the purpose of the research project and will only be seen by the researcher and her supervisors. Any third party will not be given access to these responses except when they are collated and individual participant responses are not identifiable).

Professional Identity
General Demographics:

Q 1. Age: (please tick box)
   18 - 30 [ ] 31 - 40 [ ] 41- 50 [ ] 51- 60 [ ] 61 & over [ ]

Q 2. Gender:_________________

Q 3. Relevant Qualifications:
_________________________________________ ____________________

Q 4. What is your role/s at your school site? (please tick all relevant boxes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registered Teacher</th>
<th>Education Support worker (teacher aide)</th>
<th>Social Worker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Worker</td>
<td>Chaplain</td>
<td>Youth Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Placement worker</td>
<td>Sessional Musician</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin Support Officer</td>
<td>Counsellor</td>
<td>Family Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: (please name)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q 5. Number of years working at FLC sites in the network? _______

Q 6. Previous Work History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Kinds of organizations e.g., school, youth agency, other</th>
<th>Number of years experience</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

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Q 7. Write 5 words that describe you as an educator within your current role/s ('educator' is used in its broadest sense – not just registered teachers).
1. ____________________
2. ____________________
3. ____________________
4. ____________________
5. ____________________

Q 8. List what you consider to be 5 important aspects of your work. After listing these, please prioritize in the second column by numbering 1 – 5 (1 being most important and 5 being of less importance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPORTANT ASPECT OF MY WORK</th>
<th>PRIORITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q 9. A metaphor or image of myself as worker
Choose one or more of the images/metaphors below, or create your own, to describe how you see yourself as a worker with young people in your school community. Give reasons for your choice, e.g.,

a) A frog. I’m sensitive to the environment around me. I can gauge the climate and health of my surrounds.
b) An arrow in flight. I cut through the air and have a clear and decisive view of my targets and goals. I hit the mark and don’t skirt around the issues.
c) Bamboo. I grow tall but can bend and bow in the storms without breaking. I grow in bunches and spread my roots deep and wide with a firm grip on the ground. I can’t easily be uprooted and am resilient and strong.

d) A ringmaster
e) A racing car driver
f) A mushroom
g) A juggler
h) A policeman/woman
i) A shark
j) An entertainer
k) A surgeon
l) A bear
m) A tight-rope walker
n) An events manager
o) A crow
p) A magician
q) A marathon runner
r) A hawk
s) A clown/jester
t) A negotiator/mediator
u) A gum tree

Other . . . (persona, animal, bird, plant, any life form – anything you choose to imagine)

Metaphor/ Image:__________________________________________________________________________

Reason for Choice__________________________________________________________________________
Q10. My professional support comes from:
Please tick one box in each row.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Support</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely 1-2/yr</th>
<th>Sometimes 1-2/term</th>
<th>Regularly Fortnightly or monthly</th>
<th>Often 1/week or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Administrative support staff at my FLC</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b) My colleagues</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Other workers with similar roles to myself</td>
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<tr>
<td>d) Network administrative support staff</td>
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<td>e) The coordinator of my FLC</td>
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<td>f) The FLC Chaplain</td>
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<td>g) The young people in my care</td>
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<td>h) Workers with other work related expertise</td>
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<tr>
<td>i) The Network team</td>
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<tr>
<td>j) My external professional supervisor</td>
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<tr>
<td>k) My own expertise</td>
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<tr>
<td>l) Other . . . please state who or what</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q11. Three most important sources of professional support.
From the above list choose:

a) The most important source of support:

b) The second most important source of support:

c) The third most important source of support:
Q 12. Working Collaboratively with Others (Collaboration is understood here as staff working jointly with shared values, taking action toward common goals)
Please tick one box in each row.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>I regularly access the expertise of other workers in the network.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>Regular planning with other staff is not a priority for me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c)</td>
<td>The level of collaboration with others at my FLC is suitable for me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d)</td>
<td>I prefer to problem-solve myself rather than consult other workers.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>e)</td>
<td>I have a clear understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of other workers at my FLC.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>f)</td>
<td>I do not regularly access the expertise of other workers at my FLC.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>g)</td>
<td>It is important to me to consistently plan and work together with other staff at my FLC.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>h)</td>
<td>I would prefer to work more collaboratively with other staff.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>i)</td>
<td>I have a clear understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of the Network Team.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>j)</td>
<td>I have a low expectation of collaboration with other staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>k)</td>
<td>I can easily ask for help from other workers when I am uncertain or ‘stuck’ with regard to how I work with a young person.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>l)</td>
<td>I am not aware of the expertise of other workers in the network.</td>
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<tr>
<td>m)</td>
<td>I am confident that any question I have will be answered willingly and respectfully by my peers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>n)</td>
<td>I am aware of the expertise of other workers in the network.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>o)</td>
<td>I am aware of the expertise of other workers at my FLC.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>p)</td>
<td>When faced with a challenge I ask for support from other workers.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>q)</td>
<td>I plan and prepare better alone as I can ensure that my aims and goals are met.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q13. Staff Collaboration at my FLC
Please tick one box in each row.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>Staff at my FLC are willing to collaborate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>The time available for collaboration at my FLC is reasonable.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c)</td>
<td>Staff at my FLC do not seem willing to collaborate with other staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>d)</td>
<td>There is not enough time available for collaboration with other staff at my FLC.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>e)</td>
<td>The process of collaboration amongst staff at my FLC is not particularly relevant to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>f)</td>
<td>Staff at my FLC are interested in collaboration with other staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>g)</td>
<td>Interest in collaboration amongst staff at my FLC does not appear to be strong.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>h)</td>
<td>Collaboration amongst staff at my FLC is a meaningful process.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please comment on your perspective of collaboration at your FLC:
Q 14. Ways of Working with Others
Please tick one box in each row.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) The <em>four principles</em> are usually enacted between staff at my FLC.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b) My experience and perspectives are valued by my colleagues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>c) Staff meetings are a balance between information sharing and relevant discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>d) My ideas and perspectives are listened to.</td>
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<tr>
<td>e) I am comfortable presenting my viewpoint to other staff and am confident I will be heard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>f) Problem solving usually occurs through discussion and collaboration.</td>
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<tr>
<td>g) I feel respected and valued by other workers at my FLC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>h) I prefer to plan in a team context to get a wider range of experience and perspectives.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) My colleagues value and actively support my cultural perspective.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>j) I regularly share resources and ideas with other staff.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) Staff meetings are an opportunity for me to share ideas and contribute suggestions freely.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l) The <em>four principles</em> are not regularly enacted between staff at my FLC.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m) Most staff meetings include information sharing rather than discussion.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>n) My cultural perspective is not always appreciated or taken into account by my colleagues.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for taking the time to complete this Questionnaire. Please return with the REPLY PAID envelope by Friday April 24.
DEFINITION KEY for SCALES IN STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE:

Q 10. Professional Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale:</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Regularly</th>
<th>Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitions:</td>
<td>Does not occur at all</td>
<td>May occur once or twice a year</td>
<td>May occur once or twice a term - not regularly</td>
<td>Fortnightly or monthly – at regular intervals</td>
<td>At least once a week or more, sometimes daily</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q12. Working Collaboratively with Others
Q13. Staff Collaboration at my FLC
Q14. Ways of Working with Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale:</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitions:</td>
<td>Am totally opposed to or against this statement</td>
<td>General difference of opinion (no strong emotion)</td>
<td>Can’t decide either way</td>
<td>Am of the same opinion</td>
<td>Totally Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D  
ON GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY LETTERHEAD  
Staff Consent Form for Interviews

Research Project: Different ways of ‘Being’ Educator:  
An Exploration of Professional Identity and Development,  
in contexts of non-traditional flexible schooling

RESEARCH TEAM:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PhD Research Candidate:</th>
<th>University Supervisors:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ann Morgan</td>
<td>Dr Raymond Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone: (07) 5552 8636</td>
<td>Telephone: (07) 5552 8333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mob: 0447 335488</td>
<td>Facsimile: (07) 5552 8599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:Ann.Morgan2@student.griffith.edu.au">Ann.Morgan2@student.griffith.edu.au</a></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:ray.brown@griffith.edu.au">ray.brown@griffith.edu.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr Debbie Heck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Telephone (07) 5552 8013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facsimile: (07) 5552 8599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:d.heck@griffith.edu.au">d.heck@griffith.edu.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information package and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that my involvement in this research will require the PhD Research Candidate (as recorded above) to interview me and this should take approximately one hour;
- I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded and subsequently erased once a transcript and data analysis has been completed;
- I understand that I will be given the opportunity at a subsequent meeting with the researcher to view and edit the transcript of my interview;
- I understand that the data will be securely stored on the Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus for the duration of the project and for 5 years thereafter, at which time it will be destroyed;
- I understand that a de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes, including informing the Focus Group in Phase 2 of the research project in a collaborative process of designing New Staff Induction and Professional Development opportunities within the network. However, I understand that my anonymity will at all times be safeguarded;
- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;
- I understand the risks involved;
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research;
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without comment and without penalty;
- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the candidate’s supervisors Dr Raymond Brown and/or Dr Debbie Heck;
- I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on 3735 5585 (or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project; and
- I agree to participate in the project.

Name

Signature

Date

PhD Research Candidate: Ann Morgan  
University Supervisors: Dr Raymond Brown, Dr Debbie Heck

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information package and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that my involvement in this research will require the PhD Research Candidate (as recorded above) to interview me and this should take approximately one hour;
- I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded and subsequently erased once a transcript and data analysis has been completed;
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- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;
- I understand the risks involved;
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research;
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without comment and without penalty;
- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the candidate’s supervisors Dr Raymond Brown and/or Dr Debbie Heck;
- I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on 3735 5585 (or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project; and
- I agree to participate in the project.

Name

Signature

Date

PhD Research Candidate: Ann Morgan  
University Supervisors: Dr Raymond Brown, Dr Debbie Heck
APPENDIX E

General Information for Interviews

Thank you for taking time to be interviewed. Your contribution is valued. Besides gathering some general information regarding your background and experience, there are four areas around your work that I’d like to talk with you about: What works; What supports; What connects; and What is valued. At any stage if you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Ann Morgan
PhD Candidate

Professional Identity

Name: ___________________________ Date of Interview: _________

General Demographics:

Q 1. Age: (please tick box)
   18 - 30 [ ] 31- 40 [ ] 41- 50 [ ] 51-60 [ ] 61 & over [ ]

Q 2. Gender: __________________

Q 3. Relevant Qualifications:
   ___________________________________________________________

Q 4. What is your role/s at your school site? (please tick all relevant boxes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Kinds of organizations e.g., school, youth agency, other</th>
<th>Number of years experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registered Teacher</td>
<td>Education Support worker (teacher aide)</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Worker</td>
<td>Chaplain</td>
<td>Youth Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Placement worker</td>
<td>Sessional Musician</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin Support Officer</td>
<td>Counsellor</td>
<td>Family Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: (please name)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q 5. Length of time working at FLC sites in the network? _____________

Q 6. Previous Work History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Kinds of organizations e.g., school, youth agency, other</th>
<th>Number of years experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

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APPENDIX F
Interview Schedule for Stage One Interviews

Five Key Areas of Interview Questions:

General demographic information and personal story
- Can you tell me what your role is and how long you’ve been working at ________?
- Can you tell me your story of how you came to do this work?

What works? (specifically related to ways of working with young people)
- What is it about the way you work with young people that ‘works’ or is most effective?
- Where do you want to be in five years time?

What supports?
(exploring ways of professional learning - what are the ways staff experience professional support, including questions on what is seen as necessary for new staff induction and professional development)
- What are the things that have supported you most in your work here?
- What professional development and staff induction do you feel is most important for new staff coming into the network?
- What have you experienced yourself? What do you think might work?

What connects? (specifically related to ways of working with other staff)
- Does the emphasis on relationships with young people in the network also influence the development of professional relationships and ways of working together in a multi-disciplinary context? How so?

What is valued? (Specifically related to ways of valuing – both at a personal and organisational level).
- What do you feel is valued the most in the work? How is that expressed on a day to day basis? Can you give me examples from your work?

Any other comments, questions?
APPENDIX G

Model of the Coding Scheme for Interview Data Analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporting Young People</th>
<th>Staff Relationships &amp; Support</th>
<th>Practical Processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the needs of young people</td>
<td>Multidisciplinary practice &amp; collaboration</td>
<td>Situated Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognising the agency of young people</td>
<td>Productive relationships among staff</td>
<td>Transformation of Professional Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning choices support</td>
<td>Staff support</td>
<td>Critical Reflective practice: Awareness to advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relationships support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff Induction and Professional Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX H

Interview Codes with Definitions

Ways of working: Supporting YP (SYP)
In alternative education sites, the responsibility to initiate and promote supportive, positive and caring relationships with young people, starts with the staff.

Code: SYP1 Understanding the needs of YP
In alternative education sites, young people’s needs are complex and are understood in a holistic way. They include social, emotional, intellectual and physical needs. Staff perceptions about young people’s needs are further explored through the identification of the code in any of the following three contexts:

**Context of identification** – how staff identify and understand the needs of young people e.g., young people present with physical needs such as lack of food or sleep, pregnancy.

**Context of response** – how staff respond to the needs of young people e.g., staff allow young people time to organise breakfast or refer them to a youth worker/counsellor.

**Context of valuing** – how staff value the needs of young people e.g., how staff listen to young people.

Code: SYP2 Recognising agency of YP
In alternative education sites, young people’s agency includes their ability to act in and on the world, make decisions and take responsibility for their own learning. Agency is enacted in and through relationships with others. Staff perceptions of how they recognise the agency of young people is further explored through the identification of the code in any of the following three contexts:

**Context of identification** – how staff identify, understand and recognise the agency of young people to act in and on the world, make decisions and retain their own sense of
power in their life direction choices e.g., staff recognise that young people can make their own learning choices.

**Context of response** – how staff respond to the agency of young people through respecting their capacity to be active participants who take responsibility for their own learning e.g., staff provide a range of learning options for young people to choose; staff respect the choices of young people even when they may not agree with them.

**Context of valuing** – how staff value the agency of young people evident in their stories and experiences e.g., staff recognise their role as mentors and guides rather than decision makers for young people.

**Code: SYP3 Learning choices support**

In alternative education sites, curriculum is understood in a broad sense, having orientations towards personal, social, cultural, vocational, and economic functions (Brady & Kennedy, 2010). Learning choices support is understood as the ways staff facilitate opportunities for educational engagement through relevant, flexible and meaningful curriculum. Staff perceptions of learning choices support are further explored through the identification of the code in any of the following three contexts:

**Context of identification** – how staff identify and understand which curriculum orientation/s is most appropriate for each young person in the learning context e.g., staff may place young people in an induction group when they arrive with an emphasis on understanding the principles.

**Context of response** – how staff respond supportively to the unique interests, capacities and challenges faced by each young person, as they explore options for engaging in curriculum orientations e.g., staff provide differentiated curriculum and options for young people to choose
Context of valuing – how staff value the diversity of student interests and needs in their facilitation of curriculum orientations through a range of educational pathways e.g., staff offer a range of learning choices including Vocational Education and Training (VET), Study Area Specifications (SASs) that are authority registered subjects with the Queensland Studies Authority, and school based subjects or project based learning.

Code: SYP4 Positive relationships support

Whilst young people may present with a range of external characteristics typical of disengagement, staff endeavour to provide positive support rather than punitive and reactive responses to young people. Staff perceptions of positive relationships support with young people are further explored through the identification of the code in any of the following three contexts:

Context of identification – how staff identify and understand the personal characteristics of each young person despite initial external characteristics of disengagement e.g., staff recognise each young person as an individual with potential rather than a difficult student to be managed

Context of response – how staff respond positively to young people through developing an egalitarian learning relationship e.g., staff endeavour to develop a mutual relationship of respect with each young person, adopting a respectful and listening attitude rather than an authoritarian positioning of themselves in the classroom

Context of valuing – how staff value the need to develop positive relationships with young people as a first priority and the basis of a safe and supportive learning environment e.g., staff recognise that building relationships with young people takes time and needs to be a priority in the classroom and wider school community.
Ways of working: Staff relationships and support (SR&S)

In alternative education sites the experiences of staff relationships and support are a key factor in achieving positive educational outcomes for young people.

Code: SR&S1 Multi-disciplinary practice & collaboration

In alternative education sites, multi-disciplinary practice and collaboration between workers is necessary. In this context, workers may include registered teachers, educational support workers, youth workers, social workers and a range of other workers. The meaning of collaboration in this context is further explored through workers’ experiences of collaboration across professional disciplines. Staff perceptions of multi-disciplinary practice and collaboration are further explored through the identification of the code in any of the following three contexts:

**Context of identification** – how staff identify and understand the nature of multidisciplinary practice and collaboration with other workers at a local site level and across the network e.g., staff understand the differing roles, skills and ways of working of other workers within their school site.

**Context of response** – how staff respond to and enact opportunities for multidisciplinary practice at a local site level and across the network e.g., staff access cultural expertise of support workers such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers.

**Context of valuing** – how staff value multidisciplinary practice at a local site level and across the network e.g., staff make time to meet with workers from other disciplines for joint planning and assessment of young people’s needs.

Code: SR&S2 Productive relationships among staff

In alternative education sites the ideals of support, care, respect, honesty and equity in staff relationships are promoted and balanced with the ability to resolve conflict constructively. In this context, staff may include registered teachers,
educational support workers, youth workers, social workers and a range of other workers. Staff perceptions of relationships with colleagues are further explored through the identification of the code in any of the following three contexts:

**Context of identification** – how staff identify and understand their experiences of relationships (productive or otherwise), with staff in their school context and across the network e.g., staff recognise the added value of having workers from different backgrounds on site that they can access for advice.

**Context of response** – how staff respond to being in a context in which productive staff relationships are promoted e.g., staff participate confidently in meetings with the understanding their perspectives will be heard and respected; staff are aware of processes that will support safe conflict resolution.

**Context of valuing** – how staff develop and maintain productive relationships among staff at a local site level and across the network e.g., staff actively participate in meetings (formal and informal) that promote sharing of practice including challenges and difficulties and feel safe in doing so.

**Code: SR&S3 Staff support**

In alternative education sites different kinds and levels of support are available to staff. These impact at local site, and network wide levels. Staff support may include social and emotional support e.g., debriefing and counselling; professional development e.g., self-care; curriculum implementation; organisational policies such as child protection and workplace health and safety. Other practical examples of staff support include: group and individual RPGs; planning days; regular staff meetings at local sites; whole staff network days; staff reflection/retreat days; and, staff induction. Staff perceptions of what supports them are further explored through the identification of the code in any of the following three contexts:
**Context of identification** – how staff identify and understand the initiatives in place to support them e.g., staff are aware of support structures and how to access them both locally and across the network

**Context of response** – how staff respond to opportunities to engage with support initiatives e.g., staff clearly know and access their preferred support structures

**Context of valuing** – how staff value the support initiatives in place e.g., level of staff participation in a range of support activities (both voluntary and mandatory).

**Ways of Professional learning (PL)**

In alternative education sites, professional learning is characterised by reciprocal relationships. The roles of learner and teacher are not static but are interchangeable and include young people as well as staff.

**Code:PL1 Situated learning**

In alternative education sites professional learning is predominantly characterised by situated learning or legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Situated learning includes learning by observing, by doing, by shadowing, by being mentored and by gradually taking on more responsibility in the presence of more experienced others. In this way learners become part of a community of practice as a newcomer or a person adopting a new role (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). Staff perceptions about situated learning are further explored through the identification of the code in any of the following three contexts:

**Context of identification** – how staff identify and understand the notion of situated learning in the school setting e.g., staff talk about their experiences of learning how to use the four principles through modelling other experienced staff.

**Context of response** – how staff respond to the notion and experience of situated learning in the school setting e.g., staff willingly buddy and mentor new staff, taking on the role of giving guidance.
Context of valuing – how staff value the notion and experience of situated learning in the school setting e.g., staff express desire to visit other sites for the sake of situated learning in another context and give personal time to achieve this. Staff welcome others who come seeking some mentoring and give time to sharing their experiences.

Code: PL2 Transformation of Professional Identity

In alternative education sites staff and young people “walk together on journeys of individual and collective transformation. [They] are sustained by and celebrate [their] commitment to hope, optimism and a belief in the possible” (Edmund Rice Education Flexible Learning Centres Network, 2011, p.3). In this context staff are invited to be changed and transformed in their professional identity through the ways they work with young people. Staff perceptions about how they have experienced change and growth in their professional identity, are further explored through the identification of the code in the data in any of the following three contexts:

Context of identification – how staff identify and understand the notion and experience of change and transformation in their professional identity e.g., staff talk about their own experiences of changing professional identity since working in the network.

Context of response – how staff respond to opportunities for change and transformation in their professional identity e.g., staff continue in the work despite demands of the role.

Context of valuing – how staff value the notion and experience of change and transformation of their professional identity e.g., staff willingly take time to share their experiences of transformation with other newcomers.

Code: PL3 Critical Reflective practice: Awareness to advocacy

In alternative education sites critical reflective practice for staff includes the development of self-awareness, awareness of others and awareness of the need for
broader system change and advocacy. In this context the significance of critical reflective practice for staff in their work with young people is highlighted. Staff perceptions about how they develop effective strategies for critical reflective practice are further explored through the identification of the code in any of the following three contexts:

**Context of identification** – how staff identify and understand the notion of critical reflective practice in their work with young people e.g., staff talk about the need for self-awareness and awareness of others in the work with young people.

**Context of response** – how staff respond to opportunities to explore and develop critical reflective practice strategies in their work with young people e.g., staff willingly participate in group supervision and RPGs.

**Context of valuing** – how staff value the notion and experience of critical reflective practice in their work with young people e.g., staff are allocated regular times to participate in critical reflective practice.

**Code: PL4 Staff Induction & Professional Development (PD)**

In alternative education sites staff induction and professional development are critical for learning how to work with disenfranchised young people. In this context staff induction and professional development may occur at local site levels, network level or through participation in external opportunities for professional learning. It may be relevant for new staff or for continuing staff being inducted into new ways of working. Staff perceptions about effective ways of learning how to work with disenfranchised young people are further explored through the identification of the code in any of the following three contexts:
Context of identification – how staff identify and understand staff induction and professional development opportunities that are offered e.g., staff are aware of requirements for staff induction and ongoing professional development opportunities

Context of response – how staff respond to opportunities for staff induction and professional development e.g., staff willingly participate in local and network level activities for staff induction and professional development

Context of valuing – how staff value new staff induction and professional development as a way of further enhancing their understanding of the philosophy and values underpinning the work with disenfranchised young people e.g.,

They value it because: staff are open to new ideas and processes and willingly participate OR

They do not value it because: staff are not open to new ideas and processes and do not participate willingly (or somewhere in between).

Over 90% of staff attend an annual three day residential whole staff network days.
APPENDIX I
A Snapshot of Questionnaire Participant Details

A snapshot of participant details will be presented through descriptive statistics collected through the use of a questionnaire. The staff questionnaire was the first data collection method used in the research project and it was completed by approximately 38% of staff across the system of flexi schools (n=30).

Roles of questionnaire respondents

The majority of staff in the flexi schools at the time the research was conducted were registered teachers and this was reflected in the results of the questionnaire with 73% of respondents identifying as such. Almost a quarter of the questionnaire respondents (23%) indicated that they had two roles in their work including various combinations of roles such as classroom teacher, education support worker, youth worker, chaplain, social worker, community development worker, counsellor, administration support worker, and job placement worker.

Age of questionnaire respondents

The age distribution of questionnaire respondents is shown in Table F1.

Table F1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Percentage of participants (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 – 30</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 – 50</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just over half of the workers (53%) were over forty years of age. In comparison to broader national statistics on teachers, these results showed little variance and were consistent with the age distribution of Australian teachers (DEEWR, 2008).
**Gender of questionnaire respondents**

Many of the questionnaire respondents were female (63%) with males comprising the remaining 37% of respondents. These results were considered in conjunction with professional background of staff at school sites such as teaching and community services, and some slight variations from national gender trends in these professions were evident. In relation to staff who were registered teachers, 48% were male and 52% of questionnaire respondents were female. The results indicated a slightly higher percentage of male teachers than occurs nationally in Australian schools in which women were predominant: 76% of primary teachers and 56% of secondary teachers were female (DEEWR, 2008). A limitation of the questionnaire was that respondents were not asked to indicate whether they were primary or secondary school trained teachers. This higher level of male teachers represented in the questionnaire respondents was not necessarily generalisable across the system of flexi schools. Reasons for the higher level cannot be determined and were beyond the scope of this data collection method. The gender results of the questionnaire were also considered in relation to staff who were community service workers (27% of questionnaire respondents). The female representation of 88% was slightly higher than national figures of 86.6% in the community service sector. This high level of female community service workers in the flexi schools was not surprising and was characteristic of the national community service workforce where women were predominant (ASU, 2007). Whilst the community service gender results were not necessarily generalisable across the system of flexi schools, it could be said that they were in keeping with national trends of the community service workforce (See Table F2: Gender breakdown of questionnaire respondents according to roles and compared with national trends).
Table F2

Gender Breakdown of Questionnaire Respondents According to Roles and Compared with National Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher questionnaire respondents</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National teacher gender breakdown (secondary)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National teacher gender breakdown (primary)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community services workers questionnaire respondents</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Community Services workers’ gender breakdown</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>86.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualifications of questionnaire respondents

Of those staff who completed the questionnaire, 73% had a Bachelor degree in Education or Social Work. Quite a significant number of those with Bachelor degree qualifications also had postgraduate qualifications including 17% with Graduate Certificates or Graduate Diplomas and another 20% with higher degrees such as a Masters or Doctoral degree. These figures were significantly higher than the national figures gathered in 2007, which indicated that around 6% of primary teachers and 9% of secondary teachers held a Masters or Doctoral degree (DEEWR, 2008). Whilst the flexi school figures for this sample were over twice the national figures, the small size of the sample and the return rate for this questionnaire indicated that the results cannot be generalised across the system of flexi schools. However, it would be reasonable to suggest that teaching staff in the flexi schools showed levels of qualifications favourably comparable to those found at a national level, indicating a very well qualified workforce in the context of the flexi schools.

Trends of qualifications for questionnaire respondents who came from the community services sector were similar to national trends in the sector. Great variations in levels of qualifications and a lack of minimum standards of qualifications
characterized the sector at a national level (Cortis, Hilferty, Chan, & Tannous, 2009). Within the questionnaire respondents 43% of workers from the community services sector had Bachelor degree qualifications, 28.5% had Certificate IV\(^5\) level qualifications within the Vocational Education and Training sector and 28.5% had no formal qualifications, but had previous work experience in the sector. Compared with teaching, a higher number of respondents did not have formal qualifications in the community services sector which also reflected national trends in the sector. (See Figure F1: Highest qualifications of questionnaire respondents in percentages).

![Figure F1. Highest qualifications of questionnaire respondents in percentages.](image)

**Years of work experience in current flexi school**

In this study, almost half of the questionnaire respondents who identified as registered teachers (45%) had been at their current school for three or more years. Less than one third (28%) of the participants who were registered teachers had been at their current flexi school for between one and three years, and just over a quarter (27%) of

\(^5\) The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (2011) describes the purpose of a Certificate IV to qualify individuals who apply a broad range of specialised knowledge and skills in varied contexts to undertake skilled work and as a pathway for further learning.
the participants who were registered teachers, were in their first year of working in the flexi schools. The national average length of time at current schools is seven years for primary teachers and eight years for secondary teachers (DEEWR, 2008). It was not possible to make a reasonable comparison of the flexi schools figures with the national figures. The flexi schools figures were influenced by the fact that three out of the five flexi school sites represented in this study had been operating for less than four years with only two of the sites having operated for over twenty years. Questionnaire respondents were not asked to indicate at which site they worked for purposes of confidentiality, and therefore it was not possible to get an indication of length of time of staff in long term sites.

Questionnaire respondents who identified themselves in other roles such as social workers and youth workers, education support workers and administration support workers, had mostly worked in the flexi schools for five or more years (66%). Approximately one third (34%) of those who had worked in other roles, had worked for less than two years in the system of flexi schools. Given the issue of high staff turnover experienced in the non-government community services workforce in Australia, due to “heavy workloads, low levels of pay, limited opportunities for career advancement” (ASU, 2007; Cortis et al., 2009, p. 84) these results appear to be out of step with national trends. The scope of this study did not enable further exploration of why this may have been the case. (See Figure F2: Years of work experience in current flexi school of questionnaire respondents).
Previous work history

There appeared to be great diversity of life and work experience amongst questionnaire respondents who were registered teachers. Many had held multiple roles in a range of different careers outside of education. National teacher survey statistics suggest that the decision to enter the teaching profession is made at secondary school (62% of primary and 39% of secondary) or tertiary education (10% and 24% respectively) (DEEWR, 2008) and that only 11% of primary school teachers and 17% of secondary school teachers were in other employment when they decided to become teachers. In the flexi schools, 23% of registered teachers had other careers before teaching indicating a higher rate of employment outside of teaching before entering the profession. Additionally, national statistics on teachers suggest that 30% of primary teachers and 25% of secondary teachers take extended leave (more than 12 months) and that 20% of teachers have resigned at some stage and then returned to teaching, suggesting substantial movement in and out of teaching. In the flexi schools’ context these figures were double the national trend with 41% having moved out of teaching into other employment and then returning to teaching, usually into the flexi schools’
context. Other career experiences included working in areas such as the arts, business, health, hospitality, non-government organisations, public service, and in the community services sector. (See Figure F3: Previous work history of registered teacher questionnaire respondents).

The reasons for the career moves were not solicited in the staff questionnaire, however, reasons for choosing to work in the system of flexi schools that have been expressed in interviews, often referred to a degree of frustration with conventional education settings related to the size of the system and its impersonal, bureaucratic nature, the larger size of student groups, and how young people were treated.

Other staff with non-teaching roles also demonstrated a variety of experience in other work contexts prior to coming to the flexi schools. The range of careers included working in community services/welfare organisations, cultural/arts, administration/office work, finance, business, hospitality, government, public service, health, and sales. (See Figure F4 Number of careers of non-teaching staff).
A summary of the snapshot of educators: Questionnaire respondents

In summary, the age and gender results of questionnaire respondents were in keeping with national trends in education and community services workforces. The results on qualifications showed at least comparable levels of qualifications to national trends with a possibility of higher levels of qualifications, although this data is not necessarily generalisable across the flexi schools. Roles in the flexi schools were predominantly education based but the length of time in current school sites could not be reasonably compared with national trends in education due to the newness of three of the five school sites. Length of time in current school sites of community service workers who responded to the questionnaire were generally longer than national figures but the research instrument did not enable reasons to be deduced. The previous work history of teaching staff in the flexi schools indicated a breadth of employment outside of teaching that was at a higher level than national trends for Australian teachers. The work history of community services staff reflected patterns of qualifications and employment in the sector at a national level.
APPENDIX J

A Snapshot of Educators who were Interviewed

This snapshot of interview participants is presented through descriptive statistics gathered through the completion of a consent form prior to the interview being conducted. The interviews were the second data collection method used in the research project and involved approximately 20% of the workforce of staff across the flexi schools (n=16) at the time the interviews were conducted.

Those interviewed represented four different school sites, four outreaches and the network support team. Eight different roles were identified among this group with some participants having two roles (e.g., registered teacher and site coordinator). Although comparison with national trends are made in the following descriptions, these comparisons are only for points of interest and it is acknowledged that no generalisable comparisons can be made from such a small sample size.

Gender and roles of interviewees

Of the participants who were interviewed, 44% were male and 56% were female. Consideration of the breakdown of gender in terms of roles at school sites enabled comparison with national trends in education and in the community services sector. For this reason details of gender will also be presented with roles in order to make comparisons with national trends.

In the group of staff interviewed 69% identified as teachers and 31% identified as community services workers (see Table G1: Roles of interviewees).

Table G1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles of interviewees</th>
<th>Percentage of Interviewees (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community services workers</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of those who identified as teachers, 55% were female and 45% were male. This breakdown of teachers according to gender was fairly consistent with national trends in secondary education where 56% of teachers were female and 44% were male (DEEWR, 2008). Of those teachers interviewed in this study, 73% were trained as secondary school teachers.

Of the 31% of interviewees who identified as community services workers, 40% were male and 60% were female. These figures were significantly different to national trends in the community services workforce where only 13.4% were male and 86.6% were female (ASU, 2007). See Table G2: Gender breakdown of interviewees according to roles and in comparison with national trends.

Table G2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers interviewed in the flexi schools</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National teacher gender breakdown (secondary)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Services Workers interviewed in the flexi schools</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Community Services workers’ gender breakdown</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>86.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, these figures do not necessarily translate across the system of flexi schools as indicated in the results from the staff questionnaire where the breakdown of male and female workers was more consistent with national trends in the community services sector, but could not necessarily be generalisable across the flexi schools. The process of selection of interview participants was random in that a general invitation was issued to all staff and then interview participants self-selected through volunteering. Only one participant who volunteered was not interviewed due to time constraints.
Age of interviewees

Those interviewed in this study could be considered mature workers in terms of age with 56% between 40 and 60 years (see Table G3: Age range of interviewees).

Table G3
Age Range of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 – 30</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 – 50</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relevant qualifications of interviewees

Of those interviewed, 81% of interviewees had degree qualifications in education or community services. Approximately one third of those with Bachelor degrees also had Masters degree qualifications. Specific details of qualifications were not included here to ensure confidentiality of participants.

Years of work experience in current flexi school

The range of years of work experience of interviewees working in the flexi schools was between six months and over 15 years. Sixty-three percent of participants had worked for over three years in the flexi schools with the average number of years across interviewees being five years (see Table G4: Interviewees’ number of years working in the flexi schools).

Table G4
Interviewees’ Number of Years Working in the Flexi Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years working in the flexi schools</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 -1 year</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>43.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more years</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A summary of the snapshot of educators: Those who were interviewed

The gender breakdown of staff interviewed in this study was consistent with national trends in education, but not necessarily in the community services sector. In terms of age, interviewees were generally mature workers with over half being between 40 and 60 years old. Interview participants had high levels of qualifications and a wide range of work experience both in and beyond education and the community services sectors. Their experience of working in the flexi schools was significant, with the average number of years of working in the flexi schools across participants being five years.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common threads in SYP1: Understanding the needs of young people</th>
<th>Common threads in SYP2: Recognising the agency of young people</th>
<th>Common threads in SYP3: Learning choices support</th>
<th>Common threads in SYP4: Positive relationship support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding the young people</td>
<td>• Giving young people choice</td>
<td>• Relationships first</td>
<td>• Relationships first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strengths-based practice</td>
<td>• Listening to young people</td>
<td>• Re-engagement strategies</td>
<td>• Relationship connected to community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trauma informed practice</td>
<td>• Trusting young people</td>
<td>• Need for structure in learning</td>
<td>• Takes time to build relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing safe &amp; supportive relationships</td>
<td>• Exercising ‘power with’ – a change in adult/ worker role</td>
<td>• Supporting young people develop a sense of achievement</td>
<td>• Listening to young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offering consistency and role-modelling to young people</td>
<td></td>
<td>• The importance of making connections</td>
<td>• Strengths-based approach to young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Taking time</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Differentiated curriculum</td>
<td>• Clear boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Questioning the purpose of education</td>
<td>• Help give young people another view – another perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Listening to young people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Qualities of educators offering relationship support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dealing with conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX L

Arriving at Strands of Common Threads Across Four Codes in Ways of Working: Supporting Young People

The clustered common threads can be seen in strands across the horizontal rows of the table. Common threads remain under the code in which they first appeared in the vertical columns of the table. Strands were identified either through repetition of common threads across two or more codes or in some cases, because they represented an important idea that may have only appeared in one code. For example, Agency of young people, was a strand that only occurred in one code – SYP2: Recognising the Agency of Young People.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code: SYP1</th>
<th>Code: SYP2</th>
<th>Code: SYP3</th>
<th>Code: SYP4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the Needs of Young People</td>
<td>Recognising the Agency of Young People</td>
<td>Learning Choices Support</td>
<td>Positive Relationship Support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STRAND 1: RELATIONSHIPS**
- Understanding the young people
- Developing safe & supportive relationships
- Relationships first
- Qualities of educators offering relationship support

**STRAND 2: CONNECTIONS**
- The importance of making connections
- Relationship connected to community
- Takes time to build relationships

**STRAND 3: TIME**
- Taking time

**STRAND 4: STRENGTHS-BASED PRACTICE**
- Promote strengths-based practice
- Supporting young people to develop a sense of achievement
- Strengths-based approach to young people

**STRAND 5: HOLDING COMPLEXITY**
- Trauma informed practice

**STRAND 6: CHANGING PERSPECTIVES**
- Questioning the purpose of education
- Help give young people another view – another perspective

**STRAND 7: LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE**
- Listening to young people
- Listening to young people
- Listening to young people

**STRAND 8: RE-ENGAGEMENT**
- Engagement
- Re-engagement strategies
- Differentiated curriculum

**STRAND 9: AGENCY OF YOUNG PEOPLE**
- Giving young people choice
- Trusting young people
- Exercising ‘power with’ – a change in adult/worker role

**STRAND 10: STRUCTURES & BOUNDARIES**
- Offering consistency & role modelling to young people
- Need for structure in learning
- Clear boundaries
APPENDIX M

Data Extracts for Eight Common Threads in the Code:
Understanding the Needs of Young People

In interviews with educators, understanding the needs of young people was talked about in a range of ways. Common threads were identified in the analysis of interview data and can be seen in Appendix Table M1.

Appendix Table M1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Threads in Understanding the Needs of Young People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the needs of young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strengths-based practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing safe &amp; supportive relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trauma informed practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Offering consistency and role modelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Taking time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Understanding young people

The first common thread that was identified in the analysis of interview data for understanding the needs of young people, included staff talking in a general way about understanding young people. Comments such as “understanding the kids – not writing them off” (INT 11, p17); “understanding where they are at” (INT 02, p.17); and starting where they are at” (INT 04, p.4) were mentioned by staff.

Strengths-based practice

The notion of understanding young people was further nuanced by a number of participants when they described how they adopted a strengths perspective to young people rather than a deficit approach, which requires seeing the dignity and potential of the young people rather than only noticing their problems (McCashen, 2005). This perspective is captured in the following response:
If you can somehow break those barriers down and get to know that person. There’s a rich little person in there, that’s got a lot of really cool opinions . . . everyone’s got something really great to do or give or learn. (INT 14, p.5)

A strengths-based approach to working with young people was articulated by another respondent when she identified that:

Many of these young people have always been regarded by really good professionals as, you know, having deficits . . . So there’s no wonder that that young person after a number of years come to the conclusion that “Oh I’m the problem and I carry these things with me that are the problem”. So if you don’t work from that model, if you start with another model of “look at your strengths”. (INT 10, p.5)

**Listening**

Listening to young people was another common thread in educators’ responses. It was seen as a practical strategy to understand the needs of young people. One of the teachers had a strong sense of the need to listen to young people in order to understand them and to be directed in action by their expressed needs. “I think that’s the essence of it, if we keep as adults getting back to listening to young people and what they're looking for” (INT 16, p.5). The commitment to listen to young people was driven by another participant’s confidence in young people’s resilience and capacity to cope:

Um, it’s listening, listening, listening and then trying to act upon what you hear with the understanding that often what young people say is not often what they mean and trying to keep talking and listening so that you can find out what they mean . . . not to fix the issue or their problem, but to help give them ways to look at it and cope with it. (INT 10 p.1)

**Safe and supportive relationships**

Staff also spoke of understanding young people in terms of the need to develop safe and supportive relationships which offer a sense of connection and belonging (Thayer-Bacon, 2004). The priority of relationships was highlighted by a worker who said that “Staff really need to be aware that the curriculum is second and the relationships are first. [New teaching staff] come in with it the other way round” (INT
For another worker the establishment of safe and supportive relationships with young people and taking the opportunity to really know the young people made a big difference to her work, especially with some young people whose behaviour she had described as particularly challenging. “You know what makes them tick and how they work and what’s happening, it’s a totally different experience” (INT 09 p.3). In terms of safe and supportive relationships, the need for commitment from staff to young people was also mentioned as important: “I think in order to create a bit of stability in these young people’s lives you need people that are committed to stay longer” (INT 08, p8).

**Trauma informed practice**

For some workers, understanding young people linked directly into knowledge of trauma informed practice, which involved developing an understanding of how some young people have been affected by trauma through abuse and neglect (see TPI and the emotional dimension: Teacher as carer, in Chapter 2: Literature Review). The impacts of abuse and neglect may include difficulties in learning, regulation of emotions, mood and attention problems, relationship and attachment difficulties, problem behaviours, hyperarousal and dissociation (Downey, 2009). In emphasising how trauma affects some young people’s capacity to interact constructively with others and engage positively with learning, one interviewee highlighted the need for knowledge.

> ... just a constant reminder of the nature of our young people and why they are the way they are, which is like the trauma and the effect of abuse ... there’s so much other stuff going on and the more we are reminded of that the more we can have the patience and tolerance [and] feel more passion towards them and compassion ... And you can't do that unless you've got the knowledge. (INT 15, p.5)

**Offering consistency and role-modelling**

Offering consistency and role-modelling to young people was another common thread in understanding the needs of young people. This was important for one worker
who made sure that she checked in with young people as a way of them experiencing consistency.

I have a group of young people that I work with and that I check in with and check how they’re going and talk with them about what they’re doing, and meet with them regularly and follow up if they’re not around. (INT 03, p.1)

Another worker felt that young people do learn about relationships through role-modelling. He offered support by understanding where they were at and by realising that change takes time.

. . . it’s about you displaying it and you role-modelling it, and kids getting it and they do get it but it takes time. It’s not gonna be overnight, you rock in and say it and the kids basically do it. It takes time. (INT 02, p.17)

Taking time

Taking time – time to care (Noddings, 1992), time to develop safe and supportive relationships (Beck & Cassidy, 2009), and appreciating time in the learning process (Cassidy & Chinnery, 2009), were other common threads in understanding the needs of young people.

Learning is not subjecting a person to ‘you’ve gotta learn this now’ you know, especially with the kids that we are working with. You need to take time you know. I think we as a society are putting too much pressure on our children to learn so quickly that you forget that the learning process takes time to develop. (INT 08, p.17)

Due to the complexity faced by many young people in their lives, it was essential that taking time be valued as an aspect of practice in the work.

It takes time . . . We have to work with young people, and take the time that it takes to get them through. What many of the young people are dealing with in their lives just does not fit neatly between school times. If that is happening we need to be prepared to stay connected with them for a lot longer than the usual two or three year senior. (INT 01, p.20)
Engagement

In relation to understanding the learning needs of young people and strategies for engagement, some staff discussed the importance of offering practical, hands-on approaches with real-life connections (Margonis, 2004, p. 42). One teacher mentioned that she tried to connect all her curriculum work to real life issues – this was her way of understanding the needs of young people for relevance and meaning, by starting with their own experience.

I think doing all sorts of life connections helps and that is not necessarily totally only life skills but when you’re doing science you make the connection to life and sometimes you make the connection of really big philosophical questions to life – like you don’t just focus on how to fill in a form, there has to be other stuff as well. (INT 04, p. 4)

Connecting to the interests of young people in a range of contexts outside of the classroom was an engagement strategy described by another one of the interviewees.

A good example would be Maths, so that you don’t have to have a Maths class, . . . Maths can be taught in the woodwork class, it can be taught out when you’re out playing volleyball or basketball. It can be taught on the beach, so, trying to look at the curriculum areas in a completely different way. (INT 12, p.4)
Recognising the agency of young people was talked about in a range of ways by staff in interviews. Common threads were identified in the analysis of interview data and can be seen in Appendix Table N1.

Table N1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Threads in Recognising the Agency of Young People</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognising the agency of young people</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Listening to young people</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Giving young people choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Trusting young people</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Exercising ‘power with’ – democratising the learning space</td>
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Listening to young people

Listening to young people was a common thread identified in the data analysis related to recognising the agency of young people. Listening to young people included the need to be informed by the young people and the importance of acting on what is heard from the young people. This was summed up by a worker when she said: “Before I can do anything, I need to be informed by the young people, and then it’s a matter of making that connection” (INT 01, p.5). According to staff, listening supports young people to enact their own solutions, allowing them to drive outcomes according to what they themselves are looking for. A youth worker recognised that young people can work out their own solutions and that they mainly want to be heard.

You don't always want to give them the solutions, ‘cause they have it. They have it, they know it. It's about you helping them get to their solution, and actually making them think about it . . . they just don't want you to tell them, they just want you to listen. (INT 13, p. 7-8)
**Giving young people choice**

Another common thread in recognising the agency of young people that was identified in the data analysis was giving young people choice. This was discussed in a number of ways including the need to respect the choices made by young people even in the face of disagreement. This notion was linked to a rights perspective, highlighting the young people’s right to choose and not trying to force young people to do what adults perceive they should.

I think I’ve built up a really good detachment from the young people, even though I love them dearly, and I want the best for them, but they’ve still got to make their choices and they’ve got to live their lives . . . I s’pose it’s always remembering to respect the young person, it’s their right to choose, positive or negative it’s their right to choose and that’s the hard bit cause you want to wrap them up. (INT 02, p.8 & 13)

Helping young people find their own passion thus enabling them to do things that they want was another dimension of how choice was perceived by a worker as she recognised the agency of young people.

I really enjoy the kind of adult, young adult to adult kind of model. You’re here ‘cause you want to be’ . . . not kind of trying to force people to do things . . . Just helping people find their passion. Once they’ve got a passion . . . you do support and stuff, but when they’ve got a passion then they’ve got a drive, they’ve got a reason to do stuff. (INT 03, p.5)

**Trusting young people**

Respecting the capacity of young people to make choices can be linked to another common thread identified in the data analysis, trusting young people. Trust was expressed in three ways: trusting what young people want; trusting what young people know; and trusting what young people can do. What young people want was linked to
them finding their own ‘spark’ and ‘passion’. “I guess people doing things that they want to. People getting spark, people getting passion - I value that” (INT 03, p.16).

Trusting what young people know was captured by a teacher who fostered young people’s agency by trusting that they already had a significant knowledge and skill base. She was conscious of highlighting this as she supported young people who were choosing to re-engage in education.

. . . but it’s sort of letting them understand how they’ve actually already got a whole lot of skills, but perhaps not the awareness around those skills, and that’s the basis of their learning, they’ve actually learnt a whole lot. (INT 01, p.5)

Trusting what young people can do required that workers give responsibility to young people. This was seen in situations requiring planning and organising:

. . . just organising outings, and stuff like that. It’s only an hour but, like this term we might organise a half day thing, or a full day thing or a camp. But you know, go play basketball, go for a walk down the beach, we’ll go and do that, stuff like that. It’s up to them to organise it. (INT 11, p.4)

It was also evident in situations requiring problem solving of issues:

And at the end of the day . . . which is what I do with the grade 11s and other young people today is to say, it’s up to you, you know it’s our school, it’s not my school, it’s your school. Like you need to bring your responsibility, you need to bring your participation and respect. (INT 10, p.18-19)

Another example of staff trusting what young people can do with their peers was seen in a story about a group of young people shared in an interview.

One young person was ready to take off. And yet, two or three others, in particular one other, but there were two or three standing in the background beckoning that other person back. Just saying, you know, ‘this can be worked out’. And I think that that’s part of it. Jay is wanting to walk out the door and you’ve got three other [young] people saying ‘no, don’t do that. Come back and we can get it sorted. There is a better way’. (INT 07, p.17)
Exercising ‘Power with’ – democratising the learning space

Finally, recognising the agency of young people through listening, giving choice, respecting their right to choose and trusting them, ultimately leads to a change in the power dynamics between adults and young people in the learning community – exercising ‘power with’ rather than ‘power over’ young people (Slattery, Butigan, Pelicaric, & Preston-Pile, 2005, p. 115; Starhawk, 1988; Warren, 2005). The common thread of exercising ‘power with’ requires adults to foster more mutual and collaborative relationships with young people (Nabavi & Lund, 2012), shifting the power dynamic inherent in more traditional teacher/student roles in which the teacher is situated as the expert and the young person as the recipient of teacher expertise. A number of educators talked about their perceptions of having as much to learn from young people as they have to teach young people. Vygotsky describes this quality of teaching/learning relationship through his concept of ‘obuchenie’ which captures the idea that all participants are both teachers and learners, and every act of teaching is also an act of learning (Cole, 2009; Vadeboncoeur, 2011). This kind of mutuality requires a letting go of traditional paradigms of control in order to embrace and enact cooperative paradigms (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005).

I guess I don’t want to be seen as an authority person. I’m not above them, we’re all people in this community and that’s how I’m gonna approach it in a respectful way and not that I’m a senior person in this environment. I don’t want to be seen or approached in that way. (INT 06, p.17)

I feel I have as much to learn from the young people here as they have to learn from me. [There is] that real feeling that we’re all on a level playing field. (INT 06, pp.20 - 21)

A degree of humility and the capacity to demonstrate one’s humanity through sometimes being vulnerable was perceived by some staff as important. For example, being able to admit mistakes and apologise to other workers or young people, or being
willing to show sensitivity through emotions, demonstrates shifts in power dynamics.

One participant described it as openness to being vulnerable and sensitive to what the young people have to offer.

I think it happens by being open to the fact of, by being a little bit vulnerable. By putting yourself out there and doing the normal things and doing them sort of sensitively, you know where young people are coming from . . . having a sensitivity to young people and what they’ve got to offer as well. (INT 07, pp.9 - 10)
APPENDIX O

Data Extracts for Seven Common Threads in the Code: Learning Choices Support

Learning choices support was talked about in several different ways in interviews with educators. Common threads were identified in the analysis of interview data and can be seen in Appendix Table O1.

Appendix Table O1

Common Threads in Learning Choices Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning choices support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Relationships first</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Re-engagement strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Need for structure in learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Supporting young people develop a sense of achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The importance of making connections</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Differentiated curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Questioning the purpose of education</td>
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Relationships first

Common threads in the code of learning choices support included an emphasis on relationships first. In order for young people to be able to engage in learning, the importance of developing positive relationships first was consistently identified in the analysis of interview data. A number of staff identified that the ability to relate to others was a positive educational outcome:

I love that the relationships come first and, I mean as an educator we know that’s the most important thing, that is somebody’s comfortable and confident, . . . that’s what’s going to provide them with opportunities in terms of relationships, friendships, social networking and work – and that’s the most important thing you know. (INT 09, p.18)

This shift to prioritising relationships first can sometimes be challenging for new staff.

[When new staff] became more relaxed they became more aware that the content of a curriculum isn’t all that significantly important in the young people’s life at the moment. It’s not denying the value of learning but learning is, well you start by saying, education is much broader than two As, Bs or Cs. (INT 05, p.27)
**Re-engagement strategies**

A second common thread was articulated as re-engagement strategies. Making real life connections, doing hands-on and practical activities were re-engagement strategies identified by staff.

I find that the kids also respond really well to the feeling of having learned something . . . And the internet helps and that’s one thing that works with them is finding all sorts of curious demonstrations on the internet – all sorts of interactive things that they can manipulate. (INT 04, p.4)

Another important strategy for re-engagement was making the young people the centre of learning. “Just joining in is the first step under really structured guidelines . . . and the kids are always the centre of my curriculum” (INT 14, p.4). Enjoyment in the learning process for staff and young people was also identified as a strategy for re-engagement. One worker talked about finding his own level of enjoyment in teaching as a strategy that he adopted:

What I do is, if I have to teach something I make it enjoyable for myself. So I go how will I make it so it’s enjoyable for myself to teach? And it will be enjoyable for the kids. So that’s the way I approach it and it works. (INT 11, p.3)

A youth worker articulated his view of what education should be:

For me personally I never really liked just sitting in a classroom and being fed information after information. For me education shouldn’t be that way it should be interactive, it should be fun, it should be engaging. (INT 08, p.12)

**Structure in learning**

The need for structure in learning was the third common thread of learning choices support identified in the interview data. Some staff perceived this was important given the complexities in other areas of the young people’s lives. “I think that the young people are often looking for structure too. Because, um, quite often we
find that by the time that they’ve found us, a lot of structure in their life has gone” (INT 01, p.6).

Structure could be provided to young people in the early stages of attendance at a program, and was evident in the scaffolding of activities to accommodate intermittent attendance. “We’ve overlayed quite a lot of structure to support intermittent attendees” (INT 01, p.7). The need for clarity from the teacher about learning goals and processes was perceived as important. “The other thing that works is structure and real [clarity] about what’s happening when” (INT 04, p.5).

**A sense of achievement**

Assisting young people develop a sense of achievement was a common thread when staff discussed learning choices support for young people. This was in part achieved when educators acknowledged what young people already knew and have learnt. It was recognised that young people liked to have the sense of achievement that accompanied successful learning.

Some of the greatest excitement that they’ve [young people] ever had was passing a Maths exam, whilst we say it’s not that important it is really important to them because it’s what society will label them as and they acknowledge that – it’s only when they get a pass or when they get an A or a B, they actually are prepared to say that society has labelled me as an E and I’m not really an E. So it’s all nice to deny that that’s important but the young people do know that it’s significant. (INT 05, p.27)

Developing the aspirations and confidence of young people in their own ability to learn was considered essential for learning choices support. The need to strengthen young people’s self-esteem and capacity to get along with other people was viewed as important in foregrounding learning. Strengthening relationships was viewed as a contributing factor towards better academic achievement through developing confidence and self-trust.

I see success as engagement, no matter how small or big it is. Um, and success to me is the young people here having ownership of this place. You know Maths and English all that can come later . . . one of the boys, he got a C for
[school subject] and he said “well, how do I get a B?” and I said “Well, trust yourself”. So he did. I said, “Trust your judgement, trust yourself”. Cause he was very hesitant. And, he did. And then he thanked me for it. That’s it – self-belief with the kids. (INT 11, p.10-11)

Making connections

The importance of making connections was the fifth common thread in learning choices support. Connections with people, connections with their own interests and connecting young people to the things they need to know in terms of future transitions, were some of the ways staff discussed the idea of making connections. One worker saw herself as a kind of connector:

I guess I’ve often seen myself in lots of work as a kind of ‘connector’ so that it’s about connecting young people with other things that they need to know, like, having a really good idea of what’s around and then doing some connecting with things that they need to do, as much as like having relationships here or wherever I was working, but I really thought that connecting people onwards after they’ve been here was a really good tool. (INT 03, pp.6-7)

Connections to one’s own life experience were also viewed by one staff member as a way to engage young people in learning choices. “I draw on my knowledge and life experience and the things that I think kids can do practically” (INT 12, p.5).

Differentiated curriculum

Differentiated curriculum was a common thread in discussing learning choices and was described in a number of ways. First, in terms of what young people themselves wanted in their learning, and also in terms of having to manage a wide range of levels and needs in any group of young people at any given time. Staff highlighted the value of “having a fairly good grasp of where every student is at in their learning” (INT 12, p.8). Recognising that young people have different learning needs at varying stages of involvement in the program highlighted the need for differentiated curriculum.

Other things that work is building the stages. When they first come in, I think they want a different kind of learning than when they’ve been there for a while.
And as they relax into the system and start to trust you, you can ask for different things. (INT 04, p.6)

**Questioning the purpose of education**

Questioning the purpose of education was identified as the final common thread in the data analysis of understanding the needs of young people. Traditional notions of education are challenged through the privileging of relationships in the research context. Narrowing conceptions of education in current national and international reform agendas do not meet the changing needs of young people, especially those who experience multiple complexity and social exclusion (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Smyth et al., 2004; Wyn, 2008). In interviews with staff, education was perceived in an holistic way recognising that all parts of the young people’s lives need to be developed and strengthened.

I could come in as a teacher, and I probably did come into this organisation with teacher thinking “Oh learning is great and having an education is great” and if I offer them this gift and they say they want it and they get it, which they did, then everything else will fall into place and I quickly learnt that it doesn’t. You’ve got to build all the other parts of that young person at the same time, or the gift that they’re taking from you and that they’re gifting themselves too, it’ll fall over. It’ll fall over because the other things haven’t been looked at along the way. (INT 10, p.12)

Educational outcomes such as personal development and growth, aspirational goals and the ability to get along with others, were seen as worthwhile and valid outcomes of education.

Give them a bit of an awareness of who they are, where everything fits in the whole scheme of things and open their minds up to, to new things and possibilities that they can achieve in their lives, whether a career, whether you know trying to read, trying to get along with other people. (INT 08, p.5)
APPENDIX P

Data Extracts for Eight Common Threads in the Code:
Positive Relationships Support

Positive relationship support was talked about in a several different ways in interview data. Common threads were identified in the analysis of interview data and can be seen in Appendix Table P1.

Appendix Table P1.

Common Threads in Positive Relationships Support

<table>
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<th>Positive Relationship Support</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Relationships first</td>
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<td>• Relationship connected to community</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Takes time to build relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Listening to young people</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Strengths-based approach to young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clear boundaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Giving young people another view – another perspective</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Qualities of educators offering relationship support</td>
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</table>

Relationships first

Common threads in the code of Positive Relationship Support once again included an emphasis on relationships first. One staff member reiterated the centrality of relationships in her work with young people.

One thing that I find really helpful with the [work] is relationships first. You know, you need to build that relationship. If you do not feel that relationship with a young person, it doesn't work and it's a constant thing you are constantly building that relationship with them. (INT 13, p.7)

Educators also talked about the need to develop rapport with young people through really getting to know them. “That’s the rapport. That’s the big one with these kids. I mean if you don’t have rapport, forget it, you’re not going to do it” (INT 2, p.20). Also of importance was taking a personal interest in them “Humour works. A real interest in them works” (INT 04, p.5). Being aware of the young people’s
particular interests and passions was viewed as significant. “You always focus on what their interests are first, they’re the most important people in the world (INT 14, p.4).

Staff felt that emphasising relationships first supported young people to feel more comfortable and to be more confident. This was linked to the need to emphasise relationships first before curriculum. Staff felt that patience, acceptance and understanding were required in order to be able to enter into an “authentic relationship with young people” (INT 16, p.2), where young people experienced being respected by staff, who perceived them as equals.

**Relationships and community**

Relationships were perceived by some educators to be connected to community. This idea of relationships and community was the second common thread for this code. Relationships and community helped to create a sense of belonging for young people as they gradually felt part of the school community. Relationships and community were linked by a staff member who talked of the impact of this on a young person who had recently left the school.

> Even when I think of a young person say from ah, last year, who has gone forward ah, left the school. She has actually benefited by being part of the school because she felt, she felt a member and felt that relationship with the school community. Now I think that that was probably good. (INT 07, p.5)

Other staff also emphasised the need to link young people into their wider local community, being able to “see the bigger picture” (INT 08, p.4).

**Taking time to build relationships**

Recognising that offering positive relationship support to young people takes time was the third common thread identified in the interview data. Specifically, relationship building takes time and can last over a long time with young people who are coming back to formal learning and face complex issues in their lives. Staff acknowledged that there was a need to “hang in with young people over time” (INT 03,
that building rapport with young people occurs over time and does not happen overnight. For another interviewee building rapport over time was also seen as needing time.

I build rapport over time, which is one of the troubles in [mainstream settings], I could hardly build because before I know it there’d be another class . . . Whereas, here, you really have a chance to build [rapport]. (INT 04, p.24)

**Listening to young people**

Listening to young people was identified as the fourth common thread in the data for this code. Staff saw the significance of listening to young people in a range of ways. Having regular and relevant conversations with young people was seen by a number of educators as part of their work. “I can just sit and listen and talk and I’m quite content with that if people want to do that” (INT 07, p.4). One staff member saw themselves as a sounding board for young people.

I like to talk, you know and I think working with these young students and young people, they don’t have that opportunity to talk to people — to talk to parents, to talk to their own family, so I’m there as a sounding board for them. I’m there initiating conversations with them. (INT 08, p.4)

For another worker, valuing conversations with young people around life experiences rather than overemphasising academic learning was significant because that was where the perceived need for change became apparent.

. . . but it’s in conversation and it’s around ah, life experiences, so, if we can turn a young person round from being an introverted or internalizing aggressive person into a relaxed, pleasant young person. (INT 05, p.26)

**Strengths-based approaches to young people**

Strengths-based approaches to young people were identified as the fifth common thread in the data for this code. This was expressed by a number of staff in terms of seeing the potential in the young people and being prepared to take risks with them.

“I’ve explained to them very, very openly that I’m taking a risk because I think they
have the potential” (INT 04, p9). One worker expressed her own preference for working within a strengths perspective with young people. “I’ve really found value in that strengths approach in the work and the narrative approach as well. It’s really finding out and talking to young people, firstly finding out their story and then bringing the strength perspective to that” (INT 06, p.21). Staff also saw the importance of seeing the dignity of young people and recognising that young people “like us, want to learn” (INT 16, p.2).

**Clear boundaries**

Some staff saw that establishing clear boundaries was important in their work with young people and this was identified as the sixth common thread in positive relationship support. This involved showing and modelling to young people appropriate ways of treating others and confronting or challenging them at times “to be the best young person they can be” (INT 05, p.9).

For another worker, clear boundaries were connected to being consistent. Consistency was linked to having a strong relationship with young people, established rapport and some flexibility.

> I think I’ve learnt that over with [another program] – it’s consistency; consistency is the best method, no matter how hard it is, how mean you look and um, brain strain, or boring, or numbing it is, don’t give in. That consistency, it teaches young people that this is not acceptable... Consistency is the game with a bit of flexibility. (INT 02, pp.22-23)

**Giving young people another view – another perspective**

The seventh common thread identified in the data for positive relationship support was helping give young people another view or another perspective. This may have been in relation to themselves and their identity and sense of self-esteem. It was also discussed in relation to young people recognising their ability through challenging them about what is their best ability, or supporting young people in their own capacity to try a different way in their relationships or in their learning. “You can give them a nudge and say, ‘hey, pull your head in’ and try a different way” (INT 02, p.5).
Seeing a purpose in what they were doing and in what they were learning was another way this common thread was discussed. Seeing that “the future is important and that young people can do something for themselves” was another way this was thread was expressed (INT 07, p.6).

Seeing the bigger picture was also about supporting young people to see a purpose for what they were doing.

And once they feel safe, then that [academic achievement] happens. And often it’s quite slowly and then it’s sort of ‘d,d,d,d,d,d’ [falling into place]. And if they see a purpose, they want something as well, OK you want to do this, you want to try and achieve this, you must do this, this, this. OK, they see a purpose for it, they just, yep. (INT 09, p.18)

Qualities of educators offering relationship support

The final common thread in the code of positive relationship support was the qualities of educators offering relationship support. In discussing positive relationship support, a range of qualities required of educators were mentioned by interviewees. These qualities included wisdom, patience, humour, acceptance, being young at heart, being sensitive, caring, understanding, and tolerant as well as being compassionate and empathetic. Qualities were defined within the context of having positive relationships by one interviewee:

I do enjoy having good relationships with young people and I do find it reasonably easy and I think it’s because I do see them as an equal, not as someone who needs me or that needs anything really from me except probably patience and acceptance and understanding and things like that. (INT 15, pp.2-3)

Patience was a quality mentioned by another worker in relation to young people.

... the patience we have for our students and what we’re trying to achieve with them. We’re not pushing them to obtain great results. We’re not pushing them to be something that they don’t want to be. We’re giving them the opportunity to grow as a person, to grow as an individual and whatever that individual might be. (INT 08, p.19)
APPENDIX Q

Details of the Process of Independent Categorisation Analysis of Staff Descriptive Words of Self as Educator

In Item 7 of the questionnaire, staff were asked to write five words that described themselves as an educator within their current role/s. Participants (n=30) each wrote 5 descriptive words with a total of 140 words or paired word descriptors generated. An independent categorisation analysis was applied to the data with another researcher acting as a critical friend. All of the descriptive words were initially sorted independently by two researchers and grouped according to categories. Categories were influenced by features of best practice in alternative education and teacher professional identity in the literature. They were framed as ‘self-descriptors’ in terms of how staff saw themselves as educators. The six categories included: carer; mentor/guide; motivator; organiser/designer; facilitator; and miscellaneous. Definitions of each category can be seen in Appendix R. A summary of the detailed analysis in the original categories can be seen in Appendix S.

Once the categories describing staff perceptions of themselves as educators had been developed they were then translated into the strands of common threads devised in the thematic network analysis of interviews. Each category was considered independently by the two researchers in relation to the strands of common threads and consensus regarding translation of categories into strands of common threads were finalised through discussion of meaning between the two researchers.
APPENDIX R

Questionnaire Item 7: Definitions for Independent Categorisation of Data

The researcher gave the definitions for the six categories and the list of words generated from questionnaire respondents to the second researcher who was acting as a critical friend in the process of independent categorisation. Categorisation was conducted separately and then the researchers met to discuss their results. The initial conversation involved further clarification of the definitions that had been written. The following version of the definitions was created with some modifications as a result of the dialogue and negotiation with the second researcher.

CARER
Care is the basis of relationships with young people. Being a carer is associated with recognising the dignity and agency of each young person. Being in the role of a carer as an educator emphasises “living together, on creating, maintaining, and enhancing positive relations” (Noddings, 1992, p. 21). The approach to being an educator who cares is “a health-promoting approach to creating a safe, supportive and caring environment that reflects a healthy psycho-social culture through the facilitation of positive peer relations and development of social skills (de Jong and Griffiths, 2005, p. 360). This role category of carer emphasises the social/emotional support offered to young people through adults being caring in their relationships with young people.

MENTOR/GUIDE
Being a mentor/guide is associated with the support and guidance offered to young people as they are “learning to understand self better and the development of life-skills, responsible thinking skills and pro-social behaviour” (de Jong & Griffiths, 2005, p. 364). The role of mentor/guide is to foster a sense of connection and positive relationship with young people to support them in attaining their goals and sense of connection within the school community. This role category emphasises listening to young people for the purpose of clarifying their own goals and sense of connection within the school community. The role of mentor/guide presumes that a caring relationship has already been developed between the adult worker and the young person.

MOTIVATOR
A motivator is one who supports young people as they find their passions and interests, to pursue their goals and educational pathways. A motivator adopts a strengths-based approach to working with young people, focussing on positive aspects and possibilities rather than perceived deficits in young people’s behaviour (McCashen, 2005). This role category of motivator emphasises being a catalyst for motivating young people to re-engage in education. Working with the young people’s own passions and interests through a strengths-based perspective supports young people in being able to see what is possible for their future.

ORGANISER/DESIGNER
An organiser/designer is one who uses their professional expertise and experience to plan, design and organise relevant, flexible and meaningful curriculum with orientations towards personal, social, cultural, vocational and economic functions (Brady & Kennedy, 2007, p. 9). It requires an holistic approach to teaching and learning that recognises the social, emotional and intellectual needs of the young people.

FACILITATOR
A facilitator of learning empowers young people to take ownership of their learning whilst offering support, development of necessary skills and access to necessary resources. A facilitator implements and enacts plans and designs for young people’s learning. They offer learning choices support for young people through facilitating opportunities for educational engagement. A facilitator enacts ‘power with’ young people through negotiation of goals, content and desired outcomes, rather than only acting as expert in a directive manner. In this way a facilitator is a co-learner working in partnership with young people through collaboration. “Student ownership of their learning program is a key to success. This empowers students to make decisions about their learning process, encourages responsibility, and contributes to motivation. Learning programs should be negotiable, offering students choice and facilitating their access to education, training and employment” (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006, p. 38).

MISCELLANEOUS
Any other words that do not fit into above categories. In some instances where a word fit into three or more categories, it was listed as miscellaneous as it could not be limited to only one or two categories.
APPENDIX S

Questionnaire Item 7: Descriptive words of self as educator
sorted into categories

Staff were invited to list five words that described them as an educator. These statements were organised into six categories. The table below indicates which categories were most frequently identified and the number of words/phrases from staff included in each category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Order of Priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organiser/Designer</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor/Guide</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivator</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following series of tables include definitions of each category of staff descriptions of themselves as educators and examples of words/phrases listed. The statements are included according to the order of priority from staff when they wrote their responses. Words that fit into two categories were listed under both categories.

(continued)
APPENDIX S (continued)

THE CATEGORY OF CARER

Care is the basis of relationships with young people. Being a carer is associated with recognising the dignity and agency of each young person. Being in the role of a carer as an educator emphasises “living together, on creating, maintaining, and enhancing positive relations” (Noddings, 1992, p. 21). The approach to being an educator who cares is “a health-promoting approach to creating a safe, supportive and caring environment that reflects a healthy psycho-social culture through the facilitation of positive peer relations and development of social skills (de Jong & Griffiths, 2005, p. 360). This role category of carer emphasises the social/emotional support offered to young people through adults being caring in their relationships with young people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATOR WORDS/PHRASES FOR CARER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listed as first priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listed as second priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attentive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

374
THE CATEGORY OF FACILITATOR

A facilitator of learning empowers young people to take ownership of their learning whilst offering support, development of necessary skills and access to necessary resources. A facilitator implements and enacts plans and designs for young people’s learning. They offer learning choices support for young people through facilitating opportunities for educational engagement. A facilitator enacts “power with” young people through negotiation of goals, content and desired outcomes, rather than only acting as expert in a directive manner. In this way a facilitator is a co-learner working in partnership with young people through collaboration. “Student ownership of their learning program is a key to success. This empowers students to make decisions about their learning process, encourages responsibility, and contributes to motivation. Learning programs should be negotiable, offering students choice and facilitating their access to education, training and employment.” (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006, p. 38)

EDUCATOR WORDS/ PHRASES FOR FACILITATOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listed as first priority</th>
<th>Listed as third priority</th>
<th>Listed as fifth priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Skills developer</td>
<td>• Facilitating</td>
<td>• Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td>• Facilitator</td>
<td>• Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td>• Teacher</td>
<td>• Vocational assessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Learner (coordinator) (enabler)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resource person</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitator</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listed as second priority</td>
<td>Listed as fourth priority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creative</td>
<td>• Collaborator</td>
<td>• Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Musician</td>
<td>• Supporter/ advocate</td>
<td>• Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td>• Engaging/ sensitive</td>
<td>• Vocational assessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Allows space to grow</td>
<td>• Implementer</td>
<td>• Learner (coordinator) (enabler)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitator</td>
<td>• Sneaky</td>
<td>• Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Facilitator</td>
<td>• Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fluid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Referee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX S (continued)

THE CATEGORY OF ORGANISER/DESIGNER

An organiser/designer is one who uses their professional expertise and experience to plan, design and organise relevant, flexible and meaningful curriculum with orientations towards personal, social, cultural, vocational and economic functions (Brady & Kennedy, 2007, p. 9). It requires an holistic approach to teaching and learning that recognises the social, emotional and intellectual needs of the young people.

EDUCATOR WORDS/ PHRASES FOR ORGANISER/ DESIGNER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listed as first priority</th>
<th>Listed as third priority</th>
<th>Listed as fifth priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organised</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficient</td>
<td>Organiser</td>
<td>Creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>Focussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listed as second priority</td>
<td>Listed as fourth priority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin person</td>
<td>Curious</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organiser</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>Creative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resourceful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritualiser</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE CATEGORY OF MENTOR/GUIDE

Being a mentor/guide is associated with the support and guidance offered to young people as they are “learning to understand self better and the development of life-skills, responsible thinking skills and pro-social behaviour” (de Jong & Griffiths 2005, p. 364). The role of mentor / guide is to foster a sense of connection and positive relationship with young people to support them in attaining their goals and sense of connection within the school community.

This role category emphasises listening to young people for the purpose of clarifying their own goals and sense of connection within the school community. The role of mentor/guide presumes that a caring relationship has already been developed between the adult worker and the young person.

EDUCATOR WORDS/ PHRASE FOR MENTOR/ GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listed as first priority</th>
<th>Listed as third priority</th>
<th>Listed as fifth priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Community member</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Journeying with (not for)</td>
<td>Role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Guide</td>
<td>Role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide</td>
<td>Guider</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listener/story sharer</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listed as second priority</td>
<td>Listed as fourth priority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiding</td>
<td>Clarifier</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listener</td>
<td>Listener</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Exemplar (lead by example)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exemplifying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
THE CATEGORY OF MOTIVATOR

A motivator is one who supports young people as they find their passions and interests, and pursue their goals and educational pathways. A motivator adopts a strengths-based approach to working with young people, focusing on positive aspects and possibilities rather than perceived deficits in young people’s behaviour (McCashen, 2005). This role category of motivator emphasises being a catalyst for motivating young people to re-engage in education. Working with the young people’s own passions and interests through a strengths-based perspective supports young people in being able to see what is possible for their future.

EDUCATOR WORDS/ PHRASE FOR MOTIVATOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listed as first priority</th>
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<th>Listed as fifth priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Professional</td>
<td>• Advisor</td>
<td>• Expander of horizons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tired</td>
<td>• Catalyst</td>
<td>• Helpful optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Curious</td>
<td>• Challenging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Energetic</td>
<td>• Fun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enthusiastic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Helpful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sharer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listed as second priority</th>
<th>Listed as fourth priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Fun</td>
<td>• Sharer of possibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Challenger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Energised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE CATEGORY OF MISCELLANEOUS

Any other words that do not fit into above categories. In some instances where a word fit into three or more categories, it was listed as miscellaneous as it could not be limited to only one or two categories.

STAFF WORDS/ PHRASE FOR MISCELLANEOUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listed as first priority</th>
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<th>Listed as fifth priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Professional</td>
<td>• Hardworking</td>
<td>• (no response)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tired</td>
<td></td>
<td>• (no response)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hardworking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Hardworking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Cleaner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Still motivated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listed as second priority</th>
<th>Listed as fourth priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Stretched</td>
<td>• (no response)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Confused (at times!!)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX T

Questionnaire Item 8: Definitions for Independent Categorisation of data
Staff were asked to write statements about the five most important aspects of their work. These words were then categorised into the following categories. Definitions for each category describe the nature of the most important aspects of the work as perceived by questionnaire respondents.

CARING AND SUPPORTING
Caring is the basis of relationships with young people. Caring is associated with recognising the dignity and agency of each young person. Caring has an “emphasis on living together, on creating, maintaining, and enhancing positive relations” (1992, p. 21). The approach to caring is “a health-promoting approach to creating a safe, supportive and caring environment that reflects a healthy psycho-social culture through the facilitation of positive peer relations and development of social skills (de Jong & Griffiths, 2005, p. 360).
This category emphasises the social/emotional support offered to young people through caring relationships with adults.

MENTORING AND GUIDING
Mentoring and guiding were associated with the support and guidance offered to young people as they were “learning to understand self better and the development of life-skills, responsible thinking skills and pro-social behaviour” (de Jong & Griffiths 2005, p. 364). Mentoring and guiding foster a sense of connection and positive relationship with young people to support them in attaining their goals and sense of connection within the school community.
This category emphasises listening to young people for the purpose of clarifying their own goals and sense of connection within the school community. The process of mentoring and guiding required that a caring relationship had already been developed between the adult worker and the young person.

MOTIVATING
Motivating young people involves supporting them as they find their passions and interests, and pursue their goals and educational pathways. Motivating young people requires the adoption of a strengths-based approach to working with young people, focussing on positive aspects and possibilities rather than perceived deficits in young people’s behaviour (McCashen, 2005).
This category emphasises being a catalyst in order to motivate young people. Working with the young people’s own passions and interests through a strengths-based perspective supports young people in being able to see what is possible for their future.

ORGANISING AND DESIGNING
Organising and designing involves using professional expertise and experience to plan, design and organise relevant, flexible and meaningful curriculum with orientations towards personal, social, cultural, vocational and economic functions (Brady & Kennedy, 2007, p. 9).

FACILITATING
Facilitating learning empowers young people to take ownership of their learning whilst offering support, development of necessary skills and access to necessary resources. Facilitating involves implementing and enacting plans and designs for learning. It involves offer learning choices support for young people through facilitating opportunities for educational engagement. Facilitating requires that staff share power with young people through negotiation of goals, content and desired outcomes, rather than acting as expert in a directive manner. In this way facilitating is a process of co-learning, working in partnership with young people through collaboration. “Student ownership of their learning program is a key to success. This empowers students to make decisions about their learning process, encourages responsibility, and contributes to motivation. Learning programs should be negotiable, offering students choice and facilitating their access to education, training and employment” (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006, p. 38)

LIFE LEARNING AND COMMUNITY NETWORKING
This aspect of work requires an orientation to teaching and learning that encompasses life-skills education and the development of skills to support transition to employment. Connections to community are fostered through family/carer involvement, community linkages and interagency collaboration between workers and other agencies offering support services for young people’s complex needs. This orientation to teaching and learning has been synthesised from features of best practice in alternative education settings in the literature. (Aron, 2003; de Jong, 2005; de Jong & Griffiths, 2006; DEETYA, 2001; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Morgan, 2009; O’Brien et al., 2001; Tobin & Sprague, 1999, 2000).

MISCELLANEOUS
Any other words that do not fit into above categories. In some instances where a word fit into three or more categories, it was listed as miscellaneous as it could not be limited to only one or two categories.
APPENDIX U

Questionnaire Item 8: Categories of Most Important Aspects of Work
with Examples from Data

Staff were asked to write statements about the five most important aspects of their work. These statements were organised into seven categories. The table below indicates which categories were most frequently identified and the number of statements by staff included in each category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Order of Priority</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caring and supporting</td>
<td>17  7  4  5  1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating</td>
<td>1  6  3  5  8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising and designing</td>
<td>0  5  7  5  4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating &amp; guiding</td>
<td>2  5  5  2  1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life learning and community</td>
<td>0  0  0  0  0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>networking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and guiding</td>
<td>2  2  1  2  0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>0  0  0  0  0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following series of tables include definitions of each category of staff descriptions of most important aspects of work and examples of statements listed. The statements are included according to the order of priority from staff when they wrote their responses. Words that fit into two categories were listed under both categories.

(continued)
THE CATEGORY OF CARING AND SUPPORTING

Caring is the basis of relationships with young people. Caring is associated with recognising the dignity and agency of each young person. Caring has an “emphasis on living together, on creating, maintaining, and enhancing positive relations” (1992, p. 21). The approach to caring is “a health-promoting approach to creating a safe, supportive and caring environment that reflects a healthy psycho-social culture through the facilitation of positive peer relations and development of social skills (de Jong & Griffiths, 2005, p. 360).

This category emphasises the social/ emotional support offered to young people through caring relationships with adults.

EDUCATOR STATEMENTS FOR CARING & SUPPORTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listed as first priority</th>
<th>Listed as second priority</th>
<th>Listed as fourth priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being available and listening to YP</td>
<td>Being available for YP</td>
<td>Being accessible to YP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being present to young people</td>
<td>Being present to each moment</td>
<td>Patience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being present/ listening to YP</td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>Promote cohesive/ support group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships</td>
<td>Developing self-confidence/esteem</td>
<td>Stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships</td>
<td>Interpersonal intelligence</td>
<td>Welcoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships with YP</td>
<td>Listening to YP’s stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships with YP</td>
<td>Respecting YP, colleagues, visitors --&gt; safety &amp; hospitality and inclusivity to all same</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building trust/ rapport/ relation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop relationships with YP that are trusting &amp; positive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YP welfare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listed as third priority</th>
<th>Listed as fifth priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being consistent for YP</td>
<td>Being open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing trust/ rapport with YP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal intelligence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
THE CATEGORY OF FACILITATING

Facilitating learning empowers young people to take ownership of their learning whilst offering support, development of necessary skills and access to necessary resources. Facilitating involves implementing and enacting plans and designs for learning. It involves offering learning choices support for young people through facilitating opportunities for educational engagement. Facilitating requires that staff share power with young people through negotiation of goals, content and desired outcomes, rather than acting as expert in a directive manner. In this way facilitating is a process of co-learning, working in partnership with young people through collaboration. “Student ownership of their learning program is a key to success. This empowers students to make decisions about their learning process, encourages responsibility, and contributes to motivation. Learning programs should be negotiable, offering students choice and facilitating their access to education, training and employment” (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006, p. 38).

EDUCATOR STATEMENTS FOR FACILITATING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listed as first priority</th>
<th>Listed as third priority</th>
<th>Listed as fifth priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Engagement through own teaching style</td>
<td>• Creative</td>
<td>• Daily running [of program]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flexible delivery of said curriculum</td>
<td>• Deliver curriculum, ability &amp; situation appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fluidity</td>
<td>• Getting people to try new/ more/ depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listed as second priority</td>
<td>Listed as fourth priority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitating a comfortable and positive environment for YP</td>
<td>• Delivery of relevant &amp; appropriate education</td>
<td>• Implementing programs outside the traditional square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td>• Facilitating purposeful activities</td>
<td>• Paper work – recording info etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td>• Problem solve, problem solve, problem solve</td>
<td>• Teach literacy/ numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td>• Skill enhancer</td>
<td>• Teaching syllabus/ curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Providing a safe and positive learning environment</td>
<td>• Teaching academic skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teaching/presenting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE CATEGORY OF ORGANISING & DESIGNING

Organising and designing involves using professional expertise and experience to plan, design and organise relevant, flexible and meaningful curriculum with orientations towards personal, social, cultural, vocational and economic functions (Brady & Kennedy, 2007, p. 9).

EDUCATOR STATEMENTS FOR ORGANISING & DESIGNING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listed as first priority</th>
<th>Listed as third priority</th>
<th>Listed as fourth priority</th>
<th>Listed as fifth priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>• Balancing structure and flexibility</td>
<td>• Knowledge</td>
<td>• Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Concept thinking/ analysis</td>
<td>• Organisation</td>
<td>• Education Lit/ Numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creating educational opportunities</td>
<td>• Organised</td>
<td>• Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creative</td>
<td>• Seeking different ways to connect YP à education</td>
<td>• Paperwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Curriculum development</td>
<td>• Staff work as a team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listed as second priority</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Curriculum knowledges</td>
<td>• Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td>• Organisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td>• Organised</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td>• Seeking different ways to connect YP à education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Innovative curriculum</td>
<td>• Staff work as a team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE CATEGORY OF MOTIVATING

One who uses their professional expertise and experience to plan, design and organise relevant, flexible and meaningful curriculum with orientations towards personal, social, cultural, vocational and economic functions (Brady & Kennedy, 2007, p. 9)

EDUCATOR STATEMENTS FOR MOTIVATING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listed as first priority</th>
<th>Listed as third priority</th>
<th>Listed as fourth priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>• Balancing structure and flexibility</td>
<td>• Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Concept thinking/ analysis</td>
<td>• Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creating educational opportunities</td>
<td>• Organised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creative</td>
<td>• Seeking different ways to connect YP (\rightarrow) education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Curriculum development</td>
<td>• Staff work as a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Learning outcomes (KLAs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listed as second priority</td>
<td>• Curriculum knowledges</td>
<td>Listed as fifth priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td>• Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td>• Education Literacy/ Numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flexible</td>
<td>• Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Innovative curriculum</td>
<td>• Paperwork</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE CATEGORY OF LIFE LEARNING & COMMUNITY NETWORKING

This aspect of work requires an orientation to teaching and learning that encompasses life-skills education and the development of skills to support transition to employment. Connections to community are fostered through family/ carer involvement, community linkages and interagency collaboration between workers and other agencies offering support services for young people’s complex needs. This orientation to teaching and learning has been synthesised from features of best practice in alternative education settings in the literature.


EDUCATOR STATEMENTS FOR LIFE-LEARNING & COMMUNITY NETWORKING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listed as first priority</th>
<th>Listed as third priority</th>
<th>Listed as a fifth priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Life/social welfare</td>
<td>• Community</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teaching lifeskills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teaching lifeskills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work with young people &amp; their families to improve opportunities &amp; happiness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listed as second priority</td>
<td>Listed as fourth priority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Life/social welfare</td>
<td>• Being tolerant of external influences i.e. family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community partnerships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Linking activities (outside of school)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX U (continued)

THE CATEGORY MENTORING & GUIDING

Mentoring and guiding were associated with the support and guidance offered to young people as they were “learning to understand self better and the development of life-skills, responsible thinking skills and pro-social behaviour” (de Jong & Griffiths 2005, p. 364). Mentoring and guiding foster a sense of connection and positive relationship with young people to support them in attaining their goals and sense of connection within the school community. This category emphasises listening to young people for the purpose of clarifying their own goals and sense of connection within the school community. The process of mentoring and guiding required that a caring relationship had already been developed between the adult worker and the young person.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATOR STATEMENTS FOR MENTORING/GUIDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listed as first priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hearing YP as the experts in their own lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Listening to YP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listed as second priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bring a sense of hope to YP &amp; having opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Listener &amp; Clarifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listed as third priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listed as fourth priority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MISCELLANEOUS CATEGORY

Any other words that did not fit into the above categories. In some instances where a word fit into three or more categories, it was listed as miscellaneous as it could not be limited to only one or two categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATOR STATEMENTS FOR MISCELLANEOUS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listed as first priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listed as second priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX V

Questionnaire Item 8: List of most important aspects of work linked with Strands of Common Threads in *Ways of Working: Supporting Young People*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First priority</th>
<th>Second Priority</th>
<th>Third Priority</th>
<th>Fourth Priority</th>
<th>Fifth Priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RELATIONSHIPS STRAND</td>
<td>RE-ENGAGEMENT STRAND</td>
<td>RE-ENGAGEMENT STRAND</td>
<td>RE-ENGAGEMENT STRAND</td>
<td>RE-ENGAGEMENT STRAND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing students</td>
<td>Empowering students to want to learn</td>
<td>Teaching life skills</td>
<td>Seeking different ways to connect YP to education</td>
<td>Implementing programs outside the traditional square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building trust/ rapport/ relation</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>Skill enhancer</td>
<td>Teaching syllabus/ curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td>Innovative curriculum</td>
<td>Learning outcomes (Key Learning Areas - KLAs)</td>
<td>Delivery of relevant &amp; appropriate education</td>
<td>Focussing on social education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships</td>
<td>Teaching/ presenting</td>
<td>Flexible delivery of said curriculum</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Getting people to try new/ more/ depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YP welfare</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Creating opportunities &amp; options for learning in context in cooperation with YP’s aspirations</td>
<td>Teaching academic skills</td>
<td>Deliver curriculum, ability &amp; situation appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships with YP</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Options advisor</td>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>Teach literacy/ numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>LISTENING TO YP STRAND</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Mentor/empathiser</td>
<td>Being professional with how I teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life/social welfare</td>
<td>Being present to each moment</td>
<td>Fluidity</td>
<td>Welcoming</td>
<td>STRUCTURE &amp; BOUNDARIES STRAND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Being available for young people</td>
<td>Teaching lifeskills</td>
<td>Promote cohesive/ support group</td>
<td>Not rushing around trying to do everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Listener &amp; clarifier</td>
<td>Creating educational opportunities</td>
<td>Staff work as a team</td>
<td>Daily running of [program]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Listening to young people’s stories</td>
<td>RELATIONSHIPS STRAND</td>
<td>STRUCTURE &amp; BOUNDARIES STRAND</td>
<td>Paper work – recording info etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships with YP</td>
<td>RELATIONSHIPS STRAND</td>
<td>Establishing trust/ rapport with YP</td>
<td>Organised</td>
<td>Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing relationships</td>
<td>Interpersonal intelligence</td>
<td>Intrapersonal intelligence</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Reality checker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISTENING TO YP STRAND</td>
<td>Care</td>
<td>Relating</td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to YP</td>
<td>Creating community</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>CONNECTIONS STRAND</td>
<td>Work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being present/ listening to YP</td>
<td>Believe in and support aspirations</td>
<td>STRENGTHS-BASED PRACTICE STRAND</td>
<td>Being tolerant of external influences i.e. family</td>
<td>Paperwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being present to young people</td>
<td>Collaboration/ Recognise individual strengths</td>
<td>Community partnerships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being available &amp; listening to YP</td>
<td>Regard the YP as worthwhile</td>
<td>Linking activities (outside of school)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE-ENGAGEMENT STRAND</th>
<th>STRENGTHS-BASED PRACTICE STRAND</th>
<th>STRUCTURE &amp; BOUNDARIES STRAND</th>
<th>HOLDING COMPLEXITY STRAND</th>
<th>STRENGTHS-BASED PRACTICE STRAND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement through own teaching style</td>
<td>Developing self-confidence/esteem</td>
<td>Being consistent for young people</td>
<td>Problem solve, problem solve, problem solve</td>
<td>Cooperating with YP, colleagues &amp; other workers, family members to optimise potential of positive options for young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging YP in learning</td>
<td>Empowering young people to make positive choices</td>
<td>Balancing structures and flexibility</td>
<td>Subversiveness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profiler – Vocational interest</td>
<td>Developing self-confidence/esteem</td>
<td>Being consistent for young people</td>
<td>Problem solve, problem solve, problem solve</td>
<td>Cooperating with YP, colleagues &amp; other workers, family members to optimise potential of positive options for young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE STRAND</td>
<td>Bring a sense of hope to YP &amp; having opportunities</td>
<td>Believing in the expertise of each YP in their life</td>
<td>Supporting growth of awareness in YP of their abilities, achievements and aspirations</td>
<td>Informing the wider community about our work with young people at the margins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing young people as the experts in their own lives</td>
<td>CONNECTIONS STRAND</td>
<td>Focussing on and understanding a YP’s preferred story</td>
<td>CHANGING PERSPECTIVES STRAND</td>
<td>RELATIONSHIPS STRAND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family relations</td>
<td>CHANGING PERSPECTIVES STRAND</td>
<td>Challenging young people to grow</td>
<td>Being open</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respecting young people, colleagues, visitors, safety &amp; hospitality &amp; inclusivity to all same</td>
<td>Concept thinking/analysis</td>
<td>LISTENING TO YP STRAND</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide a safe &amp; positive learning environment</td>
<td>CONNECTIONS STRAND</td>
<td>Work with young people &amp; their families to improve opportunities &amp; happiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX W

**Detailed Summary of the Instances of Metaphors Identifiable in Strands of Common Threads**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphor/ Image</th>
<th>Reason for choice</th>
<th>Strands of common threads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dolphin in river (group of dolphins)</td>
<td>A river is the metaphor for the journey of learning. It changes with the seasons but has boundaries within which one operates. Students come to me (gr. 9 &amp; 10) towards the higher end of their learning journey. As the dolphin I guide, pick up signals, work in with the group, have fun, have compassion and care but also leap into jumps beyond the comfortable known &amp; regroup when needed, still within boundaries and picking up speed towards the ocean.</td>
<td>Relationships, Re-engagement, Structure and boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air</td>
<td>I support life &amp; growth. I am often in-visible. I am strong &amp; gentle. I create the possibility for things to happen.</td>
<td>Relationships, Strengths-based practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A dancer in improvisation</td>
<td>As a dancer I have my evergrowing kit bag of moves, dynamics, rhythms, tempos, strength, flexibility, speeds to draw on when the context seems right. I am improvising constantly on the diversity of themes presented by the YP &amp; others in the community. The improvisation is fed by the dance in me wanting to come out &amp; all the dance in others that calls for response or accompaniment or simple stillness. It needs constant attention and “aliveness” (love).</td>
<td>Relationships, Re-engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiator/ mediator / juggler</td>
<td>After building trust with YP, I’m interested in challenging &amp; negotiating for more &amp; improved options, choices &amp; pathways.</td>
<td>Relationships, Changing perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>I believe “tough love” is important. Care, non-judgemental, challenging. Always available and genuine. Gospel value of welcome and acceptance.</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour guide</td>
<td>I help YP on their life journeys at times showing them the road ahead or helping to map out a path ahead.</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Shaman</td>
<td>Acting as a spirit guide on YP’s spiritual journey.</td>
<td>Relationships, Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A parachute instructor (who loves to do tandem jumps but occasionally takes herself for a solo jump)</td>
<td>I am required to know my second jumper, each has to put a certain amount of trust in each other and where required know how to ease the anxiety and tension of a first time jumper. At times I need to take the lead and at others just enjoy the journey but ensure a safe landing.</td>
<td>Relationships, Structure and boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiding star</td>
<td>Showing by example. Showing children how to behave with confidence, dignity and compassion for self and others. Showing mothers how to treat their children with respect for the child and consideration for the learning process.</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An events manager</td>
<td>I am constantly juggling many areas to try to make ideas come together &amp; learning events to be successful.</td>
<td>Re-engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events manager/ ringmaster</td>
<td>As a bit of a control freak I’m a bit anal about efficient organisation and oversight</td>
<td>Structure &amp; Boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A frog/ a juggler/ an entertainer/ a negotiator/ mediator</td>
<td>Teaching and engaging YP on the margins requires you to be sensitive to all, juggle many things, entertain the masses and negotiate/mediate through the trials and tribulations of daily life (for YP).</td>
<td>Re-engagement, Holding complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainer/ Jester</td>
<td>Clowning &amp; entertaining is essential in motivating/ mentoring &amp; teaching to reduce the risk of taking ourselves too seriously.</td>
<td>Re-engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
### APPENDIX W (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphor/Image</th>
<th>Reason for choice</th>
<th>Strand of common threads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A juggler</td>
<td>I keep multiple balls in the air at the same time. I make what is hard work and takes concentration seem easy, enjoyable and entertaining.</td>
<td>Re-engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A juggler</td>
<td>I continue to juggle many roles &amp; faces of the job to suit the climate of the day/ group requirements &amp; desired outcome.</td>
<td>Holding complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magician</td>
<td>As I have many tricks up my sleeves &amp; ready to use them when needed.</td>
<td>Re-engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A magician</td>
<td>Tricks up my sleeve for being able to change programs at any given time</td>
<td>Re-engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A juggler; A policeman/ woman; a clown/ jester; a negotiator/ mediator</td>
<td>The position requires running around in circles but eventually it all comes together in the classroom, school etc.</td>
<td>Re-engagement; Holding complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A rollercoaster</td>
<td>Twists &amp; turns/ highs and lows at times a wild ride but it always finishes level &amp; smooth</td>
<td>Holding complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A marathon runner</td>
<td>Despite the experience and knowledge, some days I feel really very tiresome but we are educators running a marathon to reap the benefits in the long run.</td>
<td>Holding complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A negotiator/ mediator</td>
<td>I also seem to do a lot of negotiating with parents and in space between people.</td>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>I like the analogy of strength within flexibility. A wide network of support underpinning the work. I especially appreciate the concept of resilience that we try to build in the YP &amp; require ourselves to keep going day-to-day.</td>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A plant stem</td>
<td>Connecting YP to the places they want to be by creating a pathway for the flow of their lives</td>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A hawk</td>
<td>Need to be watching what’s going on around at all times (from risk)</td>
<td>Structure &amp; Boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A frog</td>
<td>I’m very sensitive to what is going on around me.</td>
<td>Listening to young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An audience</td>
<td>I am witness to the growth, change &amp; development of young people. I watch them create their hopes &amp; dreams &amp; acknowledge their growth. I celebrate their achievements.</td>
<td>Strengths-based practice; Listening to young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pastry chef</td>
<td>I get to work with a variety of doughs and pastries and love that you know each delicacy will end up a unique, beautiful and intricate pastry with the right mix of ingredients and working of the dough.</td>
<td>Strengths-based practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gum tree</td>
<td>Always there. Provide safe gathering space. Provide shade/comfortable/ healing space</td>
<td>Listening to young people; Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A gum tree</td>
<td>Provide some shade and place to rest. I tend not to go at a cracking pace. I sway with the breeze and provide a place for some koalas and birds to call home.</td>
<td>Relationships; Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NavSat (GPS)</td>
<td>I can keep an eye on most things without actually being present at an FLC site. I occasionally give wrong directions.</td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor/ Image</td>
<td>Reason for choice</td>
<td>Strand of common threads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A frog; an arrow in flight; Bamboo</td>
<td>Depending on the circumstances I can switch between these and that’s what makes an effective educator – not to be too set in one way.</td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathon runner</td>
<td>Where the start line is 1st day of year &amp; finish line last day of year. You tend to get a bit wobbly about the ¾ mark!!</td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathon runner</td>
<td>I am a marathon runner, I never give up.</td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo; Entertainer; Clown/Jester; Negotiator/ Mediator</td>
<td>No reason given</td>
<td>Cannot determine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koala; Frog</td>
<td>No reason given</td>
<td>Cannot determine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo (but secretly want to be b) an arrow in flight!!</td>
<td>No reason given</td>
<td>Cannot determine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A juggler</td>
<td>No reason given</td>
<td>Cannot determine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A negotiator/ Mediator</td>
<td>No reason given</td>
<td>Cannot determine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>No reason given</td>
<td>Cannot determine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2 metaphors and their reasons were not included as they may identify questionnaire respondents)
# APPENDIX X

Common Threads in Three Codes for Ways of Working: Staff Relationships and Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of working: Staff relationships and support</th>
<th>Common threads in SR&amp;S1: Multidisciplinary practice and collaboration</th>
<th>Common threads in SR&amp;S2: Productive relationships among staff</th>
<th>Common threads in SR&amp;S3: Staff support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Partnering with and learning from other workers</td>
<td>• Importance of relationships</td>
<td>• Organisational structures for support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Working with interests / strengths of workers</td>
<td>• Support</td>
<td>• Network Team support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Different ‘frame of mind’ between teacher and community services workers</td>
<td>• Collaboration</td>
<td>• Local site support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Training/ Networking together across disciplines</td>
<td>• Using the four principles</td>
<td>• Reflection/ Supervision: individual and group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Challenges for paraprofessionals</td>
<td>• Safety for risk taking</td>
<td>• Flexible and honest ways of working</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dominance of education model</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Seeing bigger picture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX Y

Data Extracts for Six Common Threads in the Code: Multidisciplinary Practice and Collaboration

In interviews with educators, multidisciplinary practice and collaboration were talked about in a range of ways. Common threads were identified in the analysis of interview data and can be seen in Appendix Table Y1.

Appendix Table Y1

Common Threads in Multidisciplinary Practice and Collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multidisciplinary practice and collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Partnering with and learning from other workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Working with interests/strengths of workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Different ‘frame of mind’ between teacher and youth worker/community worker/social worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Training/networking together across disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Challenges for paraprofessionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dominance of education model</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The perceptions of staff about multidisciplinary practice showed a link between ‘doing their work’ and ‘social participation’. Multidisciplinary practice was enacted and experienced in the context of relationships with other staff that were generally characterised as being supportive, helpful, a resource for practice, comfortable, and open. Some staff had experienced multidisciplinary practice in other work contexts and it was not new to them. For others, it was quite a contrast to previous work contexts and required a shift in understanding.

Partnering with and learning from other workers

The first common thread that was identified in the analysis of interview data for multidisciplinary practice and collaboration, was partnering with and learning from other workers. Some interview participants recognised the benefit of working across professional boundaries and experienced support through drawing on the expertise and complementary skills of workers from other professional backgrounds. Sharing of knowledge across professional disciplines occurred regularly for some.
I think the biggest thing has been collaboration. Collaboration with other workers - really sharing on a very regular basis. You know, how’s it going? What’s going on? Yeah. Collaboration with the other workers here and really sharing of our knowledges, you know, across disciplines, across learning areas. (INT 01, p.9)

The extent of the multidisciplinary practice in various school sites was difficult to gauge from the interviews as general questions were asked rather than in-depth inquiry into this particular aspect of practice.

**Working with the interests and strengths of workers**

The second common thread in multidisciplinary practice and collaboration was working with the interests and strengths of workers. This was particularly relevant in outreach situations where the staffing generally consisted of a youth worker and a teacher with up to 15 young people. Boundaries between roles were not as marked in these settings with the flexibility for workers to draw on the strengths of each staff person rather than strictly working according to roles such as teacher and youth worker. There was a sense of “blending of each others’ strengths. A sort of balancing” (INT 08, p.15) and working where the strengths are which appeared to also suit the needs and interests of workers as well as young people. Workers recognised that if they were working in an area of interest and passion, this also impacted on young people. The focus in these situations was still clearly on the needs of the young people and how those needs could be most effectively met. In larger sites workers made reference to drawing on the strengths and interests of co-workers, even those from other sites, especially in relation to planning units of work for young people.

Those that are keen to do it will do it [sharing ideas]. And by now, like I’ve got in my head say the name of five people who I would contact about ‘xyz’. And that I know are keen to talk about that. And they typically the ones who also put things on the forum [online sharing space]. (INT 04, p.16)
Different frame of mind between teachers and community services workers

A third common thread in multidisciplinary practice and collaboration was the notion of there being a ‘different frame of mind’ between teachers and community services workers. Some teachers talked about this as a learning opportunity. They had been unfamiliar with the idea of a practice framework that was commonly used by workers in community services. This awareness caused the teacher to reflect on developing their own practice framework and to consider how it might influence their work with young people.

I’ve always been interested in ecology . . . I guess that’s part of the philosophical framework. It’s kind of a framework for my work . . . in coming here – you know – “what’s your framework?” Wow, social workers talk about their framework – I went ooh! What’s my framework? I wonder what it is . . . . (INT 01, p.8)

The different frame of mind was at times also expressed in language. For example, among youth workers, social workers and community workers, the term ‘young people’ or ‘young person’, was most commonly used in practice. Teachers in mainstream contexts generally use the term ‘students’, and in the research context, whilst young people was the term most commonly adopted, some teachers used ‘students’ or ‘kids’ to refer to the young people. One teacher found himself reflecting on this and recognised that youth work discourse had influenced the wider educator discourse in the network context in a positive way.

So their [youth workers] language was a different discourse. It really is significantly different, like the language used in education. And it will be interesting to see in the [school sites], what will be the language incorporated in the [school sites]. There’s already, not a conflict, but there’s already a tension around the word young people and students. Um, and I think, I probably have been sold on the word young people. (INT 05, p.38)
The teacher showed understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of using the term young people as a more dignified expression of equality and valuing of the person, rather than a term that can denote a different level in terms of traditional power dynamics. However, this person also mentioned that some young people actually liked being referred to as a student in this context. They were reinventing themselves in a new way and changing past negative experiences of being a student in other places.

In the [school sites], in the compulsory area of 12 – 15 [years of age], some young people actually like the language of being called a student because they actually have never, ah, acceptably could have been called a student. (INT 05, p.38)

The different frame of mind between teachers and community services workers, was also highlighted by a community services worker who had observed that certain ways of speaking, such as using directive language and the use of imperatives, and certain body language used by some teachers, tended to reinforce more authoritarian/traditional roles. Whilst this was not generally widespread amongst all teachers in the context, it had come to the attention of the community services worker at their site. For example, during a small group meeting, a teacher standing in front of a group in the classroom at the whiteboard whilst young people sat, rather than being part of a circle of discussion at the same level, highlighted a different awareness between the teacher and the community services worker regarding communication with young people, particularly non-verbal communication and the dynamics of power. The community services worker recognised that difference was not necessarily problematic if awareness accompanies the choices made for specific purposes in certain situations.

But I do notice that there’s different ways that the people who have a background in education would occasionally approach things than people with a background in social work or community services. And I’m not necessarily saying one way is wrong or right but there’s definitely differences and when I first came to watch those different interactions, yea it was interesting to find where I fit . . . it’s just the whole manner, the body language and everything, um, is very different. And there were times when I was wondering you know I
go, now where is it in a teaching degree do they even teach about body language? And you might be saying it in a nice way but what is your body language expressing?  (INT 06, p.17 & 19)

Several teachers acknowledged that youth workers provided a very good sounding board for them as they sought advice, support and ideas from both trained and untrained youth workers. Interviewees perceived that youth workers’ different experiences of life and work offered another perspective which enhanced the relationships of teachers with young people.

Youth workers are gold, ‘cause their skills . . . their skills in just working through what to say to a young person [that] is appropriate. And as a teacher, I’ve learnt a lot and my experience has given me a lot . . . we’ve got some teachers who were youth workers and [I often] go “Is this appropriate?” or “what should I do?” Cause if I think I'm not right or if I’m a bit worried about something I would definitely go and ask if not the boss, then someone I know who has that experience. (INT 14, p.11)

Training and networking together across disciplines

Training and networking together across disciplines was the fourth common thread in multidisciplinary practice and collaboration. In some instances where this had occurred, workers had developed a common vocabulary in their practice that proved useful. The valuing of training and study, whether done individually or in teams, provided opportunities for workers to be supported and/or challenged in their current concepts around working with young people.

Another thing I guess is that we’ve specifically done training together. So that we can relate our own discipline areas to the training that we’re doing and it forms a communication arc across to other colleagues who have different backgrounds. So really specifically, the teacher educators communicate with the social worker educators. We did training that gave us . . . a common vocabulary so that did really help. (INT 01, p.11)

Some teachers stated that their understanding of youth work practice was not clear and that greater clarity in this area would be advantageous. “I think it would be, it
would be good if both teachers and youth workers, if everybody sort of knew what the others were doing it would be pretty handy (INT 12, p.20).

Networking across agencies was also identified by a few participants as an enhancement to their practice. This tended to be a common aspect of practice for those workers in the community services but not so evident for teachers (Edwards, 2004; Friesen, Finney, & Krentz, 1999). The general sense from teachers interviewed was that teachers who are generally not experienced in youth work and social work practice, need to draw on aspects of both domains for their work in this context as they are complementary and support enhanced outcomes for young people (Edwards, 2005).

Maybe they [teachers] should given lots of in-service about that [youth work practice]. Cause I know their skills are more of a social work realm and teachers are educators, but you've got to kind of cover both, but I'm not experienced it that. (INT 14, p.13)

**Challenges for paraprofessionals**

When discussing multidisciplinary practice and collaboration, a fifth common thread was the challenges experienced by paraprofessionals, particularly in relation to equity issues. Whilst the general feeling towards multidisciplinary practice and collaboration from the interview participants was positive, some participants highlighted that the common boundaries between paraprofessionals such as teacher aides and education support workers in mainstream contexts, were not always as clearly apparent in the network context.

Although there are times where maybe a lot has been expected of them. Or we take them for granted, perhaps, and I don’t mean we, like, with a teacher you’ve got to do your planning, you’ve got to do all the background stuff and sometimes it might seem that they are expected to do that. But I think they take on an awful lot, outside their role here. And I don't know if I would actually like to be in their shoes, being a teacher aide. (INT 14, p.12)
With the emphasis on developing safe and supportive relationships with young people, paraprofessionals engage in a dynamic way alongside teachers in the work with young people. Some paraprofessionals have the advantage of being young people themselves, whilst others are very familiar with the local community and culture – both in terms of social and socioeconomic dimensions of culture and/or ethnic/Indigenous dimensions of culture. The social and cultural capital of such workers is recognised on the ground in a day to day capacity in interactions with young people and colleagues. However, the limitations of an industrial award that delineates between workers in terms of formal qualifications and their associated rates of pay and number of hours/weeks worked, but which does not formally recognise social and cultural capital through economic remuneration, is problematic. The social and cultural capital of paraprofessionals, were recognised as essential elements of work in this context. Some staff felt that this work should also be valued in an economic sense given its very significant contribution to the effectiveness of the work in the context.

The teachers, you know they do the relationship stuff and the bit of youth work and stuff but their focus is pretty clear, here you’re a teacher this is what you’re gonna do. Whereas the others, the youth workers, the social workers and those people, it’s not that clear, it’s pretty muddy, because they do, do teaching, because they use teaching as, you know they’ll take classes, they’ll take kids out and do stuff, so they’ll link it to the curriculum or they’ll use that as a vehicle to move it along to the next thing to work out some issues with some young people. So it gets really blurry. And then I s’pose there’s pay issues, there’s holiday issues. There’s all those sorts of things that come into play that makes it very muddy. (INT 12, p.16-17)

This lack of recognition impacts on the promotion and valuing of multidisciplinary practice and collaboration through “power differences” (Rueda & Monzo, 2002).

**Dominance of the education model**

This issue of power differences leads into the final common thread in multidisciplinary practice and collaboration, the dominance of the education model in
the context. Some participants commented that multidisciplinary practice had decreased over the years and was not as strong now since the schools have become larger, with a greater number of teachers employed.

There’s not a lot of people from different backgrounds. This is very much a teaching place now. It’s very a teacher dominated thing and teacher aides are doing the work of teachers. They’re what you would call a youth worker but that’s a youth support coordinator whose role is quite different. Like they work, they work with a particular case load for example, like eight or ten, and they don’t take on any new clients once they’ve reached that – like they’re very careful about their load and the other part of their role is to be sort of pro-active and access other programs which will run here, right? So we don’t really have a youth worker in the sense of somebody who’d be hanging out or something. A teacher can’t turn around and say to a youth worker “Do you mind just going and sitting with them for a couple of hours” and you haven’t got that sort of, it’s a different, it’s on a different level. (INT 10, p.10)

In the past it was felt that the youth worker role was often a voice of challenge for teaching staff. In many instances the advocacy role of youth workers was dynamic. In the network context where the primary focus has been on reengaging and enfranchising young people in and through education, multidisciplinary practice offers teachers new ways of working with young people. Many community services workers are trained to recognise that young people need support in a variety of complex areas of their lives, not only in formal learning choices. Without the holistic approach offered by community services workers providing other practice frameworks, something has been lost for young people who experience multiple complexities in their lives.

There have been in the past youth workers who have been employed as youth workers to like just you know be here, part of the place. [Previous youth workers] . . . would have a big overview of all of the students. And they would challenge, they would challenge teaching staff. They would keep that balance right. They would say “look, this, you know, the way you’re approaching that student, because they’re not participating in a classroom they have to go home, there’s more to that young person. (INT 10, p.11)

It was also recognised by one staff member that the accountability measures for teachers had increased dramatically over time with regard to curriculum, assessment,
administration and other dimensions of professionalism now imposed on teachers. “Teachers too now, [pause] are very busy - they’re busy with the teaching, they’re busy with the education. Now, the accountability measures are much more” (INT 10, p.15).

This increased accountability, combined with the diminishing number of community services workers employed in the context, is a potential threat to the continuation of vibrant multidisciplinary practice in the context.
APPENDIX Z

Data Extracts for Five Common Threads in the code:

Productive Relationships Among Staff

The idea of productive relationships among staff was talked about in a variety of ways in interviews. Common threads were identified in the analysis of interview data and can be seen in Appendix Table Z1.

Appendix Table Z1

Common Threads in Productive Relationships Among Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Productive relationships among staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Importance of relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Using the four principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Safety for risk taking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Importance of relationships

The importance of relationships among staff was the first common thread apparent in interview data. Certain personal qualities were highlighted by some participants as being important in the development of productive relationships. These qualities included openness, honesty, patience and friendliness. Such qualities contributed to productive and safe relationships among staff.

A number of staff felt that relationships with staff and with young people were bound together in the notion of community. A certain degree of accountability to the school community occurs as a result of working in a relational manner. One participant talked about relationships in the context of community in the following way:

I think that relationship is bound up with their whole sort of idea of community. If we hold relationships as important, I think that the natural outcome is the whole community idea. But within the community a number of relationships are actually made, so support, I suppose for when a staff member comes in, that the relationships are started within the actual school community. They [staff] have a responsibility as well as the young people have an opportunity to make some sort of relationship that can be a helpful relationship. (INT 07, p.9-10)
Several participants felt that relationships were the most important aspect of the work. Through developing relationships, trust develops. With trust comes safety. A number of staff felt comfortable and safe in their relationships with their colleagues and were able to ask lots of questions when necessary and felt closely supported.

I guess within the workers, I know I was very open and up front that I was a new practitioner, I’m gonna have a lot of questions and just working, in this environment I feel completely comfortable to just stick up my hand and say, ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about, can you help out?’ And so to have a team of people, that you’re that comfortable with. And I also think that it’s great that within that team we’ve got a range of people, there’s people who have been here for years and years and who are a bit older and more experienced and then there’s a group of I guess, younger workers as well and we all bring different things to the table as well so we can all support each other in different areas. (INT 06, p.7)

It was also noted that if staff are living and modelling the importance of relationships with each other, this filters down to what happens with the young people

So it’s the relationship building [among staff], which is quite ironic, because when I started here I would never have thought that that would be the case. I didn’t really know what to expect to be quite honest but yea. And so those relationships, which I s’pose filters down to what happens with the kids... ‘cause that’s where the trust comes. (INT 12, p.10)

Support

Support was the second common thread identified in interview data. It was mentioned in a number of different ways from the practical support offered on the ground on a day to day basis, and in the emotional support that staff experienced in their relationships with colleagues. One participant perceived that “there was a mentality within the network about nurturing and making sure people [staff] are feeling comfortable and that they’re OK” (INT 09, p.15-16). Another participant felt that experiences of negativity and ‘backstabbing’ were notable in their absence and that there was a genuine sense of respect and support.
I think it’s the staff. Because you can always bounce ideas off them and everything like that . . . and, just the friendliness. There’s no backstabbing or stuff or anything like that, it’s all, you know if you’ve got issues, put the issues on the table. (INT 11, p.12)

Support was also discussed in terms of the professional support staff felt when they were able to draw on the expertise of workers from other disciplines and from those who had worked in the context over a longer period of time and whose experience was significant. The experience of mentoring was positively mentioned by a number of participants as well as the opportunity to “be around excellent people, excellent adults” (INT 10, p.7), and in the process of employment in the early days “of hanging around for a while” (INT 10, p.25).

Collaboration

Collaboration was the third common thread identified in this code of the interview data. The experience of collaboration was spoken about in terms of having “a strong working team, a sense of cohesion and shared vision” (INT 03, p.7). It was felt that there needed to be a sense of unity and a “solid team for a place to flourish” (INT 13, p.19). The development of a sense of team partly occurred as a result of “sharing on a regular basis” (INT 01, p.9). For example, this sharing occurred formally in morning meetings, afternoon debriefs and at staff meetings, and also informally through giving time to incidental, work-related conversation and sharing.

Using the four principles

The fourth common thread identified in the interview data for productive relationships among staff was using the four principles of respect, participation, safety and legal, and honesty. What a number of staff highlighted was that the four principles were for everybody and did not only apply to young people. This required that staff “respect each other and be very open and honest if things aren’t working” (INT 01, p.17). Staff felt enabled to admit mistakes and one participant commented that “the
respect and the chance to do better and learn from your mistakes has been genuinely practiced” (INT 04, p.22). Younger workers expressed a feeling of being valued and respected by older, more experienced workers. One experienced staff member commented that working with the four principles can sometimes “impact badly”. Staff may have “a different view of how others are working” which can create tensions and disagreements. This was not seen as overly problematic as the participant had realistic expectations that differences occur, and adopted a practical approach requiring problem solving. “You try every point of the compass until you find one that works” (INT 10, p.19).

**Safety for risk taking**

Finally, productive relationships among staff, was identified in relation to risk taking. Several staff interviewed felt able to take risks, “run with new ideas” (INT 11, p.15) and try something creative. The sense of being able to “have a go; who cares if it stuffs up; relationship is the most important thing” was a commonly held sentiment (INT 12, p.10-12).
APPENDIX AA

Data Extracts for Six Common Threads in the Code: Staff Support

Staff support was experienced in a number of different ways by interview participants. Common threads were identified in the analysis of interview data and can be seen in Appendix Table AA1.

Appendix Table AA1

*Common Threads in Staff Support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Organisational structures for support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Network Team support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Local site support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflection/ supervision: individual and group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible and honest ways of working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Seeing the bigger picture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Organisational structures for support**

A range of organisational structures that supported staff in their work were identified by interview participants. These included regular meetings such as: morning meetings; staff meetings; community and learning choices meetings; staff days for strategic review and planning; debriefs; induction days; whole staff days; and supervision meetings. These organisational structures were used by staff at different times and for different purposes. Preferences for some options over others were expressed depending on individuals’ circumstances and needs. There was generally a high level of satisfaction expressed by staff in relation to the range of options for staff support that were available across the network.

**Network support team**

The second common thread identified in the interview data related to staff support was the role offered by the network support team. At the time this study was conducted, the support team comprised a range of workers with specific realms of responsibility, offering support in the following areas: learning choices, child
protection, human resource management, identity and formation, induction and professional development, special needs, administration and a range of other support needs identified by staff through coordinators in sites. This team was multidisciplinary and worked across the five school sites participating in this study. Features of the support offered by this team that were identified by staff, included a strong emphasis on relationships. This was often expressed through the sense of availability of the team and the principal to staff. Regarding face to face contact, the following was expressed: “I mean [the principal] has no hesitation if you have a problem that you need to meet face to face he’ll book a ticket and come” (INT 08, p.8), and contact by telephone at any time. “I know I can ring [the principal] at the drop of a hat. I know I’ve got some really good rapport with [the principal] (INT 02, p.8).

Staff generally expressed confidence in the willingness and capacity of the support team to assist them in their work, despite the challenges of distance and multiple campuses. Only one interviewee expressed hesitancy to approach support team staff due to the high demand of their time across sites.

Local site support

Local site support was identified as the third common thread of staff support. It encompassed a range of aspects such as support offered by colleagues on a one to one basis and through the support of the larger staff team.

Well I think having a really good strong working team is really supportive and that’s been really useful over the time. . . but when we’ve got good regular supervision, and we’re working as a team and we’ve got sort of, that sense of cohesion, and shared vision, then it’s fine. (INT 03, p.7)

Coordinator support was generally considered one of the most integral dimensions of support for staff in their work. “The coordinator is very supportive and so is everyone else” (INT 13, p.12). A number of staff also mentioned the support they experienced from young people. This was evident when staff witnessed the growth and
change apparent in the lives of young people. “I think it’s actually good to be able to see a growth within the young people as well” (INT 07, p.8). Support from young people was also evident through the genuine and reciprocal care and concern offered by young people in authentic relationships with staff, and by the openness of young people to engage in programs guided by the operation by principles model incorporating respect, participation, safe and legal and honesty.

But the young people are actually the ones that are the biggest [support]. I find that, sometimes I’ll go in and feel like I’ll doubt my ability and then I walk into school and the young people help me recognise that (INT 15, p.4).

**Reflection/supervision: Individual and group**

Some staff mentioned the support they experienced through professional supervision. This was offered internally by the organisation through access to a professional counsellor or at times with the local site coordinator.

And having regular supervision I found was, with um, just with [coordinator], and also when I first started, with a [more experienced worker] as well. I found [supervision] essential and really great for anyone and particularly for any new practitioner. (INT 06, p.8)

One participant talked about external supervision and recognised the value of this kind of support in their professional work.

I think I would explain [supervision] as a support mechanism, it’s a support mechanism in so far as it’s an external support mechanism, where you can actually be supported by another person um, that’s not anything to do with staff and I think that’s important - a bit of distance. I think a bit of distance is actually very important. It makes sense. (INT 07, p.8)

Some sites arranged regular group supervision or reflective practice as another mechanism of support for staff in their work. This was valued by those who had participated in the sessions.
[Having] enough space to talk about why, why do you do it like that? Why do you do this? What would you do in this situation? So I guess a lot of time for reflecting on how things are done and why things are done that way. Where that idea comes from... so there’s a lot of time for discussion and reflection, these are really important, because I don’t know that they’re—it’s not like you can go off somewhere else where you can find out how to do it—you really have to do this. (INT 03, p.10)

Flexible and honest ways of working

The next common thread identified in the data related to staff support was the flexible and honest ways of working that was a feature of the context. This flexibility was experienced when an individual staff member’s personal health circumstances were considered in decisions about hours of work and leave arrangements.

... coming back in first part-time and then full-time, the [coordinator] has been excellent and has kept on my replacement for the afternoon program so that I don’t have to jump in 100% and that’s been really supportive. (INT 04, p.10)

The sense of honesty in work practice was apparent when staff felt able to admit when they were struggling with an aspect of their work or with a particular young person.

I think one of the areas that is very difficult in this is you feel isolated or you can feel isolated, you can feel you’re the only one having troubles, but that’s certainly not true. You’re really the only person not having trouble (laugh), if you believe that you’re not having trouble. And I think that’s what comes out in these conversations and I’ve gone down to [school site] and different times when people are sort of ah, a bit cagey about what they’re talking about and I basically say, ‘you know it is OK to be struggling with this’ and they go ‘Oh God, I thought I was the only one’. And I say, ‘look I’ve had all this experience and I’m struggling’, um so, you know, so I think they relax a little bit more when they can hear that people [struggle]. (INT 05, p.21)

Flexibility and honesty was evident through the collegiality and equality experienced in working relationships with other staff where individuals felt they were working in a flexible and honest way. “You’re really working in partnership and you’re working as equals and it’s about negotiation and compromise and listening” (INT 09,
This teacher identified that her experience of working in the network was a “backflip from the authority model of being teacher” that had been experienced in another conventional education setting (INT 09, p.6). Flexibility was also experienced by staff when they felt encouraged to run with new ideas and try new things.

I think working with people at the network has allowed a greater freedom of information sharing and a greater flexibility “OK let’s give this a go” rather than “Oh I don’t think this is gonna work”. (INT 08, p.14)

### Seeing the bigger picture

The final common thread identified in the data for staff support was the sense of seeing the bigger picture. This was expressed in a range of ways and in a variety of spheres. At a personal level for some staff, seeing the bigger picture was connected to their own sense of spirituality and purpose in their work as educators.

I do have a strong sense of being part of a bigger picture and in all honesty I have a big sense of support from the spirit. The spirit and all that kind of thing and in all honesty I pray every day before I go in every day and I sort of pray when I come out and it’s not really religious but it's a calling in of whatever I can be. That actually is a massive support. (INT 15, p.3)

I feel that what I do, I’m not just going to a job, you know, that it has a purpose. And what I like about here, people don't realise it, a lot that kids don't realise that the Christian Brothers are doing ministry here that’s cutting edge, all these kids realise is that no one gets expelled, what they're getting here is unconditional love and that constant forgiveness. They don't know that, ‘cause out in the world it’s three strikes and you’re gone, OK? (INT 13, p.26)

For other staff, seeing the bigger picture impacted the way they viewed their work as educators on a day to day level. This was captured when staff recognised that education was broader than curriculum and that in their work of enfranchising young people, relationships were always the first priority. At a wider organisational level, seeing the bigger picture entailed staff having awareness that they were part of a
network of schools beyond their local site and that they could access support and resources through this wider network.

I think the (network) is, it’s a godsend. It’s a whole network of youth workers, teachers, [support staff], coordinators – everyone supports one another. You only need to say the word. I’m having problems in this area or, you know for everyone to give you as much support as you need. (INT 08, p.8)

Beyond the organisation, seeing the bigger picture included aspects of networking that enabled staff to move beyond the boundaries of the organisation into a wider sphere of support and expertise within local communities and with other agencies.

I guess I do a lot of sort of networking stuff, so I’ll, like in the past I’ve worked for things with [other agency]. . . and get some funding for that, and talking it through with them and building up the ideas around training and get some for funding around that . . . I’m on a couple of reference groups – one’s about [the youthwork] sector . . . so what sort of support and development for youth workers. And I’ll go on another one about engaging, how to engage young people who are disengaging, from education. (INT 03, pp.2-3)

In a political and ideological sense, seeing the bigger picture involved offering a challenge to the very notion of what education entailed and how it can be enacted. One participant eloquently articulated that the practice of education experienced in the network context offered a unique and important perspective contributing to the wider social discourse of education.

I think these places offer a model of excellence around what pedagogy and what learning can be like. I’m really glad that the best of educators, the people who choose to work with us, all show the commitment to reflect and delve into themselves, and to challenge themselves, and at the same time, want to work with this disadvantaged group of young people. I think these places actually offer and stand in front of a fair bit of what can be seen in the current economic climate, as being a revisionist kind of approach to education. And in that sense, the very existence of these places becomes radical. Places like this need to exist to challenge other systems, so in that kind of hegemonic sense, they are extremely important as a political and pedagogic point of difference. (INT 16, p.9)
APPENDIX AB

Arriving at Strands of Common Threads Across Three Codes in Ways of Working: Staff Relationships and Support

Strands were identified either through repetition across two or more codes or in some instances because they represented an important idea that may have only appeared in one code. For example, the strand of organisational structures that support only appeared in one code - SR&S3: Staff Support.

(The clustered common threads can be seen in strands across the horizontal rows of the table. Common threads remain under the code in which they first appeared, and can be seen in the vertical columns of the table).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code: SR&amp;S1</th>
<th>Code: SR&amp;S2</th>
<th>Code: SR&amp;S3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multidisciplinary practice and collaboration</td>
<td>Productive relationships among staff</td>
<td>Staff support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STRAND 1: MULTIDISCIPLINARY PRACTICE**
- Partnering with and learning from other workers
- Different ‘frame of mind’ between teacher and community services workers
- Training/ networking together across disciplines

**STRAND 2: COLLABORATION**
- Working with interests/ strengths of workers
- Collaboration

**STRAND 3: RELATIONSHIPS**
- Importance of relationships
- Support

**STRAND 4: WORKING WITH THE FOUR PRINCIPLES WITH STAFF**
- Using the four principles
- Flexible and honest ways of working

**STRAND 5: ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES THAT SUPPORT**
- Organisational structures for support
- Network Team support
- Local site support
- Reflection/ supervision: Individual and group

**STRAND 6: SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE**
- Safety for risk taking
- Seeing the bigger picture

**STRAND 7: CHALLENGES TO SUPPORT**
- Challenges for paraprofessionals
- Dominance of education model
### APPENDIX AC

**Items 12 and 13: Results of Questionnaire Data Analysis Related to Collaboration**

Staff were invited to rate the statements on a 5 point scale:
1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Unsure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

#### Item 12 Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Items grouped according to Insights on collaboration</th>
<th>Percentage rate of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration was important for planning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Regular planning with other staff is not a priority for me.</td>
<td>80% Strongly disagree/Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) It is important to me to consistently plan and work together with other staff at my FLC.</td>
<td>87% Agree/Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q) I plan and prepare better alone as I can ensure that my aims and goals are met.</td>
<td>57% Disagree strongly/Disagree 17% unsure 26% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration was important for problem solving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) I prefer to problem-solve myself rather than consult other workers.</td>
<td>83% Strongly disagree/Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) I can easily ask for help from other workers when I am uncertain or ‘stuck’ with regard to how I work with a young person.</td>
<td>93% Agree/Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p) When faced with a challenge I ask for support from other workers.</td>
<td>97% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More collaboration would be preferable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) I would prefer to work more collaboratively with other staff.</td>
<td>83% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) I have a low expectation of collaboration with other staff.</td>
<td>87% Strongly disagree/Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive expectation of peers to be supportive and respectful in answering any questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m) I am confident that any question I have will be answered willingly and respectfully by my peers.</td>
<td>90% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration at a local level was strong with a high level of awareness of the expertise of peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) The level of collaboration with others at my FLC is suitable for me.</td>
<td>74% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) I have a clear understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of other workers at my FLC.</td>
<td>83% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) I do not regularly access the expertise of other workers at my FLC.</td>
<td>90% Strongly Disagree/Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o) I am aware of the expertise of other workers at my FLC.</td>
<td>83% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of awareness of the expertise of staff at a network level which can impede collaboration across sites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) I regularly access the expertise of other workers in the network.</td>
<td>70% % Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) I have a clear understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of the Network Team.</td>
<td>30% Strongly disagree/Disagree 17% unsure 53% Agree/strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l) I am not aware of the expertise of other workers in the network.</td>
<td>Mixed Response 47% Strongly disagree/Disagree 10% unsure 43% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n) I am aware of the expertise of other workers in the network.</td>
<td>Mixed Response 50% Strongly disagree/Disagree 13% unsure 33.5% Agree/Strongly agree 3.5% no response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
APPENDIX AC (continued)

Items 12 and 13: Results of Questionnaire Data Analysis Related to Collaboration

Staff were invited to rate the statements on a 5 point scale:
1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Unsure, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree

**Item 13 responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Items grouped according to Insights on collaboration</th>
<th>Percentage rate of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time available for collaboration</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) The time available for collaboration at my FLC is reasonable.</td>
<td>Mixed response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.5% Strongly disagree/disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10% unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56.5% agree that time is reasonable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) There is not enough time available for collaboration with other staff at my FLC.</td>
<td>Mixed response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46% Strongly disagree/disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7% unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47% Agree/strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Willingness to collaborate</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Staff at my FLC are willing to collaborate</td>
<td>97% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Staff at my FLC do not seem willing to collaborate with other staff.</td>
<td>90% Strongly disagree/disagree with statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Staff at my FLC are interested in collaboration with other staff.</td>
<td>90% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Interest in collaboration amongst staff at my FLC does not appear to be strong.</td>
<td>90% Strongly disagree/disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal relevance and meaningfulness of collaboration</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) The process of collaboration amongst staff at my FLC is not particularly relevant to me.</td>
<td>80% Strongly disagree/disagree with statement and therefore feel that collaboration is personally relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Collaboration amongst staff at my FLC is a meaningful process.</td>
<td>23% unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX AD

**Item 14: Ways of Working with Others**

Results of Questionnaire Data Analysis Related to Strands of Common Threads

Staff were invited to rate the statements on a 5 point scale:
1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Unsure, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Item 14 responses grouped according to Strands of common threads</th>
<th>Percentage rate of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multidisciplinary practice</strong></td>
<td>Not evident in the data for this item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Staff meetings are a balance between information sharing and relevant discussion.</td>
<td>93% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Problem solving usually occurs through discussion and collaboration.</td>
<td>93% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) I prefer to plan in a team context to get a wider range of experience and perspectives.</td>
<td>77% Agree/Strongly agree, 13% Unsure, 7% Disagree, 3% No response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) I regularly share resources and ideas with other staff.</td>
<td>94% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m) Most staff meetings include information sharing rather than discussion.</td>
<td>63% Disagree/Strongly disagree, 27% Agree, 7% Unsure, 3% No response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) My experience and perspectives are valued by my colleagues.</td>
<td>94% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) My ideas and perspectives are listened to.</td>
<td>97% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) I am comfortable presenting my viewpoint to other staff and am confident I will be heard.</td>
<td>90% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working with the four principles with staff</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) The four principles are usually enacted between staff at my FLC.</td>
<td>97% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) My ideas and perspectives are listened to (Respect).</td>
<td>97% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) I am comfortable presenting my viewpoint to other staff and am confident I will be heard (Safe &amp; Legal).</td>
<td>90% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) I feel respected and valued by other workers at my FLC (Respect).</td>
<td>97% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) My colleagues value and actively support my cultural perspective (Respect).</td>
<td>83% Agree/Strongly agree, 17% Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) Staff meetings are an opportunity for me to share ideas and contribute suggestions freely (Safe &amp; Legal).</td>
<td>87% Agree/Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l) The four principles are not regularly enacted between staff at my FLC.</td>
<td>93% Disagree/Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n) My cultural perspective is not always appreciated or taken into account by my colleagues (Respect).</td>
<td>80% Strongly Disagree/Disagree; 16.66% Unsure; 3.33% Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisational structures that support</strong></td>
<td>Not evident in the data for this item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seeing the bigger picture</strong></td>
<td>Not evident in the data for this item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges to support</strong></td>
<td>Not evident in the data for this item</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX AE

**Common Threads in Four Codes for Ways of Professional Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning by watching/ observing</td>
<td>Movement towards relationships as a priority</td>
<td>Personal reflection for self-awareness and inner strength</td>
<td>Understanding young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning by doing &amp; through experience</td>
<td>Movement towards equality, openness and trust</td>
<td>Reflection on practice as a dimension of professional supervision</td>
<td>Emphasising relationships, community and working with the four principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning by being present in the work</td>
<td>Movement away from control and fear</td>
<td>Reflection as a dimension of team collaboration</td>
<td>Situated learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning through being part of a team</td>
<td>– having freedom to risk</td>
<td>Critical reflection for interrogation of own practice</td>
<td>Reflection and discussion for awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning through reflection</td>
<td>– becoming a co-learner</td>
<td>Critical reflection developing awareness for advocacy</td>
<td>Aspects of organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning through finding own passion</td>
<td>Movement towards greater self-awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Practical guidelines for learning choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Movement towards advocacy and activism for young people</td>
<td></td>
<td>General recommendations for Professional Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX AF

Data Extracts for Six Common Threads in the Code:

*Situated Learning*

In flexi school sites professional learning was predominantly characterised by ‘situated learning’ or ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Situated learning or legitimate peripheral participation included learning by observing, by doing, by shadowing, by being mentored and by gradually taking on more responsibility in the presence of more experienced others. In this way learners became part of a community of practice as a newcomer or a person adopting a new role (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). For example:

- staff talked about their experiences of learning how to use the four principles through modelling other experienced staff;
- staff willingly became a buddy and mentored new staff, taking on the role of giving guidance and support;
- staff expressed a desire to visit other sites for the sake of situated learning in other contexts and were prepared to give personal time to achieve this; and
- staff welcomed others who came seeking some mentoring and gave time to share their experiences.

In interviews with educators, situated learning was discussed in a range of ways. Six common threads were identified in the interview data analysis for this code and these can be seen in Appendix Table AF 1.

**Table AF 1**

*Common Threads in Situated Learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situated Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning by watching/observing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning by doing &amp; through experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning by being present in the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning through being part of a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning through reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning through finding own passion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learning by watching/observing

The first common thread identified in the analysis of interview data for situated learning was learning by watching/observing. When asked about staff induction, one participant talked about the importance of giving people an opportunity to learn by watching, being part of the group, seeing other workers modelling the four principles in action with young people. When asked what he felt he would like to tell new workers coming in to the network his response captured an important aspect of learning through being part of a community of practice, what Wenger and Lave refer to as legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1998).

I would like to show them, it’s not tell them. You don’t, I mean telling someone is a different tactic – seeing the work in action is a different story – it’s a whole complete picture on its own . . . (INT 02, p16)

When asked how he thought new workers could be supported as they learnt how to support young people in this way of working, the same participant reiterated again the importance of seeing the work in action and integrating the practice into who you are and how you are with young people. He felt that it needed to be lived and role-modelled by the workers.

Well, I think that it’s a matter of giving them, like you said an induction, and I get that and maybe someone talking to them about the principles, but until they actually get out into the job and then see that working it’s a completely different kettle of fish . . . it’s very easy to look at the work and go yea I get that, but to work that into a program, I think about it, so you just can’t – it’s a matter of um – seeing it work. But it’s not just about seeing it, but it’s about you displaying it and you role-modelling it, and kids getting it and they do get it but it takes time. It’s not gonna be overnight, you rock in and say it and the kids basically do it. It takes time. (INT 02, p.17)
When discussing new staff induction, the need to learn through observing and being part of the community was emphasised by participants. This idea was consistent with Lave and Wenger’s notion of legitimate peripheral participation (1991, p. 29).

I think that people coming to outreach, should um, know what they’re coming in for, not just turn up and then start the day. They need to come and, sit in a group for a week at least, and just have a look for at least a week. And say, ‘come and have a look before you decide –sign up’. Just sign up and come and spend a week with us. It changes from day to day and a lot of the kids will not give you anything until a week, or, very much until you go off . . . that’s not something you can go in and say I know, I know the four principles, there’s so much more than words, so I really, really believe, that someone has to come in, it’d be so much beneficial for them, not just them but to reflect on their work so they don’t lose staff either. Have a look at what a youth worker does, and have a look at what a teacher does and then ask some questions, and go to meetings and see how, what happens on a day to day basis. (INT 02, p.11)

One of the ideas another worker talked about in relation to new staff learning about the work was the notion of situated learning through shadowing other more experienced workers.

Um, another thing that would help is um, a chance to shadow other people. Two people from [other school site] came one day and spent an hour in my class and an hour in [other worker’s] class and went away with a term full of ideas. It’s that simple. It’s not rocket science. Yea, and the room to spend one hour talking, debriefing about what you saw happening in class. You know, even an experienced one like me, I would love to go and find out how [worker at another site] does things or other people, you know? I’d love to go and shadow other different sites and that, I’d even be willing to do that in my own time, but it’s just sort of the chance. (INT 04, p.14)

In establishing herself as a worker in the new context, an interview participant talked about how the learning came through having to “find where I fit” and learning through observing other workers.

But I do notice that there’s different ways that the people who have a background in education would occasionally approach things than people with a background in social work or community services. And I’m not necessarily saying one way is wrong or right but there’s definitely differences and when I first came to watch those different interactions, yea it was interesting to find where I fit. (INT 06, p.17)
When asked about what staff need when they come into the work, another worker talked about understanding the young people who we worked with and giving people an opportunity to have “a bit of a taster”.

I think a grasp on the reality of who you’re gonna be working with. A lot of workers come in that are new to the field of working with disadvantaged, at-risk young people, you know they have different thought processes. If you can give them a bit of a taster, if it’s possible. You know, new workers coming in and spending a good week with one of the outreaches or one of the schools. I think that’s an important process myself and having that, you know there’s different positions within our network – giving them a bit of a taste each one to say, with one of the workers so they can get a broader sense of how each position works together to make the one, you know what I’m trying to say? ‘Cause a teacher’s frame of mind is a lot different to a youth worker’s frame of mind you know, a teacher aide, the cooks, the administration team – it all works well. Everyone’s got the same philosophy, mentality to make the, kids you know shine, to see their full potential. It’s wonderful to see but I think yea, if we can give those new workers a bit of a taste of each of those areas, I think it’s beneficial. (INT 08, pp.9-10)

Learning by doing and through experience

The second common thread in situated learning was the idea of learning by doing and through experience. When discussing how to develop the ability to detach from the stresses of the issues faced by young people, one worker talked about that he learnt through experience and finding his own way of dealing with it. He also mentioned learning from someone else.

You don’t get taught it, I mean that’s . . . You can read about it but to actually go through the whole situation . . . I think . . . A book’s great, and you can have all the knowledge but to actually sit and physically cop it and then at the end of the day, go home and go well, that’s OK, tomorrow I’ll start again, and not worry about it, not be concerned about it, not let it eat away at you, that’s, you’ve got to learn that, it’s something you learn, it’s ah, yea . . . you have to go through it before you can . . . Cause the thing with that is the fact that you get the emotion attached to it and you get the guilt then get your self-talk and then you get their talk, and you get that whole – it’s a whole bundle of joy, type thing with it. So it’s not something you can read, you can stay detached from children but how do you detach from somebody saying “I want to kill myself” or “I’m gonna go home to drugs and alcohol and that”. Yea, that’s emotional stuff that just rips you apart and if you’re not . . . And I believe if you’re not
strong enough, and no matter how strong you get, it’s still real, so you gotta get, yea learn, you have to find a way. Or learn it from someone else. (INT 02, p.9)

When talking about how new staff learn how to do the work, another participant talked about how she felt that the work was quite unique and that learning the way of working by doing it was essential. She also articulated a need for new staff to engage in being present in the work and observing what happens as a way of learning.

A lot of being around it [the work] to watch what happens and see how it goes . . . . . . it’s not like you can go off somewhere else where you can find out how to do it – you really have to do this. (INT 03, p.10-11)

One worker talked about how she herself appreciated learning by doing. She had identified her own preferred style of learning on the job and was grateful that she was given room to move, ask questions and “learn by doing”.

I’m someone who, would rather just sort of not be totally thrown in the deep end but go ‘this is what we’re gonna do, if you have any questions then ask along the way’ and I learn by doing and that’s exactly what happened here. And that worked really well for me. But I know for other people that, that doesn’t work and so, yea for me to have the team around but to sort of just, being able to do my own individual thing as well. I didn’t feel at all smothered, I could, I guess sort my own way into it and work out where I fit and how I fit. It wasn’t gonna be exactly the same as the person whose role I was sort of doing and everything and I was going to do it my own way. And there was a lot of freedom to do that which I found was fantastic but to also have that support there as well so if I felt I lost my way in that at all, I could always go back and ask and to have, yea I guess my structures in place, maybe like little routines say like our morning meeting at 9 o’clock every morning. Just to know that things like that are gonna happen so if I have any questions at the beginning of the day, or, it’s something that was happening, you hear about it, you know about it and you’re informed. (INT 06, pp. 8 – 9)

**Learning by being present in the work**

Learning by being present in the work was the third common thread in situated learning. This aspect of situated learning was described by participants as they talked about the importance of being around others who were experienced and having space to be part of the context. An interviewee described her own experience of situated
learning when she first came into the work by being around it, absorbing aspects of how
to do the work from the people around her and learning through doing the work and
having space to be.

Um, like the first segment of a few years might have been a learning time where,
you know I was just sucking in the importance I saw from people around me and
learning and doing and um, and just being. (INT 10, p.7)

In a similar way a worker talked about the process that was like the process of
osmosis – ‘soaking up’ and learning from others in the context.

I was very fortunate to work with you know an enormous range of people . . .
so I guess like at these places there are a lot of other learnings that happen from
people, not so much a discipline or practice framework, so I was exposed to a lot
of people's ideas around how this could work and how to be in places like this
. . . so I guess over time, you soak that stuff up. And that's what's great about
this place is that you kind of the hierarchy of authorities in disciplines kind of
gets broken down a bit so that everyone has a say, that’s why the principles
work with adults as well. (INT 16, pp.4-5)

When considering how people learnt aspects of doing the work, another
interviewee mentioned the opportunity to look and spend time in a site before starting
work.

I think they probably should be asked, and sometimes that’s just not practical to
come and have a look and come and spend a few days. Just to sort of get a feel,
‘cause you cannot possibly get an idea without being there. (INT 14, p.14)

Learning by being part of a team

Learning by being part of a team was the fourth common thread in situated
learning. As a young practitioner and recent graduate, one worker was quite
comfortable with the notion of situated learning where she could learn on the job and be
part of a team being supported, guided and mentored.

And so to have, yea a team of people, that you’re comfortable with. And I also
think that it’s great that within that team we’ve got a range of people, there’s
people who have been here for years and years and who are a bit older and more
experienced and then there’s a group of I guess, younger workers as well and we all bring different things to the table as well so we can all support each other in different areas. (INT 06, p. 7)

When talking about her own process of learning on the job, another teacher mentioned the supportive role of her teaching partner. She described the changes in her own sense of professional identity as she has become more aware of her role and the expectations of how to work with the young people. This was a gradual process over time of being and becoming more competent through the support of another worker that enabled her to learn through the experience of doing the work and being part of a team.

Well, [teaching partner] has been so monumental in that and the fact that - thank goodness – I hope he would agree, we have a really solid relationship. . . he’s had to take on so much responsibility, which must be frustrating for him at times. Um, but I slowly feel that I’m becoming more capable and we’ve fallen into our roles nicely as well. I used to double guess myself and check everything with [teaching partner] initially and I found that the kids then when I spoke to them would do the same thing “Hold on, let’s double check because he’s the boss!” You know, whereas they’re now feeling far more comfortable with me if I give them some instructions, they know “OK yep, this is – “She’s legit now!” Yeeaa!! (laugh). She knows what she’s doing – sort of (laugh). If they don’t like it they’ll still go and, but they’ll do the same with [teaching partner] and me. That’s been really important. (INT 09, pp.10 – 11)

Emphasising the importance of not working alone but as part of a team, one participant talked about the importance of working with others, especially for new staff as they learnt this way of working with young people.

No, and it’s important not to do it on your own. [We’re] getting the walls in the small classrooms knocked down, so that people aren’t on their own. I think that team teaching works best and team teaching works best but sometimes small groups do too . . . And to have two people working together is better than just one person who feels they’ve got responsibility for twelve young people, and you’re not stuck on your own in a room. Because you’re not seeing anybody else, like even new young teachers there are other people that new people can learn from. (INT 10, pp. 28-29)
When describing how staff at her school site learnt to work with the four principles, one worker described the challenges faced by the staff. The staff had to learn as a team how to operate with the four principles in a period of transition and change. This involved seeing the importance of having regular team discussions regarding how the four principles could be used in working with young people.

We needed to actually learn it as a team. The other coordinator that came, you know, she actually had to re-educate all of us. But you know, maybe in the induction, the case of the four principles, they're not gonna learn it in one day, but it's when they get back in its okay, maybe a reminder even in the staff meetings, when you do bring up a young person or a debriefing at the end of the day, a constant reminder of the four principles, OK, if it's not working how does it work? (INT 13, pp.17-18)

The importance of mentoring and role modelling from a more experienced colleague in a team was mentioned by an interviewee as a significant way that had impacted on her and the way she has learned to work with the young people in the context.

I don't know where she gets the time, but she has made time to listen and sometimes you can see she hasn't got the time for you and you learn to leave her, but she is the most supportive role model and she models language, when I'm going, “Hey this has just happened, seems like a bit extreme behaviour, what do I do, how do I deal with it?” And she models language that’s needed to calmly defuse the situation. Her experience is worth gold we should bottle her. (INT 14, p.6)

**Learning through reflection**

Learning through reflection was the fifth common thread identified in situated learning. In the research context, reflection occurred in a number of different ways including general conversations with colleagues, more formal debriefing at staff meetings and through structured supervision, a common practice of workers within the community services sector that focussed on reflection on practice. Being supported by more experienced workers through supervision was appreciated by one worker when
she first started in her role, learning about the work. “I found [supervision] essential and really great for anyone and particularly for any new practitioner (INT 06, p.8).

When discussing how new staff learn about the work, another participant talked about learning by observing and learning by doing and having enough time to reflect and discuss processes with other workers.

I guess it’s kind of a lot of being around it to watch what happens and see how it goes. I think, - and then I guess enough space to talk about why, why do you do it like that? Why do you do this? What would you do in this situation? So I guess a lot of time for reflecting on how things are done and why things are done that way. Where does that idea come from? You know cause people haven’t got the history of where that’s resolved, you know the trials and errors of it. Not that - and things are constantly changing as well. So being, you know coming in fresh-eyed, you go ‘Why do you do it like that?’ yea. So there’s a lot of time for discussion and reflection, these are really important. (INT 03, p.10)

**Learning through finding own passion**

The final common thread identified in the interview data related to situated learning was learning through finding one’s own passion. When talking about things that have supported her in her role and enhanced her professional learning, one worker talked about learning/ collaborating/ networking with other staff in similar roles at other sites. Her own interest, initiative and passion for curriculum was a driver for this networking and situated learning through a specific community of practice.

The really practical curriculum things, that was supportive and helpful. That just needs like all the people who teach maths at the networks to talk together about you know ‘what are you doing?’ Yea it works for me because I have way too much initiative and all that – I’m not sure that it works for other people but then if they’re really passionate about something, they can put their hand up, like you can’t, you can’t force people to do that and those that are keen to do it will do it. And um, by now, like I’ve got in my head say the name of five people who I would contact about ‘xyz’. And that I know are keen to talk about that. And um, they typically are the ones who also put things on the forum. (INT 04, pp.15-16)

Another worker talked about the importance of modelling hands on teaching strategies for staff who may not be used to working in this way and encouraging them to
draw on their own interests or passions, skills and talents to develop strategies for reengaging young people.

I’ve been to [outreach] a few times and I’ve been to [school site] and I actually walk up there with a hammer and some pegs and some string and some tape measures and say “this is how you can do it”, and start banging some things into the ground and show them. That’s all, so I actually model it for them. So I sit there and say “this is what I would do, I’ve only got a limited amount of knowledge, you’ve got a whole heap of other skills that you possess and that you know and they might be interested in hospitality, they might be interested in cooking, they might be interested in something else, but they have to try and draw on what they’re good at and bring that into the subjects. (INT 12, p.6)

Summary of situated learning

Situated learning or legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) included learning by watching and observing, learning by doing and through developing experience. Other aspects of situated learning that occurred on a daily basis and was described by interviewees included learning through being present in the work and being around the work, having time to ‘take in’ or ‘soak up’ from other more experienced workers important aspects of the work. Learning through being part of a community and having opportunities to share ideas, engage in conversation, discuss experiences and share resources or participate in a mentoring relationship or learn from more experienced role models was another common thread identified in the data. Finally, learning through reflection and learning through finding one’s own passion were also identified in the interview data. Through participating in a range of these various strategies that supported situated learning, new workers gradually were able to take on more responsibility in the presence of more experienced others, a feature of a Vygotskian sociocultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Through this process, staff who were engaging in situated learning became part of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29) in which their identity as educators was shaped and influenced by their practice (Wenger, 1998).
APPENDIX AG

Data Extracts for Seven Common Threads in the Code:
Transformation of Professional Identity

In flexi school sites staff and young people “walk together on journeys of individual and collective transformation. [They] are sustained by and celebrate [their] commitment to hope, optimism and a belief in the possible” (FLC Values, 2009). In the research context staff were invited to be changed and transformed in their professional identity through the ways they worked with young people. For example:

- staff talked about their own experiences of changing professional identity since working in the flexi schools;
- staff continued in the work despite demands of their role; and
- staff willingly took time to share their experiences of transformation with other newcomers.

Seven common threads were identified in the interview data analysis for transformation of professional identity and they are represented in Appendix Table AG.

Table AG 1

Common Threads in Transformation of Professional Identity

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformation of professional identity</th>
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<td>• Movement towards relationships as a priority</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Movement towards equality, openness and trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Movement away from control and fear</td>
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<td>• having freedom to risk</td>
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<tr>
<td>• becoming a co-learner</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Movement towards greater self-awareness</td>
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<td>• Movement towards advocacy and activism for young people</td>
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Movement towards relationships as a priority

This common thread was the first identified in the interview data analysis for this code. The importance of relationships with young people has been frequently mentioned by staff across all codes in the data analysis. In terms of transformation of
professional identity it was evident in the data that for new staff, prioritising relationships required a shift in their thinking around their practice as educators.

This change was described by an interviewee.

. . . the staff really need to be aware that the curriculum is second and the relationships are first. So as far as teaching staff go, new to it, they come in with the other way round, that the curriculum has to be done and that and um, so getting that change. . . . It’s that change and once that happens, the curriculum just falls into place, and it’ll all happen, it’s getting the priority, which is more important, it’s the relationship rather than the curriculum. Yea, and I don’t know how you get that across but, that’s probably the biggest struggle that I would come across and it would be really good if people already understood that or had some introduction to it. (INT 12, p.13-15)

**Movement towards equality, openness and trust**

The second common thread in transformation of professional identity was movement towards equality, openness and trust. These qualities in relationships were important within staff teams and with young people. For example, in talking about facing a challenging situation of a valued staff member leaving for another position, an interviewee commented about the importance of seeing opportunities and not just loss. The ability to draw on the resources of the whole group and to face challenges as part of a team was highlighted. This view required a certain degree of openness and trust within the staff group that had developed over time.

It was quite a big thing, cause we’ve really, we’ve knitted well together (yes), so if people are thinking of moving on it does feel like potentially a big rent (yes). But then what it also gives you, opportunities to say as well, what are all the positives that come out of this? What are the opportunities – how can we celebrate that person? Which they did. What do we keep, what have they left here that we can keep working with? Then, what sort of things will grow up in their absence. It’s an opportunity for all of that kind of discussion. So we move forward understanding that we have the resources of the whole group to hand. Any challenge does not have to be faced solo. (INT 01, p.16&17)

One relatively new worker talked about her experience of equality at her school site in terms of the style of working with young people. She described working
developmentally and compared this with working from a service provision model. The difference for her was the greater sense of equality she experienced in the work practice.

Um, well say, for example, the young parent’s program, that I worked at, it was very much about providing for these young women, helping them out, taking them to services. It was really I guess a lot of giving of yourself and they would come to you with really specific kind of needs. And that’s happened here but there’s also, I guess a lot more of equality and we’re all people and I guess the big thing about working developmentally instead of providing a service for someone is that there’s a lot of, I guess, complications, group decisions made, when stuff happens here it happens as a whole, young people have a say, workers have a say. (INT 06, p.5, lines 57 – 70)

Another interview participant talked about how he had recognised shifts in his relationships with other staff over time that involved moving towards greater openness and trust, moving away from fear of failure, the need to control and being able to have the freedom ‘to risk’. He felt that the flat structure of the organisation contributed to these shifts occurring.

I s’pose for me, a good thing for me is the fact that it’s a really flat structure. It’s a really flat structure. So for me, I’m no one’s boss and I’ve got one boss. And I like to think the staff think the same way. That’s what I like to think. I think they do, cause the actual structure, that’s what makes it work, it creates the openness. It creates the avenues for people to be able to chat and for people to talk and not feel threatened and not try to hide things and all that. . . . the one thing I value is that openness and that people don’t think I’m their boss. Which is different to a lot of other places. It’s different to pretty much everywhere else I’ve worked. Ah, so I’m working alongside them and I’m there to support them, that’s it. And they do ring me, which is amazing. They ring and ask me questions, so ah. That’s probably the one, yea, it’s the structure, the flatness that creates the openness and it’s that that allows the relationships to build, yea. (INT 12, pp.23-25)

The movement towards equality, openness and trust with young people was also mentioned by staff who saw themselves as co-learners with young people “having as much to learn from the young people as they have to learn from me” (INT 06, 20), and “having a sensitivity to young people and what they’ve got to offer as well” (INT 07, p.10).
For another worker, the transformation she identified was in terms of openness to try different strategies for engagement. She recognised in the work of her colleagues who were teachers, their need to change their ways of working with young people to ensure that the young people’s interests were at the centre of learning. There was a consciousness of needing to “cater for all” (INT 13, p.9). Teachers were asking what they needed to do for specific young people - they were reviewing and reflecting on their practice and asking themselves what else they could do to make the learning engaging and relevant.

. . . you’re working on the edge, you know, it's cutting edge work so, and that's what I like about it, you must change you can't stay the same, a new generation, they think quicker, you know and it’s about being creative and you have interesting young people that you've got to stay on top of . . . we’re always reviewing, OK, um that's working, but for this kid, what do we need to do? Try to cater for all. . . how are they going to learn best? (INT 13, p. 9)

The idea of personal growth and transformation as a movement towards openness and trust was captured in one participant’s response in which safety was identified as the essence of what the school sites have to offer to young people and adults alike.

Oh I think the essence of these places for everyone that comes to them, and I mean adults and young people is, when they mature and there are times when they don't have this, but that’s like the rest of life, but I think when they mature, these places um, they grow into themselves kind of thing, the essence of them is the value of safety. What I mean by that is that the sense that you are emotionally, spiritually, physically, um intellectually safe, um, for everyone. And that's safe to have your own mind, to say your own piece, safe to express yourself the way you want to express yourself, and fundamentally we're all looking for that, and that's why I think adults like these places as well. (INT 16, p.8)

Movement away from control and fear

The third common thread in transformation of professional identity was movement away from control and fear. This common thread captured the ideas of
having the freedom to take risks and being open to becoming a co-learner with young people. This learning was available even to experienced workers, not only new staff. One interviewee talked about the learning she had experienced since starting with the network where she encountered a whole other range of learning needs among young people.

And [I] have progressed since then ‘cause I really think I’ve learnt a lot there. ‘Cause I thought I was experienced in all this but not until you hit middle school classes at [school site] you’re not (laugh). (INT 04, p.4)

When asked about some of the differences she had experienced as a worker in the network context one participant described an aspect of transformation of her professional identity related to movement away from control and fear. She talked about a different style of working with her teaching partner that required moving away from a more traditional authoritarian model of being teacher that she had experienced in another educational context. She described the shift that occurred in her sense of herself as a teacher in a mainstream context compared to her identity that had evolved through working in the network.

Absolutely, there’s the, the level of authority I guess that traditional notion that the teacher um, has this authoritative role is um, is not the case and you’re really working in partnership and you’re working as equals and it’s about negotiation and compromise and listening, and, and um, accommodating and that initially was really difficult to get my head around because as a new teacher it takes so long time for you to get used to your role as an authoritative figure within the classroom. It takes you know a good twelve months before you feel comfortable in front of a group of teenagers and confidently you know, giving them instruction and, and you’re really taught to be quite you know, non-questioning in what you do. So there’s a little bit of a back flip and that can be difficult but, you know [teaching partner’s] been such a good role model for me and a mentor the last six months and he’s been really patient and I just, and I can see the value of, I mean I’m not sure if you could bring that ideal into a regular classroom, ‘cause it would result in chaos but it’s just, for working with these kids that have a lot of behaviour problems, it’s just like a little light switch is on and they’re no longer, the naughty kids that drive you insane. (INT 09, pp.6 – 7)
An aspect of learning and change in terms of moving away from control and fear for one worker has been his understanding of the need to set boundaries and how it is the young people who “keep you understanding it”. The young people take on ownership of the program and they are the ones who encourage participation from new students. This demonstrates that the growth and change away from control and fear towards freedom to risk and being a co-learner is not only in the young people but also in the workers who are prepared to let go and encourage the young people to take responsibility and to have ownership.

You’ve got to set boundaries, otherwise it will be you know, there’s a circus out there. And a lot of young people respect that, they keep pushing the boundaries, but some live on the boundaries and that’s . . . I’ve only been doing it for two and a half years, but they keep you understanding it. Back in the good old days there were no boundaries, no nothing. . . The culture has changed but it’s because the kids that have been here longer actually, take the new people and say OK, this is how it works, and they actually pull them up and say, yea they would do that, “We don’t do that here” which has been really good . . . They do that ownership thing. (INT 11, p.21)

The freedom to take risks and try something new can be just as challenging for adults as it is for young people. Another worker described the changes he saw in teachers with regard to their approach to curriculum delivery and relationships with young people.

Because the teachers are coming to us with, I mean they’ve all worked in mainstream schools and they’ve all been to the same universities as everybody else, aah and they have those same sort of, ‘we’ve got to get the kids through the curriculum, we’ve gotta get the ABCs’, a very structured sort of process so I suppose what I see as beneficial to the kids is trying to break that down, so that they are learning, and teaching the teachers “listen, it’s not all about the curriculum, that there are other ways of doing it without getting too bogged down in As, Bs and Cs and ticking all the boxes”. (INT 12, p.3)

When asked what some of the other ways to teach the teachers might be, his response was:
Um, probably, a good example would be Maths, so that you don’t have to have a Maths class, you know your Maths can be taught in the woodwork class, it can be taught out when you’re out playing volleyball or basketball. It can be taught on the beach, um, and those sorts of things, so, trying to get the teachers to look at their curriculum areas in a completely different way. That’s what I try and do and that’s one of the challenges, because the kids are doing stuff and they don’t even know they’re doing it. You know you could have - a good example is one young person up at _______ (school site) struggling with Maths, really interested in cars, so I sat down with the teacher and said, OK, this kid’s interested in cars, how are we going to get him involved in Maths somehow? So that the task we came up with was that you have to get his car, deck it out with a boom box sort of thing, and he had to price his boom boxes, he had to get the prices, try and work out how it’s going to get in his car and all that sort of stuff and that was the Maths part of it, and he could do it. (INT 12, pp.3-5)

One of the challenges that this same worker identified in trying to get staff to shift their ideas around curriculum delivery was connected to their willingness to try something different or new, which was seen as a dimension of risk-taking.

But I think one of the biggest issues is that we bump into staff that are reluctant to have a crack at it, ‘cause they’ve been doing this for 20 or 30 years and they, and they may feel, that they don’t have the skills to you know, go out and make sand castles and draw and stuff like that and that can be counted as, they’re doing Maths, they’re doing English. They think that Maths is sitting down in a class and adding up all the numbers. And so that, that’s a hurdle for each site . . . there is a risk, yea, that they’re going outside their safety zone, they’re going outside the curriculum documents and outside everything they’ve been taught to do (laugh). They’re doing the complete opposite. That said though, the accountability is still there but there’s not, there’s no pressure. The accountability is, is reduced. I think that’s a big thing. (INT 12, pp.8-9)

Movement towards greater self-awareness

The movement towards greater self-awareness was the fourth common thread in transformation of professional identity. Some staff talked about this in relation to the value they placed on supporting young people in their personal growth and awareness, whilst others only discussed their own increased levels of self-awareness.

For example, one worker talked about his hopes for the young people to be better people as a result of being part of the program.
But if we can change, just the principles of respect, like I say to all the young people I interview, just the fact that if you turn out to be a better person – my goal is to get you to be a better person than when you walked in the door. (INT 02, p.15)

For another worker, it was compassion for the young people that made him want to challenge them to be the best young person they could be. He felt this was connected to a fundamental value of the organisation:

And you know a compassion with young people – um, a validity in what we’re actually doing and that’s all enveloped around that challenging them to the best young person they could . . . and for them to then take that into society. (INT 05, pp. 9-10)

A similar commitment to support the young people through creating a safe environment for learning, personal growth and awareness was expressed by a worker who said:

So I guess in this sense, we have the focus about we’re all here because we really want to learn, but a real mantra of that, a real sort of – people are here cause they want to learn, they want to make their life different from how it is, so that people don’t have to negotiate that stuff, when they come in – it’s a safe thing, we really want to do that, we wouldn’t be here otherwise. (INT 03, p.18)

Other participants talked about the movement towards self-awareness in relation to personal experiences. One participant talked about awareness and growth starting with yourself.

. . . we all want to get ourselves to the most ideal environment and we all want to be there and it’s the journey of getting there . . . and not going home stressed or getting stressed. And you start with yourself. And then you start to develop through stage one, two, three and four. You’ve gotta understand how you as a person works. (INT 11, p.6)

For this same worker, self-awareness was connected to his own learning in the time since he started working in the network.
Well as an educator, as I said to you in the past, I’ve learnt more in the last two and a half years than I have - about people, and their wants and needs and all that, than I have in a lifetime. (INT 11, pp.16-17)

Another worker talked about her strong sense of wanting to grow, change and improve as a teacher. This sense of awareness of herself as an educator prompted her to continue her own learning and development.

I've got a great job and I love it, but, I still want to do it well. I feel like I've got a responsibility to learn as much as I can to keep thinking of new things and new stuff, where I look at what we do and try to improve it. (INT 14, p.26)

One interviewee described how her own transformation of professional identity happened before she came to the work through dealing with health issues and doing her own soul-searching and discovery. She had an awareness of the importance of this aspect of herself in relation to her work.

Well to be honest, like because of my health issues and because of my strong religious upbringing, which I ended up changing... I still had a very strong sense of love and justice and things like that. Um, I think I entered into something that I'd already had very, very, very firm belief in, and I’ve had my time of soul searching and discovery and so, I think it’s given me an opportunity to um, go hey, um, that’s why I’ve really put it down [as a source of] support. (INT 15, p.8).

This self-awareness also informed how she worked with the young people. This was evident as she described trying to encourage young people to have a sense of ‘being a bigger person’ which was also part of her own sense of self-awareness.

Again, I just see it as a lot of these people are so wounded. And it’s like we can be more... I try and give young people a sense of being a bigger person, instead of a smaller, and hopefully over time that whittles away and they take on that responsibility, and they do it not just because they’ve got a fear that if they don't do it, they’ll be in trouble. But because it's internalised, they see the goodness in being good. (INT 15, p.11)
Movement towards advocacy and activism for young people

The final common thread in transformation of professional identity was the movement towards advocacy and activism for young people. For one worker, the advocacy was expressed through resistance to what she felt were unrealistic expectations of external bureaucracies, for the sake of the needs of young people. Her sense of being able to effect change and transformation in ways of working that were not constrained by bureaucracy but rather shaped by values of community and connection, were clear notions in her perception of herself as an educator who enfranchised young people.

– you know before I met [coordinator] I was probably a little bit more like – “gotta toe the line, gotta toe the line”. Whereas, now I’m a bit more, well actually, the line is ridiculous; it’s crazy to toe it. So that’s been really great because, it means if we can’t do it we just tell them we can’t do it, we just tell them we can’t and not try to pretend we can, so rather than bust our guts to do something that’s actually so counter-productive or not useful. That’s been really great because I think, that’s often when you can, especially in the community sector where I come from, you know you have to meet these government regulations and policies that are actually, whoever wrote them has never had to implement them and it’s sort of things like for housing having a three month time frame to get someone from crisis accommodation into, three months to find someone housing, you know in the housing market where there’s no houses, you know, things like that, that you sort of are outrageous . . . we don’t do that, we keep people until they can find somewhere else, which I thought was quite radical. You know like the pressure to keep moving people on so that you look like you’re doing what you said you were doing, (laugh), even though someone said it thinking - in a different time frame, in a different world when you could move, you could find someone, you could find housing. (INT 03, pp. 8-9)

These ideas of advocacy for young people were also captured in her response to the question of what she valued most. Transformation was implicit in her comment about valuing doing things differently. “Well I value doing things differently, I value um, trying to do things in a new way, and that are useful” (INT 03, p.16).

For another worker it was the frustration of not being able to effect change in another context that motivated her to find an alternative and come and work with the network:
I’ve been to every school there on contracts and really, really got frustrated with not being able to do what you needed to do, um and having to do all sorts of other things that were in my opinion not helpful – not that they wouldn’t be helpful for anyone but not for the kids that I was focusing on. And so I deliberately went and sought out what other kinds of education was available, and I came across [the network] and I applied for it. (INT 04, p. 3)

**Summary of transformation of professional identity**

Transformation of professional identity was different for different staff and occurred across varying timelines and in a range of contexts. The transformation and shift in identity was sometimes gradual and at other times more dramatic. Transformation of professional identity included movements in understanding of self and of ways of being educator: the movement towards relationships as a priority; the movement towards equality, openness and trust; the movement away from control and fear – having freedom to risk and become a co-learner; the movement towards greater self-awareness; and the movement towards advocacy and activism for young people.
APPENDIX AH

Data Extracts for Five Common Threads in the Code:

*Critical Reflective Practice*

In flexi school sites, critical reflective practice for staff included the development of self-awareness, awareness of others and awareness of the need for broader system change and advocacy for young people. In this context the significance of critical reflective practice for staff in their work with young people was highlighted.

For example:

- staff talked about the need for self-awareness and awareness of others in the work with young people;
- staff willingly participated in group supervision and RPGs; and
- staff were allocated regular times to participate in critical reflective practice.

Five common threads were identified in the interview data analysis for critical reflective practice and they are represented in Appendix Table AH 1.

**Table AH 1**

*Common Threads in Critical Reflective Practice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical reflective practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Personal reflection for self-awareness and inner strength</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Reflection on practice as a dimension of professional supervision</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Reflection as a dimension of team collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Critical reflection for interrogation of own practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Critical reflection developing awareness for advocacy</td>
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**Personal reflection for self-awareness and inner strength**

The first common thread in critical reflective practice was personal reflection for self-awareness and inner strength. Reflection enabled workers to deepen their own sense of self-awareness in ways that enabled them to be more effective in their work with young people. When asked about what supports him in doing the work, one of the youth workers partnering a teacher in an outreach context discussed his own sense of
self-awareness and inner strength gained from life experience that enabled him to continue doing the work. He has learnt his own way of detaching and dealing with the challenges. This comes largely through self-awareness.

Um, I s’pose I’m very strong in who I am, and I don’t see myself any different to a teacher. I mean teachers are educated but then again I was street educated and like I tell [other staff], it’s funny ‘cause, for me it’s um, education’s great, but if you don’t have the life skills, the life skills serve you for an education also. I think they both congeal together (INT 02,p.5).

This notion of self-awareness and inner strength was mentioned at another time by the same youth worker.

I think first you have to be strong within yourself. You have to know what you’re about, if you show any flaws with these young people, they’ll gobble you up and I think you can put yourself at harm, literally. So, yea, it’s a tough one (INT 02, p.7).

This worker’s inner strength came through various life experiences and learning along the way that have enabled reflection and led to greater self-awareness which has supported his work with young people.

There’s some people in my life that along the way, it’s not something I’ve learnt from here, it’s sort of other people who’ve taught me, or I’ve picked it up and stuff, haven’t read it from a book. You have to learn from it. And I think it’s also, it comes from a bit of . . . a spirit within me, which knows, I come from a sense that everyone, everyone deserves a right, no matter how bad. The last job that I was in I was working with um, some people with some really serious issues which . . . my boss used to throw me the hardest ones, cause, they knew that’s where I came from. Like, I’d talk to them and listen to them and not be judgemental and not be biased about it, so, I think you really gotta . . . I guess to get to that point I did a lot of searching myself. I did a lot of soul searching, yea absolutely (INT 02, p.10).

**Reflection on practice as a dimension of professional supervision**

One of the teachers talked about supervision as one of the mechanisms of support that he used. This practice was not commonly mentioned by teachers as a source of support but more prevalent within community service workers as they took time to discuss their work and reflections with a professional supervisor.
One of the things is that I actually have a professional supervisor who I can use and he just sits and basically listens and lets me put it out. I think that that’s important. I think it’s important, that people are able to say ‘How are you going?’ and provide that listening ear (INT 07, p.7).

A couple of social workers talked about the way that professional supervision supported them to be reflective in their work.

And um, supervision’s really good, like I just actually went on Monday night, I hadn’t been for months or maybe a year and it was really good, it was like ‘oh yea, this is really good’, Makes you just stop and think about stuff (INT 03, p.9).

A similar sentiment was expressed by another social worker who mentioned supervision as a support for her work.

And having regular supervision I found was, with um, just with[coordinator]-and also when I first started with[more experienced social worker] as well. I found it . . . essential and really great for anyone and particularly for any new practitioner (INT 06, p.8).

**Reflection as a dimension of team collaboration**

The second common thread identified in critical reflective practice was reflection as a dimension of team collaboration. One worker identified the importance of incorporating reflection in all aspects of team work. She showed a commitment to reflective practice in the way she worked with young people and her colleagues and commented that what was important was “Taking time to reflect – a lot of reflection, especially on our processes with young people (INT 01, p.9). This was reiterated later in the interview when she commented that “Time to reflect, whether in meetings with young people or time with colleagues is paramount, because the diversity of our young people and ourselves needs due recognition (INT 01, p.21). There seemed to be a strong culture of reflective practice that had been established within her school community.
I think the other thing too, we offer lots of reflective space, you know with, one on one with the coordinator. If we need external supervision we can call on [the network support worker] and the [coordinator] gives workers other options for individual professional supervision. We do group supervision as well. That’s been an ongoing practice . . . ah, before I came here. That’s really helpful where we can discuss issues (INT 01, p.15).

The responsibility to support other colleagues to be reflective was also part of this worker’s consciousness.

Giving her [pre-service teacher] constructive feedback, um, you know, it’s just such an exciting thing. But I don’t really mind in what context I do it. But if I can reflect back to people, you know of any age, my colleagues or young people, um, things that they’re doing that seem to be really benefiting others or perhaps they’re not aware, there are practical things that they’re not aware of – if I can reflect back to them and in a way, where in a way they take ownership of it and their influence . . . the way they go forward (INT 01, p.4).

One of the obstacles to being reflective in teams was identified by a worker who talked about the added pressures of increased levels of accountability that she had seen come into the teaching profession.

. . . and as I said it’s um, you need time to think, well how to do it [being reflective in the work] within those pressures. You know we should be able to still do it - and the fact that [school sites] are still existing and that most days travel really well and that most young people can kind of get engaged (INT 10, pp.16-17).

Critical reflection for interrogation of own practice

The fourth common thread identified in critical reflective practice was critical reflection for interrogation of own practice. One experienced worker, recognised the need to consciously engage in ‘deschooling’ to resist traditional practices that caused her slip into a state of complacency. She felt the need to regularly engage in processes of interrogating her own practice through asking the challenging questions around “Who’s not here?”, “Why aren’t they here?” and “Who are we shutting out?” This
required holding the tensions, doing a balancing act – letting go of the need to control, manage and be seen to ‘be efficient’.

It’s like um, (pause) it’s like walking on a tight-rope sometimes, to maintain that balance that you can fall into, that, you know [previous youth worker] used always warn us about you know an educational view of the world and, which is industrial model designed to produce workers for the, you know, great machine out there. And the other model of, of um being with young people who are human beings and, and bringing them to a state of decent human-beingness, if they want to be decent human beings and just for them to celebrate their decency ‘cause they are all decent human beings. So that’s like a, you’ve got to, you’ve gotta check in. So that’s really quite um difficult. Cause you can be really seduced you know, really seduced. Like on any one day I’ll look around and everything’s quiet and people in class and teaching happening and learning happening, presumably kids are on task and you go, “ohh good job!” You go, oh hell what’s going on here? “Hang on! Who’s not here? Like where’s so and so and where’s so and so and where’s the ruckuss and where’s, you know, where’s [young person] screaming her head off into the world cause she’s been in care for ten years? Ahh, that’s right. Why aren’t they here? Yea, who are we shutting out? (INT 10, p.21-22).

Another worker talked about the importance of reflective practice being combined with team processes in order to interrogate and really understand staff practices. By asking questions that can challenge common assumptions about why the work is done in a certain way, workers can come closer to understanding and prioritising the needs of young people in work practices.

I guess it’s kind of a lot of being around it to watch what happens and see how it goes. I think -and then I guess enough space to talk about why, why do you do it like that? Why do you do this? What would you do in this situation? So I guess a lot of time for reflecting on how things are done and why things are done that way. Where that idea comes from? You know cause people haven’t got the history of where that’s resolved, you know the trials and errors of it. Not that - and things are constantly changing as well. So being, you know coming in fresh-eyed, you go ‘Why do you do it like that?’ yea. So there’s a lot of time for discussion and reflection, these are really important, because I don’t know that they’re – it’s yea, like there’s pretty – it’s not like you can go off somewhere else where you can find out how to do it – you really have to do this (INT 03, p.10-11).
Critical reflection developing awareness for advocacy

The final common thread in critical reflective practice was critical reflection developing awareness for advocacy. When discussing the future options for more schools opening across the nation, one interview participant highlighted reflection on the experience of this work over a twenty year period. It seemed that reflection on the nature of the work over time and its capacity for advocacy for those who are disenfranchised is what is supporting its growth and development.

Our experience over the past 20 years would indicate that the sense of dislocation for a, it’s a small cohort of people really if you look at national statistics, but a cohort that is extremely complicated and complex and it's across the nation and um, the legacy of the Christian Brothers order and the vision of Edmund Rice Education Australia, is to respond to the needs of those that are marginalised or in their words, those who are in some sort of physical or literal poverty, and to respond to the signs of the times. So from an organisational perspective, I read that as being, this is the work that the organisation wants us to do (INT 16, pp.3-4).

In a similar vein, reflection on the nature of the work and its significance at a national level in relation to revisioning the purpose of education in a different way that is more responsive to the disenfranchised, this worker spoke about how this awareness through reflection was a starting point for advocacy. The existence of these kinds of schools and educational pathways provides another conceptualisation of what education can be.

What I think these places offer actually is a model of excellence around what pedagogy and what learning can be like and I'm really glad that these, that the best of educators, the people who choose to work with us, all show the commitment to reflect on their own stuff and delve into themselves, and to challenge themselves, through that, and at the same time, want to work with this disadvantaged group of young people. I think these places actually offer a, stand as a bit of a – stand in front of a fair bit of what can be seen in the current economic climate as being a bit of a revisionist kind of approach to education. And in that sense, the very existence of these places become radical and places like this need to exist to challenge other systems. So in that kind of hegemonic sense, they are extremely important as a political and pedagogic kind of – point of difference and I think that apart from that day to day work, where none of those words would mean anything to anybody, they actually carry with them an extremely important place in the development of education in this nation.
because they're very mature, compared to a lot of other educational frameworks that are there. And hence the reason to grow them(INT 16, p.9).

**Summary of critical reflective practice**

Critical reflective practice was understood in a range of ways including: personal reflection for self-awareness and inner strength; reflection on practice as a dimension of professional supervision; reflection as a dimension of team collaboration; critical reflection for interrogation of own practice; and critical reflection developing awareness for advocacy. There was a distinction in understanding and expressions of reflective practice, sometimes related to whether staff were teachers or community welfare workers. This was more evident with regard to how staff understood or accessed professional supervision. Variation in understanding and practice of critical reflective practice was also evident across sites.
APPENDIX AI
Data Extracts for Eight Common Threads in the Code:  
Staff Induction and Professional Development

In flexi school sites staff induction and professional development were vital for staff in learning how to work to enfranchise young people. In this context staff induction and professional development occurred at local site levels, network level or through participation in external opportunities for professional learning. It may have been relevant for new staff or for continuing staff being inducted into new ways of working.

For example:

- staff were aware of requirements for staff induction and ongoing professional development opportunities;
- staff willingly participated in local and network level activities for staff induction and professional development; and
- staff were open to new ideas and processes and willingly participated.

Eight common threads were identified in the interview data analysis for staff induction and professional development and they are represented in Appendix Table AI1.

Table AI1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Threads in Staff Induction and Professional Development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding young people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emphasising relationships, community &amp; using the four principles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Situated learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflection and discussion for awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aspects of the organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practical guidelines for learning choices</td>
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<tr>
<td>General recommendations for professional development</td>
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Whilst many of the common threads for this code of staff induction and professional development have also been identified within the codes for this
overarching theme of *ways of professional learning*, they will be reiterated in this section as they pinpoint what staff perceived as important dimensions of their work practice with young people and of what they valued in the work. In some instances what interviewees mentioned about new staff needs for induction was the result of their own reflections of the induction support they did not experience and would like to have encountered as a new worker in the context. In other examples staff shared about the positive aspects of their own induction that were useful and supportive from their perspective. Each of the common threads will be discussed with examples presented from the interview data.

**Understanding young people**

The first common thread in staff induction and professional development was understanding young people. Whilst much of this data has been outlined in detail in Appendix M, a brief reiteration of key ideas in relation to staff induction will be presented. Some staff highlighted the need to understand the nature of this cohort of young people and their life experiences that have impacted on their learning.

Complementing this perspective was the need to start with the lens of health and wellbeing rather than immediately focussing on delivering more traditional curriculum. This linked to the notion of trauma-informed practice and the need to appreciate the cognitive impact of the trauma of abuse, neglect, and substance abuse that may have had on a range of young people who come to the alternative schools (see trauma informed practice in Chapter 2: Literature Review, TPI and the emotional dimension: Teacher as carer, and Appendix M for a more in depth coverage of these ideas).

**Emphasising relationships, community & using the four principles**

The second common thread for staff induction and professional learning was emphasising relationships, community, and using the four principles. In a similar way to the previous common thread, these notions presented by staff as important aspects of
new staff induction have been presented in ways of working with young people and in productive relationships among staff. However, key ideas of staff perceptions will be reiterated here. In the analysis of interview data, one of the most consistently repeated notions for working with young people and other staff in the research context was the emphasis on relationships within community that were guided through the use of the four principles. A number of interview participants recognised that for new staff these issues were at times challenging and problematic and took time to understand and appreciate how they could be enacted in the context with young people and other staff. The need to support staff as they came to this awareness of the priority of relationships was mentioned by a participant.

. . . within the community that a number of relationships are actually made, so support, I suppose for when a staff member comes in, that the relationships are started within the actual school community by you know, they have a responsibility as well as the young people have an opportunity to make some sort of relationship that can be a helpful relationship (INT 07, p.9-10).

The idea that the principles applied to staff and young people alike and that mutual responsibility for developing relationships and using the four principles was reiterated by interviewees. Understanding that the principles were guidelines for relationships rather than a set of rules was an important aspect of the work that interviewees felt needed to be discussed in induction processes. As part of staff induction, one participant felt that learning about using the four principles was an ongoing everyday process that needed to be prioritised and that an appreciation of the time that this process of understanding required was important.

. . . but you know, maybe in the induction, the case of the four principles, they're not gonna learn it in one day, but it's when they get back in its okay, maybe a reminder even in the staff meetings, um when you do bring up a young person or a debriefing at the end of the day, a constant reminder of the four principles, OK, if it's not working how does it work? And just, cause the four principles you need to know it on a daily basis - It’s what the school is based on, you know, if we're gonna jump out and teach it must be drummed into our heads before you go out to the kids, and you know um, not only that, it's really
important we have to action those four principles, respect, participation, safe and legal, um honesty and stuff like that, yep. To me, it must be on a weekly basis, it should be in discussions you know on a weekly basis I mean, everything else is important, but you know, um, that's all we have!. I have to say it. I wish I knew the four principles really well from the word go. At the start for that coordinator, she had to re-educate all of us. It was tough. (INT 13, p.18).

Situated learning

Situated learning was the third common thread in the code of staff induction and professional learning that was identified in the interview data. The interview data on situated learning as an aspect of *ways of professional learning* were presented in Appendix AF and included ideas such as learning by watching/observing; learning by doing and through experience; learning by being present in the work; learning by being part of a team; learning through reflection; and, learning through finding one’s own passion. This way of learning was seen as important not only for ongoing professional learning, but specifically for induction purposes. It incorporated learning processes such as being guided, mentored, seeing the work in action and learning by doing. It was recognised by a number of interview participants that this process of staff induction took time and required some degree of mentoring or buddyng with other more experienced staff in the local context. “I think it’s important to have a buddy within the staff that’s able to sort of be a person that’s able to relate and that does listen” (INT 07, p.9). Being able to have lower levels of responsibility in the first few months of work was one suggestion by another participant.

What I think they need and that they don’t have now is quite a length of time and depending on the nature of the person, three months to six months of um, not having any big responsibilities, which is not the same as having no work, but to just be like an offsider for somebody. An offsider with lots of tasks so they can just dive in and do things but to take um . . . . to take a young teacher and put them in front of a group of ten quite disengaged young people and go “fly, my child, do it”, I think is a really big ask. . . . But I do think that fairly long period of time without big responsibilities would be really good. And then, and then it’d be a dynamic thing and that person then, and that adult then would gradually just reach out and say “Listen I’d like to do such and such” or “I’d like to take
When another interviewee was asked to reflect on her own experiences of induction or what she thought was important for new staff induction she referred to her own induction experience which was learning through doing. She recognized that not all people like this style but that it suited her.

I think yea, as I said before having an openness to people to be able to ask and to get help. Um, I think it’s, every person works so differently and it works for different people in different ways. I’m someone who, would rather just sort of not be totally thrown in the deep end but go ‘this is what we’re gonna do, if you have any questions then ask along the way’ and I learn by doing and that’s exactly what happened here and um, that worked really well for me (INT 06, p.8-9).

**Reflection and discussion for awareness**

Within the code of staff induction and professional learning, the fourth common thread identified in the data analysis was reflection and discussion for awareness. The significance of reflection was highlighted through the code of critical reflective practice (see Appendix AH: Data Extracts for Five Common Threads in the Code: Critical Reflective Practice). It was seen as no less important for new staff to develop this skill as for experienced staff to foster in an ongoing manner.

In terms of reflection for induction one staff member talked about new staff developing awareness of their own working styles and that of others as important for staff induction in order to make the most of meeting processes.

So, to go back to the induction thing, people need to know who does what and what they like to do. You know, and how they work, ‘cause we’ve all got very different styles. That’s something that usually comes out in all of our meetings, you know, when we’re doing our planning and discussing, our preferences (INT 01, p.17&18).
Additionally this worker emphasised the need for reflection in all aspects of work practice to be able to recognise the diversity of both the young people and of staff.

Time to reflect, whether in meetings with young people or time with colleagues is paramount, because the diversity of our young people and ourselves needs due recognition. To move beyond acknowledgement of diversity to practice with diversity requires a high proportion of communication and reflection. This is a pretty big part of the induction process. (INT 01, p. 21)

The social dimension of learning was highlighted by staff who mentioned the importance of new staff having plenty of opportunities to discuss their reflections on their work. Having the opportunity to speak with other workers who are already doing the work with young people was seen as a valuable aspect of new staff induction

I think the third one [idea for staff induction] is that I would kind of like to see, and I don’t know um, I don’t know whether there’s on the ground opportunities for the new staff to actually talk at those inservice days to people who are actually operating in it. (INT 05, pp.18 – 20)

One participant talked about the fresh perspective that new staff bring when they are engaged in learning on the job and ask questions which clarify the purpose and underpinning values of the work. This was seen by a participant as an important aspect of reflection and discussion that allowed understanding of the work to emerge.

I guess it’s kind of a lot of being around it to watch what happens and see how it goes. I think - and then I guess enough space to talk about why, why do you do it like that? Why do you do this? What would you do in this situation? So I guess a lot of time for reflecting on how things are done and why things are done that way. Where that idea comes from? You know cause people haven’t got the history of where that’s resolved, you know the trials and errors of it. Not that - and things are constantly changing as well. So being, you know coming in fresh-eyed, you go ‘Why do you do it like that?’ yea. So there’s a lot of time for discussion and reflection, these are really important, because I don’t know that they’re – it’s yea, like there’s pretty – it’s not like you can go off somewhere else where you can find out how to do it – you really have to do this (INT 03, p.10-11).
Finally, in terms of reflection and discussion for awareness, another participant talked about the value of new staff meeting together with other new staff, sharing stories and experiencing a supportive environment in which they can share the challenges of the work. For example, these discussion groups of new staff could address issues of importance/concern once per fortnight. It was felt that this would help to alleviate the isolation and sense that you may be the only one having troubles that can be common amongst new staff in this context. Such a group may foster a culture of honesty, building a sense of trust within a group where people can freely talk about what they are struggling with. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) describe these stories of the daily realities and struggles in teaching as ‘secret stories’. The secret stories relay what teachers’ experience is really like, the struggle stories that can be challenging to share as staff do not always feel safe. More often the ‘sacred stories’ of the institution or the ‘cover stories’ that describe the ‘professional face’ stories in a local context, are more commonly shared.

I suppose it is about that storytelling and I do acknowledge that it’s difficult bringing six new staff together, they’re not again going to open up and be honest, oh well not honest – give the depth and I think if they journey together for a while they can start unpacking going, ‘hey you why I said I’m here because I like this kind of education, the bottom line is that I was either burning out where I was, I was having a crap time, and I’m hoping this will help me and this is helping me’. It could be after the first year or second year they go ‘well I was burning out and having a crap time, in fact, I feel the same, I need a lot of help or I’ve gotta get out of this’. Getting them to a position where they can be honest cause that’s basically the four principles and ensuring that, the staff understand that they, and I believe they do, the principles that we espouse to the young people are a life experience values, but they are also ours. So that’s important (INT 05, p.19 – 23).

Aspects of the organisation

Understanding aspects of the organisation both at a local site level and at a network wide level was the fifth common thread in staff induction and professional learning. This understanding was discussed in terms of new staff developing an
awareness of the local level organisational processes that were used to communicate
with other staff.

They [new staff] need help to get hold of all of the different processes that we
have to keep up with each other. So we have to go through an explanation and
obviously an experience of what our different meetings are about (INT 01, p.13).

The value of workers being able to understand “how they can use those
meetings – to bring things up” (INT 01, p.15) was also mentioned as important. At a
network wide level the induction of staff in relation to child protection training was
viewed as necessary even for workers who may have done that training in other
contexts.

Um, oh yes, I mean they definitely need to go to the Flexible Learning Centres
Induction as well to know what is this network that they’re part of. And
certainly, the child protection training . . . I think even if people have done it or
workers have done it somewhere else, I think coming here, because our young
people, you know so many of them have been at risk in all different ways, it’s a
good thing to have it all refreshed (INT 01, p15).

Gaining insights into the philosophy of the network was viewed by another
worker as an important aspect of staff induction.

I do think there needs to be more induction for new ones on the whole
philosophy. Like even yesterday in that discussion it became apparent that some
people are there for entirely different reasons than what you would expect. And
that can be really detrimental in their daily actions unless you get that
philosophy in that high level straight, and what that means in practice (INT 04,
p.16-17).

When asked whether the differences in philosophy between different workers
could be reconciled, the respondent stated that:

They can be closer, like if there was a chance, which there sometimes is on a
[staff planning day] to get the philosophy clearer, then we some way unite again
around a common image. But if you never talk about what the common image is
then you can’t possibly align yourself with it. So in the induction thing,
something like, ‘What is our common image?’ should appear (INT 04, pp17-18).
In a similar vein another worker felt that it was important that new staff developed an understanding of the foundational story of the organisation.

I believe it is important that people understand what [founder’s education] is about and have that um, translated into what [network sites], you know it is different here than necessarily as you see as the face of it in a mainstream school, but fundamentally, it is what the values are about. So I think that is important (INT 05, p.18-19).

Other aspects of staff induction such as duty of care and organisational policies were mentioned as usual components of induction with an additional component of staff support being highlighted for new staff. “So I think that is important. I think it’s important that they receive information about where support is available in the [network sites] (INT 05, p.18-19).

**Practical guidelines for learning choices**

Another common thread in staff induction and professional learning was the provision of practical learning guidelines for working with young people. One interviewee described her experience in the past when she felt there had been some hesitation from network administration about being too prescriptive about exactly what teachers should be teaching in their classes. This was related to a concern that the learning needs of each individual within the class group should shape the learning choices rather than a generally defined curriculum that was imposed on all young people. Whilst this participant understood the concern, she felt strongly that some kind of guidelines would assist new staff to understand where to target their planning.

What would have helped me in that situation was a list of where things are and who you go to for what, you know very practical, basic things.[Site coordinator]got crazy from me because I kept asking where’s this, that and the other . . . I think that at the beginning of someone starting at [school site] you should give them some sample things of what has worked in the past with different groups. Not guaranteeing that that would work with the group that you are faced with but give some direction, some – this is the level that we are talking about, like this is the sort of things. Like even a list of the criteria that
I’ve mentioned before on what works, um, that would help people, and just . . . But when I bring it up people think that I want a ready-made recipe cause I can’t make my own. Like the reaction whenever it’s been brought up has been quite aggressively negative and I’m not at all after a recipe, I’m after some guidelines. I really don’t see why it couldn’t be provided – really don’t see it (INT 04, pp.13-14).

**General recommendations for professional development**

The final common thread in staff induction and professional development was general professional development recommendations that were mentioned by a number of different participants. Some of these recommendations involved integrating information and communication technologies more fully. Examples given included a coordinated approach to listing professional development options for all staff using a centrally available website (INT 04); using DVD productions of the network context to share with job applicants and new staff so they get a feel for the context that was visual and involved interactions with young people (INT 07, INT 08); developing a website, database or booklet with details of other staff across the network and their areas of skill, interest and expertise for the purpose of networking and collaboration (INT 09); and capturing interactions between experienced staff and young people as a way of modelling ways of working with young people that are relevant and appropriate for this context. An example of capturing aspects of practice using digital media was filming a morning meeting. In this way new staff would see more realistic interactions between staff and young people rather than merely a website that is not interactive (INT 14). Other professional development recommendations included teachers doing some learning in the area of community welfare, with a specific emphasis on youth work.

I see that it could be something beneficial so it would be an area where maybe teachers to coming across into this area where they could be directed into it.

. . . Yea so I was saying that last year I undertook a diploma in community welfare, youth strand, which um, was what I believe is significant in the type of work we do as education being the background, confident in education and your content subject and we acquire skills in welfare (INT 05, pp.36-37).
For another participant the need to understand Indigenous perspectives more fully was mentioned as important for staff induction and professional development.

The other thing that I’m still not 100% sure of that I’m struggling with at the moment is the Indigenous kids, the Indigenous culture. Um, how to deal with that, how to work with it ‘cause I don’t know anything about it, so I’m slowly learning about it at the moment. And maybe staff need that (INT 12, p.13).

Finally, in terms of general recommendations for professional development, was the idea of supporting staff who are not in a teaching role to bring their perspective of the young people to the whole staff group in a stronger way. This may encourage the development of a broader perspective of the young people that goes beyond teachers’ perceptions, and incorporates a specific valuing of cultural capital.

I think the um, professional development would be to um have the staff who aren’t teachers, to explore the way they look at young people and what they think instinctively what young people should need, particularly say somebody who, I’Il just take this example which is an example from here and I know that’s very wrapped up in personality, but like [a particular worker], for example, who as well as you know, really good intuition and lots of experience within his own culture and with young blokes, particularly Indigenous young blokes, now he instinctively knows a particular way to do things and what shouldn’t happen. But he would never ever presume to sit there and go “look, you should do this”. He just quietly goes about it doing it his own way . . . but some sort of professional development that gives people the permission to do it like in a staff meeting and in a staff group, like I try and foster that but it’s a big ask (INT 10, p13-14.)

**Summary of staff induction and professional development**

Common threads in staff induction and professional development included understanding young people; emphasising relationships, community and using the four principles; situated learning; reflection and discussion for awareness; aspects of the organisation; practical guidelines for learning choices; and general professional development recommendations.
APPENDIX AJ

Arriving at Strands of Common Threads Across Four Codes in
Ways of Professional Learning

The clustered common threads can be seen in strands across the horizontal rows of the table. Common threads remain under the code in which they first appeared in the vertical columns of the table. Strands were identified either through repetition of common threads across two or more codes or in some cases, because they represented an important idea that may have only appeared in one code. For example, Aspects of the organisation, was a strand that only occurred in one code – PL4 Staff Induction and Professional Development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Situated Learning</td>
<td>Transformation of Professional Identity</td>
<td>Critical Reflective Practice</td>
<td>Staff Induction and Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRAND 1: SITUATED LEARNING</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Learning by watching/ observing&lt;br&gt;• Learning by doing &amp; through experience&lt;br&gt;• Learning by being present in the work – being around the work</td>
<td><strong>STRAND 2: LEARNING IN &amp; THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Learning through being part of a team – sharing ideas, experience &amp; resources&lt;br&gt;• Learning through finding own passion &amp; networking with others</td>
<td><strong>STRAND 3: SELF-AWARENESS &amp; INNER WORK</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Learning through reflection and debriefing&lt;br&gt;• Movement towards greater self-awareness&lt;br&gt;• Movement towards equality, openness and trust&lt;br&gt;• Movement towards advocacy and activism for and with young people</td>
<td><strong>STRAND 4: CRITICAL REFLECTIVE PRACTICE</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Movement towards relationships as a priority&lt;br&gt;• Movement away from control and fear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX AK

Description of Kinds of Activities Conducted in RPGs

RPG activities required people to explore the purpose of reflective practice, to share personal stories related to their work, to explore values associated with professional identity through the use of values and metaphor cards, to engage in conversations about aspects of work practice and to explore challenging aspects of practice through reflective drawings. In each session the facilitators were committed to using group processes that encouraged participants to have choice, to take responsibility for their own learning, to have the capacity to feel safe, and to have a space in which to be heard. The underlying values of the four principles of ‘respect, participation, safe and legal and honesty’ provided a common ground for dialogue and negotiation in relationships with young people in the research context (FLCN, 2005). They were also applied to the professional learning space or ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 1998) in which RPGs were conducted. All of the activities attempted to promote a broad sociocultural awareness of aspects of identity and practice as staff engaged in work with disenfranchised young people. Activities used were varied, depending on the needs of the group (see Table AK1 below for description of activities in two sessions).

Table AK1

*Description of Activities in Two RPG Sessions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 1 Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity 1: Explanation of purpose of reflective practice group—sharing your understanding/ experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 2: Sharing stories exercise (collective timeline)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 3: Values Cards – what is important to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 4: Metaphor exercise – how do you see yourself as a worker?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 5: Explanation of Reflective conversation tool</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 2 Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity 1: What’s on top for you today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 2: Reflective Conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 3: Reflective Drawing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 4: The Tree of Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity 5: Metaphor Cards – a review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Planning RPG sessions

The activities and agenda for each RPG session were initially planned by the co-facilitators, but an effort was made to be responsive to the particular needs of each RPG. The facilitators offered a range of options and invited the participants in the group to consider options and choose. At any stage if the facilitators felt that the activity was not useful or of interest to the group at that time, consultation with the group occurred and a change of focus was initiated. If time allowed another activity was started, using the same process of seeking feedback from the group regarding their needs and interests.

Feedback from participants was used to design subsequent sessions and there was an attempt by the facilitators to be responsive to the particular needs of each group at different sites. This meant that the content and material discussed at each of the five RPG sites was not always exactly the same. The facilitators of the RPGs read the feedback from written evaluations, met and reflected on the experience of facilitating, and discussed any concerns, challenges and perceived successes of each session. For the following session a range of activities were planned, but there was always an attempt to be responsive to participants, using their lived experiences at work in their own settings as the starting point for reflection.

Introductory activities

The introductory activities of each session included a space and time of hospitality and sharing afternoon tea as a way of moving into a less ‘busy’ space. This time was informal and unstructured. Following afternoon tea, other introductory activities were used as a kind of barometer to gauge where the group was at in terms of their physical or emotional state and general sense of wellbeing or otherwise. For example, one activity, “What’s on top for you today?” was an opportunity for participants to briefly share how the day has been for them or mention what was on the top of their mind in the moment. At other times participants were asked to rate how
they were feeling in terms of their own energy levels on a scale of 1-10 with the option of giving further explanations if they wanted to. Another introductory activity used for checking in around the group, was done through simple creative drawing or sculpting activities creating symbols in response to a general prompt question from the facilitators. For example, participants were invited to use coloured pipe cleaners to create a symbol of where they were at in themselves in that moment. Only five minutes were given to complete the task. Sharing not only evoked humour and laughter, but offered some surprises in terms of the depth of sharing of insights that emerged. Emphasis was always on the reflective process and not the artistic quality of the outcome.

Activities promoting self-awareness, exploration of educator identity and values

Activities to promote self-awareness and exploration of educator identity, including the exploration of personal and organisational values, used a range of creative processes such as storytelling, use of values cards, metaphor cards, reflective drawing, and general discussion. An example of an identity and values activity was where participants were asked to share their personal story of how they came to the work and identify ‘seeds of fire’ or personal passion that informed their choices. A second example of an activity of this kind exploring identity and values, was where participants were asked to choose two or three values from a set of values cards and discuss with a partner or in small groups, how these values informed their work with young people. A third example of an activity exploring identity and values was through the use of a set of metaphor cards. The metaphor cards captured aspects of educator identity that were gathered in the first stage of the design experiment through the questionnaire. The metaphors were chosen and/or created by experienced workers in the context and included written descriptions. These were then illustrated by an artist and made into a set of cards with the accompanying descriptions written on the back of the cards.
Participants in the RPGs had the opportunity to choose a card and discuss how it connected with an aspect of their own identity, the values that underpinned their work and/or aspects of practice that was relevant at the time. They could give their own explanation of the metaphor or draw on the one provided by other workers in the context. These cards were used in a number of sessions and evoked different responses, highlighting the multi-faceted nature of educator identity and the significant influence of context.

**Activities that explored challenging aspects of daily practice**

The activities which explored aspects of daily practice that were challenging or problematic in the work with young people and colleagues, often incorporated similar creative processes used in the first kind of reflective activities, but the purpose was different. For example, one activity was a guided reflective drawing exercise that required participants to focus on a challenging issue in their practice and explore this issue through the use of colour, line, texture, and if desired, words, to assist in making meaning of the situation and clarifying who were the key people involved and what were the main issues. Another example of this kind of activity was a guided reflective conversation in which one participant would put forward a scenario based on a specific situation of concern with a young person that arose out of daily experiences in the workplace and seek the collective wisdom of the group. The intention of the group interactions were not to tell another worker what ‘should’ or ‘ought’ to be done, but rather exploring options and possibilities, whilst respecting difference and allowing the expression of multiple perspectives within the group that may be useful for the worker presenting the scenario. A further activity supporting workers in their awareness of issues in practice included mindfulness and relaxation exercises, such as breathing and other simple physical exercises to release tension and raise awareness of how the body holds stress and tension, and to understand how the body can frequently give cues that
can be useful for self-awareness in the face of conflict or challenging situations (Siegel, 2009).

**Closing activities**

The activities for closing the session were usually brief but enabled the participants to synthesise their key learnings or insights from the RPG session. One example of a closing activity was to go around the group asking each participant to briefly mention one key insight from the session, which was shared in the group without comment from others or discussion in the group. Additionally, for the first two sessions, participants were asked to complete a written evaluation of the session which was used for research purposes and to inform planning of the next session. All of the RPG activities were designed with the intention of enabling reflection that may lead to deeper awareness of the needs of young people and self-awareness of participants through reflection on identity, values and practice.
### APPENDIX A1

Dispositions of Being and Becoming in Quotes from Stage One Interviews with Educators

(Researcher coding, independent researcher coding and final consensus following conversation and negotiation included in table)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote Number</th>
<th>Interview Extract</th>
<th>Ways of Being &amp; Becoming interpreted in the data by Main Researcher (black) and by Critical Friend (red)</th>
<th>Consensus statements on Ways of Being &amp; Becoming following conversation and negotiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1            | INT 01 Ahh. . . . I think a real openness about social justice and ethical stances – that kind of thing. Just having it up front. And also, the bit about, really being open about caring for each other (yes). That’s, yea, always bothered me that you can’t say, “no actually, we do care about you, I actually care about you. I don’t know you very well yet, cause you’ve just come to _________ [FLC], but because you’ve made a commitment to come here, I instantly care about you as a young person who is trying to make their way” and then of course you build the conversation for the future (p.9, lines 136-142). | Being just (social justice)  
Being ethical (ethical stances)  
Being open about caring for each other | Being just  
Being ethical  
Being open about caring for others |
| 2            | INT 01 Um, well, certainly working with the four principles, those four principles are for everybody. So we, you know, there’s not a different set that works across the workers. And that just makes it really fantastic to be here, cause we’re all very clear about how we need to respect each other, and um, and be very open and honest if things aren’t working, you know, we need to say. (yes) And, when that happens, people are extremely supportive (p.17, lines 252-256). | Being respectful  
Being very open and honest if things aren’t working | Being able to apply four principles to self and others  
Understand/apply 4 principles to self & others  
Be open and honest |
| 3            | INT 01 I guess where we need to be fairly aware of where people’s different strengths and where people’s preferences are (p.17, lines 259-260). | Being aware of where people’s different strengths and preferences are  
Able to recognise strengths in others  
Appreciate different preferences | Being aware and able to recognise strengths in others  
Being able to appreciate different preferences |
| 4            | INT 01 Yes, so there’s that generosity here and it goes in all different ways (p.19, line 282). | Being generous  
Appreciate generosity in all  
Appreciate generosity in its different forms | Being able to appreciate generosity in all  
Being able to appreciate generosity in its different forms |
<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 INT 01</td>
<td>I think it’s respecting the dignity of each person . . . So it’s really the humanity and the humanity of everyone. The staff, the young people and the volunteers (p19, lines 286 &amp; 288-290).</td>
<td>Being respectful Being human Able to respect all</td>
<td>Being respectful Being human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 INT 02</td>
<td>I think it’s, the young people know, a um, – someone from the heart, not someone from the head. They can read it a mile away, so yea. That’s how I do it (yea, mmm) (p.4, lines 49-51).</td>
<td>Being someone from the heart, not someone from the head (Could be read as authenticity and genuineness) Being authentic, being genuine Be authentic Recognise the heart Not ruled by the head</td>
<td>Being authentic Being able to recognise the heart – not ruled by the head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 INT 02</td>
<td>(in speaking about working in an outreach) Our job is 24/7 – it’s not, you just turn up, you’re on, you take that on in the program, I mean we’re there 24/7 with the kids, so it’s sort of um . . . I think first you have to be strong within yourself. You have to know what you’re about, if you show any flaws with these young people, they’ll gobble you up and I think you can put yourself at harm, literally (p.7, lines 89-93).</td>
<td>Being strong in yourself Being self-aware Be committed to kids/ needs Be able to know yourself and find inner resource</td>
<td>Being committed to young people’s needs Being self-aware and able to find inner resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 INT 02</td>
<td>The last job that I was in I was working with um, some people with some really serious issues (yep) which . . . my boss used to throw me the hardest ones, cause, they knew that’s where I came from. Like, I’d talk to them and listen to them (yea) and not be judgemental and not be biased about it, so, I think you really gotta . . . and I guess to get to that point I did a lot of searching myself. I did a lot of soul searching (yea) yea absolutely (yea) (p.10,lines 130-135).</td>
<td>Being non-judgemental Being non-biased Being open to search your soul (to look within, to understand yourself) Able to self-reflect Able to refrain from judgement Interrogate self-bias; prejudice and values</td>
<td>Being able to self-reflect and develop self-understanding Being non-judgmental Being able to interrogate self-bias, prejudice and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 INT 02</td>
<td>The principles are four words on a piece of paper, and I know, I get that, and I understand that people come in and know that and they see Respect, Participation, Safe &amp; Legal and Honesty, and you can rattle it off, (laugh) But to know how it works, I was taught up __________, where it all started, so I’ve seen it work. It’s not just that, it’s a living, breathing – it comes in, it goes out and when the kids muck up at outreach it goes in – you tighten it. When they’ve been really good, it gets loose - it’s an entity on its own (yea) and I think staff have to, well I believe that staff should adhere to the principles all the time. Our kids learn more from not what we say but what we do (yea). They learn more from me from who I am, the person first, rather than the four principles, then, they get it. And if I think people and members of staff not adhering then sort of I, I keep . . . I will stir it and say, ‘hey, yea, this is your role as a teacher– you’ve got to work from the four principles as well’ (pp.12-13, lines 161-172).</td>
<td>Being authentic in living the four principles Be able to embody principles Be able to role-model in accordance with principles</td>
<td>Being able to embody principles Being able to role-model in accordance with the principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote Number</td>
<td>Interview Extract</td>
<td>Consensus statements on Ways of Being &amp; Becoming following conversation and negotiation</td>
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</table>
| 10 | INT 02 I was thinking about it and that’s the easiest way to explain, *that I live the principles inside my life and outside my life*, you can ask my friends and ______ [partner] (p.14, lines 186-190). | Being authentic and consistent in living the principles  
Able to demonstrate principles as part of person and values |
| 11 | INT 03 And hanging in with people I think - like the, you know it can be tricky because people, kids can sort of drop off for a while and if you don’t *hang in and keep the relationship up*, even when they’re not coming (p.5, lines 60-63). | Being present to people “hanging in with people”  
Ability to establish and maintain genuine connection with others  
Genuinely interested in wellbeing of others |
| 12 | INT 03 I guess every place is unique, but in some ways there’s things about the this place, the teamwork, the multiple, sort of mark I guess of it, it’s *quite unique* and the way of working I guess is kind of new. I guess it’s kind of a lot of being around it to watch what happens and see how it goes (p.3, lines 137).  
So I guess a lot of time for reflecting on how things are done and why things are done that way. Where that idea comes from. You know cause people haven’t got the history of where that’s resolved, you know the trials and errors of it. Not that - and *things are constantly changing as well*.  
So being, you know coming in fresh-eyed, you go ‘Why do you do it like that?’ yea. So there’s a lot of *time for discussion and reflection, these are really important*, because I don’t know that they’re – it’s yea, like there’s pretty – it’s not like you can go off somewhere else where you can find out how to do it – you really have to do this (pp.10-11, lines, 138-145). | Being observant and attentive to what is emerging in practice context  
Being critically reflective  
Recognise uniqueness  
Also recognise dynamic nature  
Able to discuss and reflect on practice |
| 13 | INT 03 Well some things that are really practical, like we don’t, we can’t, like there’s . . . um . . . Because, I guess the alcohol one - so it’s drug and alcohol free and that means the whole school. Which means the *staff can’t have drugs and alcohol either*. So there’s no like, oh, we’re gonna have a drink after work, cause that like *doesn’t fit with the principles* (p.11-12, lines 156-159). | Being consistent in terms of same standards for staff & young people  
Apply values/standards to self- behaviour/attitudes  
Able to accept principles in value system of self |
| 14 | INT 03 I guess this *idea of hospitality*, it’s *part of how we work with people*. You know if someone comes to the front door, then it’s hopefully someone says to them, ‘How are you going?’ would you like a tea or a coffee? Doesn’t matter if they’re a young person, and like everyone gets that kind of treatment (p.12, lines 162-165). | Being hospitable  
Being welcoming  
A good host to all |
| 15 | INT 03 Um and watching the young people interact with the kids is always a, I find are some of the *nicest moments*, cause everybody becomes gentle when they talk to kids. It’s just great, you know and see you can’t get that kind of, that kind of – get through that toughened- and you know that’s kind of nice (p.15, lines 212-215). | Being gentle  
Being inclusive of young children as legitimate members of the community  
Recognise empathy in others  
Celebrate this as strength |

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 INT 04</td>
<td>I also really, really work on illustrating the process of what we’re doing. Like, why are you here? This is a practice run for real life. Here, you get the feedback. In real life you might just get chucked out, yea? I’m being fairly confrontational with that, but in a gentle way, like they know I do it because I care (yep) (p.5-6, lines 66-69).</td>
<td>Being confrontational but in a gentle way Being caring Being strong/ assertive Being caring simultaneously</td>
<td>Being strong and assertive Being Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 INT 05</td>
<td>I’ve always been inclined to the pastoral nature of education in mainstream schooling, and I would think that our greatest attribute can be in relationship with the young people. But for me it’s also having the, you know I don’t want to use the wordflippanly, but, the wisdom of age and the experience with it to, to challenge the young people, and that’s an interesting word’cause I remember when I went to [school site] and use the word challenge there were some of the youth workers that used to cringe and see the word challenge as aggressive (yes), but this is challenge as about personal development (yea) ah, so that would be one thing, the thing that I would like to think that I bring, is a just response in relationship with the young people (mmmm). And you know a compassion with young people – um, a validity in what we’re actually doing (mmmm) and that’s all enveloped around that challenging them to be the best young person they could (p.9, lines 111-121).</td>
<td>Being challenging Being compassionate Challenge/motivate for development of young people Achieve through compassion and genuine relationship</td>
<td>Being challenging and compassionate in genuine relationship with young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 INT 05</td>
<td>Teachers or educators, yea educators can go on a long time (yea) if they’re young at heart (yea), um, and you kind of do stay young at heart if you engage with young people (yep) (p.13-14, lines 179-181).</td>
<td>Being young at heart Ability to be playful/ have fun with young people</td>
<td>Being playful/ young at heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 INT 05</td>
<td>I feel that I’ve been a fairly strong person by my convictions and also my experiences of 20 years and knowing (p.14, lines 188-189).</td>
<td>Being a fairly strong person by my convictions and experience Use past life experiences as strength</td>
<td>Being strong and able to draw on past life experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 INT 05</td>
<td>I try to bring a lot of my, the really beneficial mainstream stuff back (yes), most of the stuff that you also run through retreats about storytelling and sharing and the confidentiality and that, being true to yourself and all that. And I bring that into the young people and I like to bring that into the staff too, you know that they can tell their stories, so I suppose it’s about that storytelling and I do acknowledge that it’s difficult bringing six new staff together, they’re not again going to open up and be honest, oh well not honest – give the depth (yep) (pp.22-23, lines 304-307).</td>
<td>Being true to yourself Being open Being honest Able to be honest with self Recognise storytelling as opening up to others</td>
<td>Being open Being honest Being able to recognise storytelling as opening up to others</td>
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| 21          | INT 05 . . once they became more relaxed they became more aware that you know the content of a curriculum isn’t all that significantly important in the young people’s life at the moment. It’s not denying the value of learning (yea) but learning is, well you start by saying, education is much broader than (mmm) two As or Bs or Cs (p.27, lines363-366). | Becoming more relaxed  
Being more aware that education is broader than As, Bs and Cs  
Recognise primary importance of relationship  
Secondary importance of curriculum | Being able to recognise primary importance of relationships  
Being able to see curriculum as secondary to relationships |
| 22          | INT 05 . . but certainly, um that’s important where the workers have the same values and understand that loving the unlovable, to treat the people with the same respect that you want to be treated yourself (yea). That’s where the values support it. If in their home life as well, you know, I would be very concerned if, I think it would be very hard if they were engaging in inappropriate behaviour on weekends and in relation to your own family. To come in and be a beacon to the young people (p.30, lines 409 – 414). | Being loving (“loving the unlovable”)  
Being authentic  
Being a beacon to the young people  
Engage with principles on personal and professional levels  
Embody principles at work | Being able to engage with principles of personal and professional levels e.g., being loving and authentic  
Being able to embody the principles  
Being a role model |
| 23          | INT 05 But when all that’s stripped away it’s 'my young person has a compassionate, appropriate compassionate relationship going on here and by God they need it, because when you look at the parents or the guardians, there are very few compassionate, appropriate relationships going on there. So it’s an opportunity maybe to break the cycle. And again I’m not really sure that we break too many of the cycles, um, but, there is some resilience with young people that if they can get to 18, and they haven’t been in too much problem with the police, um, they probably can make their way into a meaningful and gainful life (mmm) (pp.32-33, lines 444-450). | Being compassionate  
Able to engage/ maintain genuine relationship  
Recognise the difficulties of relationship for young people | Being compassionate  
Being able to engage/ maintain genuine relationship  
Being able to recognise the difficulties of relationships for young people |
| 24          | INT 05 Yea I think you do need to be, if you have to challenge the young people to be better people, you have to be pretty strong yourself (p.36, lines 492-493). | Being pretty strong yourself  
Able to self-reflect  
Find inner strength | Being able to self-reflect  
Being able to find inner strength |
| 25          | INT 06 Um, definitely approaching young people um, with an open mind and open attitude and coming in with the specific intention of building a relationship and getting to know a young person before you go any further (yep) (p.3, lines 29-31). | Being open-minded  
Being open in attitude  
Be open  
Willing to build genuine relationships | Being open in mind and attitude  
Being willing to build genuine relationships |
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<td>26 INT 06</td>
<td>Um, yea, particularly I guess within the workers and um, I know I was very open and up front that I was a new practitioner, I’m gonna have a lot of questions and just having, working, in this environment I feel completely comfortable to just stick up my hand and say, ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about, can you help out?’ (p.7, lines 87-91) . . . having an openness to people to be able to ask and to get help (p.8, 110).</td>
<td>Being open and up-front about not knowing everything Being open to ask and to get help Being honest with self Able to seek assistance</td>
<td>Being honest with self about not knowing everything Being open and willing to seek assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 INT 06</td>
<td>I think responsibility is a big one in that I guess in a sense that there’s so much going on and every worker has a different responsibility in a different area but we also have responsibilities for each other (yes) and I found that really upheld and everyone’s really supportive of each other and that’s a really important thing that we all have a responsibility to help one another out. It’s not like I’ve got my own things to do, I’m not, I don’t have time to help you – yea in that it comes under all the headings not just under respect and responsibility. Yea that really comes through I think (pp.11-12, 154-161).</td>
<td>Being responsible to help one another out Being supportive Being respectful Recognise personal responsibility Recognise collective/collaborative approach to responsibility</td>
<td>Being able to recognise personal responsibility being able to recognise collective/ collaborative approach to responsibility Being supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 INT 06</td>
<td>Yea like I feel I have as much to learn from the young people here as they have to learn from me (p.20, lines 285-286).</td>
<td>Being a co-learner Being open to learn from the young people Recognise the influence of self on others Recognise the influence of others on self</td>
<td>Being a co-learner Being able to recognise influence of self on others and others on self, including young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 INT 07 . . .</td>
<td>if we can build a community that people feel welcomed into and feel part of, I think that that is significant to young people, they can be part of that (yep) (p.4, lines 54-55).</td>
<td>Being welcoming Able to encourage participation by participating in welcoming others</td>
<td>Being able to encourage participation by welcoming others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 INT 07</td>
<td>I suppose for when a staff member comes in, that the relationships are started within the actual school community (mmmm) by you know, they have a responsibility as well as the young people have an opportunity to make some sort of relationship that can be a helpful relationship (mmmm). So, how does that happen? I think it happens by being open to the fact of, by being a little bit vulnerable (mmmm). By putting yourself out there and doing the normal things and doing them sort of sensitively, you know where young people are coming from, because, yea, having a sensitivity to young people and what they’ve got to offer as well (p.10,128–134).</td>
<td>Being open to the responsibility to make some sort of helpful relationship with young people Being a little bit vulnerable (putting yourself out there and doing normal things with sensitivity to the young people and what they’ve go to offer as well) Being open/honest/vulnerable Being sensitive to others Recognising strengths in others</td>
<td>Being open/ honest and vulnerable in relationships with young people Being sensitive to others Being able to recognise strength in others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 INT 07</td>
<td>Um, yea. I think the four principles call staff members, whoever they are, to be accountable to the community as much as everyone else is. They call staff to be accountable because we can’t put ourself up on a pedestal and say, we’re the teacher, or we’re the youth worker, you know, come and follow us (yea). I think that we’ve got to be accountable ah, we’ve got to hold ourselves accountable to those four principles (yea) (p.11)</td>
<td>Being accountable to the community Being accountable to the four principles Embody the principles Be accountable to the school community</td>
<td>Being able to embody the principles Being accountable to the school community</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>INT 08 You know, I’m looking forward to kids seeing a bit of continuity and commitment from people rather than, we have a lot of teachers and other workers that stay you know, two years max, and then the next lot of people come along so, I think in order to create a bit of stability in these young people’s lives you need people that are committed to stay longer (p.7, 91-95).</td>
<td>Being committed to stay longer with the young people in the work</td>
<td>Being committed to the young people</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Committed to stay</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>INT 08 Look, those four principles are really the key principles that we live on a day to day basis as humans, about respecting one another, respecting yourself, you know, being something (pp.15-16, lines 203-205).</td>
<td>Being respectful of one another Being respectful of self Being something Embrace principles in all of life</td>
<td>Being able to embrace the principles in whole of life</td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>INT 08 I think the one word that I think is really valued in our family, I called it a family cause everyone’s so supportive of one another, is the patience. The patience that staff have with each other, the patience we have for our students and what we’re trying to achieve with them (p.19, lines 250-253).</td>
<td>Being supportive Being patient (staff to staff, staff to young people)</td>
<td>Being supportive Being patient and able to develop this</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Develop patience</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>INT 08 We’re giving them the opportunity to grow as a person, to grow as an individual and whatever that individual might be, we don’t you know give names to people, we don’t want them to have too much expectations of themselves, we just want them to be happy with who they are, and where they wanna go, you know and for us to be there for them you know. And I think that’s what the students really appreciate that we have that patience with them while in mainstream education there’s not that um, opportunity for patience to be put into the class because they have 20/25/30 kids to a classroom (pp.19-20, lines 254-261).</td>
<td>Being able to grow as a person – “whatever that individual might be” Being happy with who they are Support development of others as happy supportive experience Have patience</td>
<td>Being supportive of the growth and development of others to be happy with themselves Being patient</td>
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<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>INT 09 (Teaching partner’s) been such a good role model for me and a mentor the last six months and he’s been really patient (p.6, lines 79-80).</td>
<td>Being patient (in staff relationships) Be role model/ mentor Be patient</td>
<td>Being a role model/ mentor Being patient in supporting staff</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>INT 09 Ah, it was quite explosive. I don’t think either of us knew that I was going to get upset and I did, and I was sort of like, oh, almost vomited it out, this upset, and - but the, I think they’re all so used to people getting upset, that the kids and (teaching partner) just said “Oh well let’s just sit down, we’ll have a chat about it” (great) Everybody get everything out and it was fine, they’re just so used to doing emotions in that way (yea, which is very healthy isn’t it when you think about it) It is (p.9, lines 110-115).</td>
<td>Being vulnerable Being emotional Be open/honest about feelings Be able to discuss emotional upsets</td>
<td>Being open and honest about feelings Being able to discuss emotional upsets</td>
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<td>INT 09</td>
<td>Um, but I slowly feel that I’m <strong>becoming more capable</strong> and we’ve fallen into our roles nicely (<strong>yea</strong> as well (<strong>yea</strong>). I used to double guess myself and check everything with ___________ (teaching partner) initially and I found that the kids then when I spoke to them would do the same thing “Hold on,” (<strong>Oh that’s interesting</strong>) “Let’s double check because he’s the boss! You know, whereas they’re now feeling far more comfortable with me if I give them some instructions (<strong>yep</strong>), they know “OK yep, this is – “She’s legit now!” <strong>Yeeaa!! (laugh)</strong> She knows what she’s doing – sort of (<strong>laugh</strong>) (pp.10-11, lines 135-141).</td>
<td><strong>Becoming more capable</strong></td>
<td><strong>Being able to recognise the development of capacity in others</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>INT 09</td>
<td>**Our focus at our outreach has always been on respect, and if you respect then you’ve pretty much covered the other principles as well and really getting across to the young people that everybody has had something that’s not worked for them (<strong>mmmm</strong>) that means that they’re here. You’re not the only one so you really have to tread, <strong>be gentle with people (<strong>yep</strong>). Cause they’re all sort of misfits in the one boat (<strong>laugh</strong>) I mean the principles make perfect sense to me and they’re easy to remember as well, straight forward and the <strong>kids can identify somebody who acts on the principles (they pick it up)</strong> and it makes sense to them with things like time out, and you know. So no, I think that that makes a lot of sense (pp.19-20, lines 259-266).</strong></td>
<td><strong>Being respectful</strong> <strong>Being gentle with others</strong> <strong>Being authentic in acting on the principles</strong> <strong>Being respectful and gentle</strong> <strong>Embody principles</strong></td>
<td><strong>Being respectful and gentle</strong> <strong>Being able to authentically embody the principles</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT 10</td>
<td>Oh a sense of not being nobody, a sense of um, um, <strong>being worthy</strong>, (<strong>yep</strong> a sense of self-value** (p.5, lines 61-62)) . . . &quot;I’m good at being patient&quot; or “I’m good at being a, you know a good leader” or “I’m good at being a good friend”, (<strong>yea</strong>) I’m good at healing or helping or just being me” (p.6, lines 72-74).</td>
<td><strong>Being someone</strong> <strong>Being worthy</strong> <strong>Being of value</strong> <strong>Being patient</strong> <strong>Being a good leader</strong> <strong>Being a good friend</strong> <strong>Being a healer</strong> <strong>Being a helper</strong> <strong>Being myself</strong> <strong>Recognising self-value and strengths</strong></td>
<td><strong>Being able to recognise self-value and strengths</strong></td>
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<td>INT 10</td>
<td>Um, like the first segment of a few years might have been <strong>a learning time</strong> where, you know I was just sucking in the importance I saw from people around me and learning and <strong>doing</strong> and um, <strong>and just being</strong> (p.7, lines 82-85).</td>
<td><strong>Just being</strong> <strong>Able to participate and learn initially</strong></td>
<td><strong>Being able to learn through participation in doing and being</strong></td>
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<td>INT 10 42</td>
<td>Um, the support of other staff um, is really valued, and when you don’t have it, that’s when you know how valuable it is (yea). People, it was um, we have quite different characters at this place that scratch up against each other but you know, come the crunch, I’ve seen things here when people have been in strife, extraordinary acts of generosity, support and all kinds of things, that’s really valued. Um, the um, the way that young people are looked after, it’s really valued. I presume no one wants to be in an organization where young people are treated unfairly or you know without much dignity or like numbers (mmm). Um, and the fact that everyone is treated respectfully, I think staff like that fact that there’s no staffroom gossip about young people or their parents, um, maybe these are the things that I value (pp.20-21, lines 68-77).</td>
<td>Being supportive Being generous Being caring towards young people Being respectful</td>
<td>Being able to value the support of others</td>
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<td>INT 10 43</td>
<td>It’s like um, (pause) it’s like walking on a tight-rope sometimes, to maintain that balance that you can fall into, that, you know _________ (previous youth worker) used always warn us about you know an educational view of the world and, which is industrial model designed to produce workers for the, you know, great machine out there. And the other model of, of um being with young people who are human beings and, and bringing them to a state of decent human-beingness, if they want to be decent human beings and just for them to celebrate their decency “cause they are all decent human beings. So that’s like a, you’ve got to, you’ve gotta check in. So that’s really quite um difficult. Cause you can be really seduced you know, really seduced. Like on any one day I’ll look around and everything’s quiet and people in class and teaching happening and learning happening, presumably kids are on task and you go, “ohhh Good job!” You go, oh hell what’s going on here? “Hang on! Who’s not here? Like where’s so and so and where’s so and so and where’s the ruckuss and where’s, you know, where’s _______ [young person] screaming her head off into the world cause she’s been in care for ten years, Ahh, that’s right. Why aren’t they here? Yea, who are we shutting out? (yep) It’s a tightrope (yea) and I s’pose what I’d like to do is to combine the two to make it work. And then other times it’s a bit like the Leunig cartoon out the front in the office where you’ve got a guy on a tightrope. (yea) and one topple this way, it’s not just you get upset but you, you drop everyone else as well cause everything is connected on the same kind of little pivot thing (yea) mmm (yea) mmm (pp.21-22, lines 281-300).</td>
<td>Being human Being able to recognise the humanity of every young person Being able to see every young person as a decent human being Being critically reflective (“Who is not here? Who are we shutting out?”) Able to recognise balance between: - Teaching and learning - Development of decency in each person as human</td>
<td>Being able to recognise the humanity of every young person Being able to recognise the balance between: Teaching and learning Development of decency in each person Being critically reflective (“Who is not here? Who are we shutting out?”)</td>
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<tr>
<td>44 INT 10</td>
<td>Or is it an easy cop out and you’re, you’re quite seduced by the fact that you want young people cheerful and happy and chatty and all those shots you see on the website all these smiling, happy people all doing education <em>(laugh)</em> Whereas 80% of our students are going “f…kin’ boring, don’t want to do that! Nooo!” and all of that. That’s where the change happens <em>(y ea).</em> So, you know, it would be nice if there was a teaching spot where something could happen so that, um, you know, you can tell people this, but they won’t really believe it, they want the feeling that, I don’t know. <em>(pause)</em> Maybe they don’t have the confidence to think “oh, ooh” you know it’s like being a new teacher, if you remember back that far, and you think “oh, ooh” and these two here are about to spit the dummy and the whole thing’s going to come tumbling down like a pack of cards, I’ve got to grab it now. And you’ve got to save it now. And you’ve got to have the um, yeah, that you can could have the hour’s class come tumbling down like a pack of cards and that’s not necessarily a bad thing, that could be a good thing <em>(y ea, and what’s the process)</em> If you’re gonna open it up though, you’ve got to have people who feel really confident about dealing with the broken eggs once they’ve been broken, “ooh, look at this, broken eggs! What’ll we do with this?” <em>(pp24-25, lines 324-339).</em></td>
<td>Being seduced by order, certainty, surface of calm and serenity in educational setting Being able to hold complexity and uncertainty Being able to see conflict as a catalyst for change and growth</td>
<td>Being able to hold complexity and uncertainty Being able to see conflict as a catalyst for change and growth Being able to recognise the confidence level in others and support the development of this to enable positive risk taking</td>
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<td>45 INT 11</td>
<td>I mean <em>(the trust we place in the young people)</em>, like I give mine a fair bit of rope and just say well you know, and you’ve got to the end of it, or you might find the end of it, hopefully not you won’t, but some of them will find the end of that rope, but <em>(y ea).</em> And you place trust in them and they <em>(it’s interesting)</em>. Yea <em>(sort of ongoing)</em> I guess <em>(pp.14-15, 14-18).</em></td>
<td>Being trusting Able to trust others and continue to demonstrate that trust</td>
<td>Being trusting and demonstrating trust in an ongoing way</td>
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<tr>
<td>46 INT 11</td>
<td><em>(What I value most is just being supported)</em> and that’s from top down <em>(y ep)</em>. It’s always there <em>(p.15, line 232).</em></td>
<td>Being supportive Value support from others</td>
<td>Being supported by others</td>
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<tr>
<td>47 INT 11</td>
<td><em>(Understanding them)</em>, like, not seeing it as face value <em>(y ea)</em>, sort of trying to read into it deeper, <em>(y ea)</em> um, and, I think it’s about understanding I think, and saying, “y ea well I see where you’re coming from, you know, it seems like you’re getting back on your feet”. And that was another thing too, and the kids can be real ratbags, and they’ve been doing it for a reason, whether it’s protection, or they don’t want to be here, they say well . . . If you can address that ASAP, you can move on, you can get along. <em>(Some kids will let you in, some won’t</em> <em>(p.17, lines 51-57).</em></td>
<td>Being understanding Try to understand/ deeper level Recognise you cannot reach all others</td>
<td>Being understanding at deep level Being aware that you cannot reach all young people</td>
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Um, for me, the biggest issue is relationships with staff (yep). So for me, I’ve got to be a nice bloke, a normal, nice not stuck up ‘dick’, (laugh) you know (yea) that walks around waving the big stick (yea). I’ve got to be someone that’s approachable, open, understands, sits down, talks the same language as them (yea). You know, if something stuffs up it’s not a big deal, everything can be fixed (yea). And that’s what I’ve been working on for 18 months and it’s taken me that long now and I’m starting to get those relationships going and people are opening up to me and they’re realizing that I’m not a big stick waver (no). Which they may have come from schools where there are big stick wavers, Yea (yea) that say hey this has to be done, that’s wrong, why are you doing that? You need to fix that up (yea). So it’s the relationship building, which is quite ironic, because when I started here I would never have thought that that would be the case (yea). I didn’t really know what to expect to be quite honest (yea) but yea. Um, and so those relationships which I s’pose filters down to what happens with the kids (yea,yea). Um, yea so, ‘cause that’s where the trust comes (p.12, lines 128-141).

Um, the thing that I value most is the openness, the openness. And again that comes from the relationship (p.23, lines 313-314). It’s different to pretty much everywhere else I’ve worked –

It’s probably the fact that the staff really need to be aware that the curriculum is second and the relationships are first (p.14, lines 180-181).
you can’t sort of keep them separate. The participation sort of thing, for me is have a crack at it, it’s ‘have a go’ (yea) um, so that they feel confident to have a go (yea). Ah, and I’m, I like to be involved. I try not to get too involved with the kids. ‘Cause I know that if I do that I’m not gonna be back for another couple of weeks and I don’t want to have them, all that trust sort of stuff, so I try and sort of steer clear. But there are certainly times where I’ll sit down and have a sanger or go to morning meetings (yea) all that sort of stuff. So there’s that participation side of things that I try to get through. Um, what else, what else am I up to? (Honesty). Honesty again, it all comes back to what I originally said a while ago, is that um, I’ve got to be able to trust them, they’ve got to be able to trust me, I’m honest with them, they’re honest with me, I don’t bullshit to them so I’d expect them to do the same back so if they’ve got an issue, lay it on the table and we’ll sort it out. Um, and that happens (yea) you know just look at the, what is it the online discussion forum thing going on there and I have some heated discussion about curriculum issues and about reporting especially, ah, but it’s all open and honest and I’m not having a crack at anybody, it’s just there (yea). And it’s interesting because, the staff that have been there for a while now, I spose I’m mainly talking about __________. (yea) it’s got the older staff and it’s sort of grounded. They’re really um, not backward in asking questions, coming forward, ‘cause we’re all going in the same direction and they think that now, whereas when I first started, that certainly wasn’t the case (yea). Yea, so they’re open (yep) (pp.20-21,274-304).

53 INT 13 Um, everyone’s been really supportive, um, the coordinator that we have now is really supportive of my role (p.11, lines,158-159).

54 INT 13 The word Flexi is so flexible so it’s really hard to know where you stand. But again it has to be a unified team. You know, one thing that I do realise is that, you know, for a place to flourish, your team needs to be solid, um, and I found that when the team has been solid, and they go “yea, I’m gonna stick to it, or whatever you set, it has to be (mmm). I can’t say it (p.19, lines 269-276).

55 INT 13 You know, for the staff to get anything done, so yep that’s one example, when the four principles aren’t working at a staff level, they play you off and also you were confused about what not to do and what to do, you know, you were not used to it. You might think “OK I’m gonna be solid about that”. But if you’re only solid about that, if you set a boundary and your solid about that, and everyone else is not going to that, then the kids are like “well why should I listen to you?” And then run off. “I’m not doing it”. And so, it kind of sort of defeats the purpose (yep). Whereas if as a team if you set it and everyone else is participating then that’s a okay (yea) (p20, lines 286-293).
56 INT 13 But, you know if it's a team decision (yea) you need to participate as a whole team, um, and I find that when one person doesn't participate, and it only takes one person, within this environment, the whole team has to carry it. It's really hard. (yea) and of course, certain protocols, you must be safe, you must be legal because it affects everyone. The four principles don't just apply to the kids they apply to the staff (yep) and if the kids see that the four principles, you know, if the staff are playing, and they can see it (yep) (p.21-22, lines 308-313).

57 INT 13 All these kids realise is that no one gets expelled, what they're getting here is unconditional love and that constant forgiveness. They don't know that, cause out in the world it’s three strikes you’re gone OK? You know, whether they realised that or not to me it's working in ministry and it's actually teaching, this is actually how Jesus went about, and it's constant forgiveness and for these people and they can't believe how much forgiving we are (p.26, lines 376-381).

58 INT 14 I really feel respected, like she knows that I'm talented and lets me just be creative, whereas other people tell you "that's not appropriate to do that". She is actually treating me like one of these kids (yea). And that's where I feel I can shine and I think that's just human nature maybe (yea) (p.6-7, lines 103-106).

59 INT 14 When I got here, the principles are so clear, and they don't always work you have bad days, but the principles are what you always fall back on, so it's not like you did this to me, “ that doesn't follow the principle respect (yea) and it has to go both ways from the teacher and a young person (yea). Which is a very different model Well, I like it, because that's how, that's my philosophy. But other people would really struggle with it, if they were a traditional teacher, but was taught even like behaviour management strategies, are often really, what do you call it, they use strategies to control the group, and that's necessary in some ways, but sometimes it's, I think you can do both (mmm) by being a human. You don't have to be nice and weak, but by being firm and caring (yea). Just be respectful (yea). So that's probably the number one (pp.7-8, lines 118-128).
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<tr>
<td>60 INT 14</td>
<td>And do you find that the principles that you work with, with young people translate into relationships with other colleagues? I do. Generally I think it’s does. I mean at times, you see people who are tired and stressed, you might snap at someone and other people’s personalities can be strong, and they might have a tendency to tell people how it is. (yep), but in that same vein, I’ve seen people go and apologise to other people and say “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have spoken to you in that way” or something like that. It’s a really nice place to work and I’ve had people come to me and say “I’m sorry it when I told you to go away”, I didn’t even think you were being offensive , but people are really aware and I think that’s beautiful. Like I love working here because I get treated like a really valuable human being, who, doesn’t have to put on any airs and graces. (yep) and we laugh a lot, you know (I think humour is really important). Yea (p.9, lines 151-158).</td>
<td>Being able to apologise</td>
<td>Being aware/sensitive to others and able to make amends</td>
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<tr>
<td>61 INT 14</td>
<td>Although there are times where maybe a lot has been expected of them. Or we take them for granted, perhaps, and I don’t mean we, like, with a teacher you’ve got to do your planning (yep), you’ve got to do all the background stuff and sometimes it might seem that they are expected to do that. But I think they take on an awful lot, (yep) outside their role here (yep). And I don’t know if I would actually like to be in their shoes, being a teacher aide before, because I know, how can you say that . . . (p.12, line 196-201).</td>
<td>Being critically reflective</td>
<td>Being critically reflective</td>
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<td>62 INT 14</td>
<td>It was a really healthy, it was a very good process to go through, um and it was very intense. And then in the afternoon we had another meeting “great work everybody, we got (site) back” which was (coordinator), but it was broken this morning and it was all that hard work you did this morning, it was worth it. We’ve found a way to fix it (pp.17-18, lines 300-304).</td>
<td>Being able to hold complexity and uncertainty</td>
<td>Being critically reflective</td>
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<tr>
<td>63 INT 14</td>
<td>And it’s not perfect, but it definitely, more caring and _________ (coordinator) will go “look, this is how we fix things here, you might go out and there may be fights in your life. But maybe you remember, one of the ways that you’ve learned to fix things differently here. And we’re trying to show you that there are other ways of doing things” (p20, lines 342-345).</td>
<td>Being caring</td>
<td>Being able to resolve conflict nonviolently using principles</td>
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| 64 INT 15    | Um, so it's my own life experience, I think it’s, I do enjoy having good relationships with young people and I do find it reasonably easy and I think it's because I do see them as an equal. (yep) not as someone who needs me or that needs anything really from me except probably patience (yea) and acceptance and um, understanding and things like that (yea, yea) (p.2, lines 33-36). | Being patient  
Being accepting  
Being understanding  
Able to conduct relationships with patience, acceptance and understanding | Being patient, accepting and understanding in relationships |
| 65 INT 15    | I do have a strong sense of being part of a bigger picture and in all honesty I have a big sense of support from the spirit (yea) The spirit and all that kind of thing and in all honesty I pray every day before I go in every day and I sort of pray when I come out and it’s not really religious but it’s a calling in of whatever I can be. That actually is a massive support (pp.3-4, lines 52-55). | Being part of something bigger (in a spiritual sense)  
Being whatever I can be through connecting to personal spiritual source | Being able to recognise the spiritual dimension of the work |
| 66 INT 15    | ... just a constant reminder of the nature of our young people and why they are the way they are the way they are, which is like the trauma and the effect of abuse and long-term brain, cause sometimes you can go into the classroom and you forget, because a lot of these young people have got incredible masks, that you would expect them to be functioning in the same way, but the reality is that they are masks, and they've got all these other, there’s so much other stuff going on and the more we are reminded of that the more we can have the patience and tolerance and things like that, that think is really important (p.5, 72-79). | Being patient  
Being tolerant  
Recognise “masking” of difficulties in others  
Show patience and tolerance | Being patient and tolerant  
Being able to recognise tendency of young people to mask difficulties |
| 67 INT 15    | But I actually believe sometimes you deal with adults who are at work ... (pause) that perhaps haven't yet dealt with a lot of their own life issues (mmm) and I think sometimes that can impact on (yep) a lot of things (mmm) so I think perhaps that so, the principles provide a really really good solid um, foundation for what people. I think that sometimes people are so programmed, that maybe sometimes it’s hard to genuinely internalise them. (yes) but I think that that's, I think that that is essential, I don't know how you do that ... (p.15, lines 116-121). | Being genuine about internalising the four principles  
Able to reflect on the self and application of the principles | Being able to self-reflect and internalise the principles |
| 68 INT 15    | Well to be honest, like because of my health issues and because of my strong religious upbringing, which I ended up changing, I ended up leaving the church but still had a very strong sense of love and justice (yes) and things like that (yea) Um, I think I entered into something that I'd already had very, very, very firm belief in, (yea). And I've had my time of soul searching (yes) and discovery and so, I think it’s given me an opportunity to um, go hey, (yes) um, that’s why I’ve really put it down to support (p.8, lines 126-132). | Being loving  
Being just  
Being a person who has had my time of soul searching and discovery  
Ability to reflect on self | Being loving  
Being just  
Being self-reflective |
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| 69           | **INT15** One thing is commitment, especially working with our kind of young people and for this to be successful, this coming and going, ‘cause these young people really have a dependency on the relationships that you build and coming and going sometimes reinforces their beliefs about neglect and things like that, so I think it’s, and how I, I think **commitment** to it (yep) is really valued and really important: Um, that’s, I think it’s the relationship and the communication between one another and support (yes, yes) Um, making sure people have access to that kind of support (yea) (p.8, lines 136-142). | Being committed  
Being supportive  
Being supported  
Recognise importance of commitment and support in ongoing relationships | Being able to recognise importance of commitment and support in ongoing relationships |
| 70           | **INT 15** I think that whole love thing, I do believe that everything functions on this love and it is an **unconditional love** (yep). Um, but I know I was sort of putting my hand up ‘cause I didn’t feel so comfortable with that being in a values statement, because I think (pause) . . . I think we do have some conditions on that at certain place, but a love for our work and a love for our young people and a love for what’s going on I think that in . . . a love for circumstances of the love for the young people in love and respect for the circumstances that are going on (yea, yea) (p.9, lines 143-149). | Being unconditionally loving  
Being respectful of the circumstances in young people’s lives  
Recognising ‘unconditional love’ as essential to the work | Being able to recognise ‘unconditional love’ as an essential aspect of the work  
Being respectful of the circumstances in young people’s lives |
| 71           | **INT 15** Well, I would just say. I’d probably be quite true to like I, like I um, I really do see patience, I see I do have patience and I do see myself as an honest **communicator** (mmmm). Especially with the young people, um, (pause). I um, (pause 3 seconds)  
There is no right or wrong (laugh)  
And loving. (yea?) I like to say that to the young people. I’m always saying that to the young people. If I do something, and I don’t know if I’m being funny too, well I’ll often say “where’s the love in that?” or if I have to say something, “you know I love you but, you can’t be doing that . . . “ They know I’m like that, I think that love is a really powerful, it creates a bit of an atmosphere for the young people, you know, they often say things, they’ll use that word ‘love’ in conversations (yea? How would they put it? Like . . . )  
Ohh, they might say, “we love you . . .” or they might say it in jest, but they might imitate that kind of thing, like “Oh, that’s not very loving” or that kind of stuff (yea) (p. 10, lines 166-178). | Being patient  
Being an honest communicator (especially with the young people)  
Being loving  
Being humourous  
Recognising personal strengths of patience and honesty (openness) | Being aware of personal strengths of patience, honesty, openness, love and humour |
| 72           | **INT 15** I try and give young people a sense of being a bigger person (yea), instead of a smaller, and hopefully over time that whirls away and they take on that responsibility, and they do it not just because they’ve got a fear that if they don’t do it, they’ll be in trouble. But because it’s internalised, they see the goodness in being good (yea – that’s lovely) (laugh) (p.11, lines 181-185). | Being a bigger person  
Being good as an internalised state (not just out of fear but out of seeing the goodness) | Encourage aspiration and values in others |
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| 73 INT 15    | But knowledge of that human condition *(yea)* Every time for myself if I have started to think “Oh, I've lost a bit of hope”, I remind myself, or we've had some speakers come in, that just make me feel more passion towards them and compassion. And then empathy, otherwise sometimes you can get a little bit resentful or, you know that thing we were talking about yesterday, wanting to use more punishment, you know, looking at thing mainstream in mainstream way, because people are taking things personally. Yeah, what they are objectively. And you can't do that unless you've got the knowledge *(yea)* *(pp.12, lines 194-201)*. | Being passionate  
Being compassionate  
Being empathetic  
Being aware through having knowledge (trauma informed practice)  
Ability to develop self-awareness and awareness of pressures on others ('human condition') | Being self-aware and aware of pressures on others by exercising passion, compassion, empathy and knowledge (trauma informed practice) |
| 74 INT 16    | Part of it’s about wanting to work with families and young people to make sure they get equity and access to what we all enjoy, and part of it’s about um, a personal part of it for me is about the amount that I learn from being in these spaces with these families and young people *(yea, yep)* *(p.1, lines 13-16)*. | Being open to learn from young people and their families in these spaces  
Working for social inclusiveness and justice | Being socially inclusive and just and open to learn from young people and their families |
| 75 INT 16    | I think the most, there's a few things in that, but the most important thing that we, the most effective important thing I’ve found is to provide an opportunity, the ability to enter into an authentic relationship with young people. And that is a very difficult thing to do in the teaching environment 'cause we're kind of not taught to do that as teachers. Um, largely it's about control, and control is usually about the volumes of people you have to work with so, we deliberately create these sites to be smaller, in terms of teacher-student ratios or worker ratios, and that provides an opportunity where you ah, enter into the relationship around the four boundaries of those principles that we work by, um and in that, is where you yourself are transformed, because a lot of this stuff that you know, you can be involved and have a certain level of authority, which may not necessarily be the case and so, reflection on that all the time. And if you can do that and be honest and open, which is complicated. I'm not saying that's easy. But if you consistently do that, then young people that for really complex reasons have been outside the mainstream, and have been hurt, um, can find a place of safety, and like us all, they want to learn. I have a strong belief in that*(yea)*. And that's how these places work *(p.2, lines 20-34)*. | Being in an authentic relationship with these young people around the boundaries of the four principles  
Being transformed  
Being reflective  
Being honest and open  
Recognise changes/ development of the self  
Recognise significance of this in creating safe places for others to try/ learn | Being authentic in relationships  
Being aware of personal changes and transformation  
Being critically reflective and aware of the significance of this in creating safe places for others |
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<td>76 INT 16</td>
<td>Our experience over the past um, 20 years would indicate that the sense of dislocation for a, it’s a small cohort of people really if you look at national statistics, but a cohort that is extremely complicated and complex and it's across the nation and um, the, the legacy of the Brothers order, of the Christian Bros order, um and the vision of Edmund Rice Education Australia, is to, um, respond to the needs of those that are marginalised or in their words, those who are in some sort of physical or literal poverty. Um, and to respond to the signs of the times, so from an organisational perspective, I read that as being, this is the work that the organisation wants us to do, and enough of that(yep) (p.3-4, lines 51-58).</td>
<td>Being responsive to the needs of those that are marginalised (e.g., for Christian Bros/EREA those in physical or literal poverty) Being responsive to the signs of the times Recognise nature of need Recognise this as work of this organisation</td>
<td>Being responsive to the needs of those that are marginalised (e.g., those in physical/literal poverty) Being aware of the nature of the work of the organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>77 INT 16</td>
<td>a lot of my knowledge around working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has come out of sitting around and listening and talking with those people, I don't need to go and study that, that well to get the depth of what that community could mean. So, I guess over time, you soak that stuff up. And that's what's great about this place is that you kind of the hierarchy of authorities in disciplines is, kind of gets broken down a bit so that everyone has a say, that's why the principles work with adults as well, so over time, I think we've learned a lot about how communities want their young people educated. We've listened a lot, and we stuffed it up from time to time, and at times we've got it really right. Um, but I think that's the essence of it, if we keep as adults getting back to listening to young people and what they're looking for (p.5, lines 77-86).</td>
<td>Being available and open to learn from listening Being able to learn from mistakes Being able to listen to young people and what they're looking for Recognise democracy and equity in the principles Always listening to others</td>
<td>Being able to recognise democracy and equity in the principles Being able to listen to young people and what they’re looking for Being available and open to learn from listening Being able to learn from mistakes</td>
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<tr>
<td>78 INT 16</td>
<td>Like the situation with young Daniel Yock(yep) who was killed by the police and they wanted to protest about that. And I remember thinking, oh yeah, we should protest will do that and then we're really challenged about that, that we were about to take a group of young people out on the street to protest a very political thing, this was a death in custody, and we're doing that suddenly, and I went “oh wow, this is, I'm out there I'm doing it and I'm the adult, partly one of the adults leading it and that's a very direct political action. But that was driven by young people, um so that was radical (p.5-6, lines 88-95).</td>
<td>Being challenged Being radical (protest and advocacy) Recognise social justice and responsibility of solidarity and political action</td>
<td>Being challenged Being able to recognise social justice and responsibility of solidarity and political action</td>
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<td>79 INT 16</td>
<td>Oh I think the essence of these places for everyone that comes to them, and I mean adults and young people, is, when they mature and there are times when they don't have this, but that’s like the rest of life, but I think when they mature, these places um, they grow into themselves kind of thing, the essence of them is the value of safety (mmm). What I mean by that is that the sense that you are emotionally, spiritually, physically, um intellectually safe (yepp). Um, for everyone. (yea) And that’s safe to have your own mind, to say your own piece, safe to express yourself the way you want to express yourself, and fundamentally we're all looking for that, and that's why I think adults like these places as well (p.8, lines 128-136).</td>
<td>Being emotionally, spiritually, physically, &amp; intellectually safe (everyone) Being safe to say your own piece Being safe to express yourself in the way you want to express yourself Recognising the many dimensions of safety (emotionally, spiritually, physically and intellectually) Recognise this as basic human need</td>
<td>Being able to recognise the many dimensions of safety (emotional, spiritual, physical and intellectual) Being able to recognise safety as a basic human need Being safe to express yourself</td>
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<tr>
<td>80 INT 16</td>
<td>I'm really glad that these, that the best of educators, the people who, who choose to work with us, all show the commitment to reflect on their own stuff and delve into themselves, and to challenge themselves, through that, um and at the same time, want to work with this disadvantaged group of young people (p.9, lines 145-148).</td>
<td>Being committed Being critically reflective Being open to challenge self Ability to reflect on self Apply this to practice</td>
<td>Being committed Being critically reflective Being able to apply this critical reflection to own practice</td>
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**APPENDIX AM**

Dispositions Identified in Interviews, Arranged in Themes, and Categorised According to Three Main Overarching Themes

Interview number and quote number in brackets after disposition statement e.g., (5/22 – see Appendix AL for referenced quotes from interviews).

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<td>(Respect, Participation, Safe &amp; Legal &amp; Honesty)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being able to embody the principles (5/22)</td>
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<td>• Being able to embody the principles (7/31)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being able to authentically embody the principles (9/39)</td>
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<td>• Being able to enact and embody the principles (6/27)</td>
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<td>• Being able to embrace the principles in whole of life (8/33)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being able to embody the principles as a unified staff team (13/56)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being participatory in a unified staff (13/56)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being able to apply the four principles to self and others (1/1)</td>
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<td>• Being authentic and consistent in living the principles (2/10)</td>
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<td>• Being consistent in applying the principles to own behaviour and attitudes (3/13)</td>
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<td>• Being able to engage with the principles at personal and professional levels e.g., being loving and authentic (5/22)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being able to embody the principles to encourage honesty, trust, safety and participation from others to have a go and take a risk (12/52)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being able to role-model in accordance with the principles (2/9)</td>
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<td>• Being able to self-reflect and internalise the principles (15/67)</td>
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<td>• Being able to recognise democracy and equity in the principles (16/77)</td>
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<td>• Being respectful (14/59)</td>
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<td>• Being respectful and gentle (9/39)</td>
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<td>• Being respectful and able to recognise/encourage the strength in others (14/58)</td>
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<td>• Being respectful of the circumstances in young people’s lives (15/70)</td>
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<td>• Being respected (14/58)</td>
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<td><strong>Dispositions of Safety</strong></td>
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<td>• Being able to recognise the many dimensions of safety (emotional, spiritual, physical &amp; intellectual) (16/79)</td>
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<td>• Being able to recognise safety as a basic human need (16/79)</td>
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<td>• Being safe to express yourself (16/79)</td>
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<td>• Being honest with self about not knowing everything (6/26)</td>
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<td>• Being able to recognise primary importance of relationships (5/31)</td>
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<td>• Being able to see curriculum as secondary to relationships (5/21)</td>
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<td>• Being able to recognise the difficulties of relationships for young people (5/23)</td>
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<td>• Being willing to build genuine relationships (6/25)</td>
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<td>• Being patient, accepting and understanding in relationships (15/64)</td>
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<td>• Being challenging and compassionate in genuine relationship with young people (5/17)</td>
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<td>• Being able to engage/ maintain genuine relationship (5/23)</td>
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<td>• Being relational by being available and accessible (11/48)</td>
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<td>• Being able to establish and maintain genuine connection with others (5/23)</td>
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<td>• Being present to others and genuinely interested in their well-being (3/11)</td>
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APPENDIX AM (continued)

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| **Dispositions of Openness** | • Being open (5/20)  
• Being open and honest (1/1)  
• Being open to admit mistakes (1/3)  
• Being able to learn from mistakes (17/78)  
• Being willing to make amends (1/3)  
• Being able to recognise storytelling as opening up to others (5/20)  
• Being able to listen to young people and what they’re looking for (16/77)  
• Being open in mind and attitude (6/25)  
• Being open and willing to seek assistance (6/26)  
• Being open/ honest and vulnerable in relationships with young people (7/30)  
• Being open and honest about feelings (9/37)  
• Being able to discuss emotional upsets (9/37)  
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• Being able to recognise personal responsibility (6/27)  
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• Being able to recognise the importance of commitment and support in ongoing relationships (15/69) |
| **Dispositions of Generosity** | • Being able to appreciate generosity in all (1/4)  
• Being able to appreciate generosity in its different forms (1/4) |
| **Dispositions of Caring and Compassion** | • Being caring (14/63)  
• Being caring (5/16)  
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<td>- Being critically reflective and able to discuss practice (3/12)</td>
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<td>- Being critically reflective and aware of the significance of this in creating safe places for others (16/75)</td>
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APPENDIX AN

Narrative Explanation of Dispositions with Interview Data Extracts Incorporated, and Grouped According to Three Overarching Themes

Dispositions of relationships

Being able to embody the principles

When staff talked about the principles as “a living breathing” entity they were describing the embodiment of the principles. Embodying the principles included being authentic in living the principles and therefore being a role model for the young people. One staff person felt that embodying the principles was like “being a beacon to young people” (INT 05) in terms of role modelling to them how to live by those values.

Applying the same values to themselves that were applied to the young people was also an expression of embodying the principles. If young people could not consume alcohol on site, one worker felt that adults also needed to take that on board, even after hours. Another staff member captured the idea of embodying the four principles when he talked about how the young people “learn more from not what we say but what we do” (INT 02). By being accountable to the principles as much as the young people were, another worker felt a responsibility to hold himself accountable to the community through the principles. A number of people highlighted that the principles were for everybody, not just for young people. This sense of collective responsibility linked the four principles back into a notion of a real community of people—not merely an abstract concept but a lived reality. Embracing the principles in the whole of life was a way of embodying “the key principles that we live on a day to day basis as humans” (INT 08), such as respecting one another and respecting yourself. Being respectful was identified as a central value within the research context.

It was evident to a number of workers that young people could clearly “identify someone who acts on the principles” (INT 02) in all aspects of life as an embodied
experience. When another worker talked about the principles he recognised that his own enacting and embodiment of the principles was an encouragement and model for young people and colleagues to be willing to take risks and have a go, especially in terms of participation and honesty. It was clear that some staff recognised the value of the principles as a foundation for everything and whilst appreciating that it was hard to “genuinely internalise them” (INT 15), it was perceived as essential in this work.

Embodying the principles included learning to resolve conflict nonviolently and to recognise democracy and equity in their operation, which was expressed in terms of genuinely listening to young people and ensuring that “everyone having a say” (INT 14) was a lived reality within the school community.

**Being respectful**

Many staff talked about being respectful, which included being respectful of self, respectful of one another and being respectful of the circumstances in young people’s lives. It involved “respecting the dignity of each person” (INT 01) and ensuring that the basis of all relationships was respect. Respect was perceived as an important focus in the work with young people as it was the starting point and launching pad for enacting other principles. When coupled with gentleness and an appreciation that everyone had experienced something in their lives that had not worked for them, it was perceived that respect made sense to young people.

The disposition of being respectful towards young people supported staff to work with young people in a manner that was not reliant on “managing behaviour” or using strategies to control the group. Being respectful was not just being “nice” and “weak” it was about “being firm and caring” (INT 14). In addition to this, another educator saw the importance of being respectful of the circumstances in young people’s lives and extending towards them a sense of unconditional love (INT 15). For another
worker, being respectful was associated with “loving the unlovable, to treat the people with the same respect that you want to be treated yourself” (INT 05). Enacting respect demonstrated a capacity or disposition to engage with others, thus enabling enhanced action in and on the immediate social context for a particular purpose (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004), such as creating a safe relational space to support the learning of young people who have experienced a wide range of social exclusion.

For another interviewee, the building of relationships through being respectful was the starting point for experiencing trust in staff relationships. One worker described her experience of being respected by her peers in the learning community as an example of the respect commonly extended to the young people. Such a disposition of respect enacted by her peers and colleagues enabled her to be fully herself (INT 14).

**Being safe**

Safety was understood holistically in terms of being emotionally, spiritually, physically, & intellectually safe (INT 16) and this kind of safety was described as the essence of these school communities. This level of safety was important for everyone, both young people and staff. Being safe was also linked to the freedom to have a voice, to say your own piece and “to be safe to express yourself in the way you want to express yourself” (INT 16). Being safe was identified as a basic human need. When discussing the disposition of safety, educators talked about being safe enough to be able to take a risk – have a go, in the same way that they were hoping young people would feel safe to have a go (INT 12). Being safe was associated with being legal because your actions affected everyone.
**Being honest**

Staff talked about being honest in terms of the capacity to be honest about “not knowing everything” and being honest with sharing personal stories and “being true to yourself” (INT 05). This kind of honesty required a disposition of being open.

**Being open**

Being open was frequently mentioned in terms of being open to admit mistakes, being open and honest if things were not working, and being willing to make amends through apologising when necessary (INT 01). This disposition of openness enabled people to learn from mistakes and required being open-minded and open in attitude. The disposition of being open was sustained by an acknowledgement of the need to be open and willing to seek assistance when you as a worker were uncertain or unsure.

The challenge that occurred in staff relationships with regard to being open and honest about one’s struggles, limitations, and needing help or support in the work with young people, was acknowledged by another educator. Building those kinds of honest and supportive relationships amongst colleagues took time and required trust and being able to recognise storytelling as opening up to others (INT 05). Whilst educators would often encourage young people to being open in this way, it was sometimes perceived as more difficult for staff, particularly new staff, to be open with their peers and colleagues about such things as “not knowing” or “needing help” (INT 01). For those workers who were able to adopt these dispositions of openness, the experience of “becoming more capable” (INT 09) over time, through support and mentoring from other staff, was not uncommon.

When talking about adult to adult relationships in the workplace, another participant stated that they had to “be someone that was approachable, open, understands, sits down, talks the same language” (INT 12) with colleagues. These
dispositions or relational capacities to engage were perceived to be just as important between co-workers as they were with young people. Being open in these ways were valued by this worker and another educator who both recognised that it came from the emphasis on relationships with all people in the learning community.

One participant talked about being available and open to learn from listening, and to learn from young people and their families and “what they’re looking for” (INT 16). Being able to listen to young people was an expression of being open to learn from the young people rather than always being in the position of ‘teacher’ and this was challenging for some staff. Traditional discourses of teacher identity that conjured notions of authority and needing to be the expert (Alsup, 2006; Britzman, 2003), were frequently contested in this context when educators adopted the disposition of becoming a co-learner with young people.

In discussing relationships with young people, another person mentioned staff responsibility to make some sort of helpful relationship with young people which required being open “by being a little bit vulnerable” (INT 07). This disposition of openness required a sensitivity to where young people were coming from “and what they’ve got to offer as well” (INT 07). Such dispositions of being open-minded with young people and being open in attitude were further examples of dispositions that supported relational ways of working with young people. Additionally staff made reference to being open and honest with feelings and being able to discuss emotional upsets (INT 01). This kind of openness was an expression of being open to caring for others and demonstrated an appreciation of the level of emotional intelligence that could be fostered through focusing on relationships first. This emphasis on relationships first highlighted an extremely important disposition – that of being relational.
**Being relational**

Being able to recognise the primary importance of relationships was a disposition highlighted by a number of staff. This disposition was evident when staff were able to see curriculum as secondary to relationships and when they were willing to build genuine relationships with young people. One educator stated that “the content of the curriculum isn’t all that significantly important in the young peoples’ lives at the moment and that education is much broader than As, Bs or Cs” (INT 05).

Being able to engage with and maintain genuine relationships and connection with others required being present to others and genuinely interested in their wellbeing. In order to sustain these relational dispositions staff also needed to be able to recognise the difficulties of relationships for young people due to the complexities in their lives. Staff had to be patient, accepting and understanding in relationships with young people and this required a relational disposition of being available and accessible to young people. At times a relational disposition required being challenging and compassionate in genuine relationships with young people.

**Being committed**

Being committed was perceived as important by a number of workers who recognised that the young people needed to have staff who were able to make a commitment to them and to their needs (INT 07). The commitment to this way of working involved: working with the four principles; reflecting on practice and on personal issues that may impact on one’s capacity to authentically engage with young people; and a commitment to reflect and challenge oneself and be open to change. Being accountable to the school community was seen as a responsibility of staff and young people (INT 07). The disposition of being able to recognise personal responsibility as well as being able to recognise a collective/collaborative approach to
responsibility were expressions of dispositions of commitment by staff. Finally, being able to recognise the importance of commitment and support in ongoing relationships with young people was identified as an important feature of this work.

**Being generous**

Being able to recognise that generosity was evident in all different ways in the school community and being able to appreciate this generosity in all, were two relational dispositions described by staff in interviews.

**Being caring and compassionate**

Being caring was associated with being firm and being compassionate. The disposition of being caring was described by a worker when she talked about dealing with conflict amongst young people. She felt the approach adopted with young people at her school was a more caring approach than other contexts she had worked in and felt that caring included showing young people other ways of sorting out conflict (INT 14). She had heard a more experienced worker talk to young people reminding them of this.

Look this is how we fix things here, you might go out and there may be fights in your life. But maybe you remember, one of the ways that you’ve learned to fix things differently here. And we’re trying to show you that there are other ways of doing things (INT 14).

Being firm and caring was talked about in relation to using the four principles as an alternative to other approaches of behaviour management that tended to be more controlling. If being firm was combined with being respectful and being human, it tended to result in being fair as well as caring. Being caring was evident in the way that young people were looked after by the staff. This was expressed when young people were treated by adults with fairness, dignity and respect. Being caring was associated
with the idea of confronting and challenging young people in a gentle way which may have involved asking the young people:

Why are you here? This is a practice run for real life. Here you get feedback. In real life you might just get chucked out, yea? I’m being fairly confrontational with that, but in a gentle way, like they know I do it because I care (INT 04).

The disposition of being compassionate was also linked by one educator to the idea of challenging young people “to be the best young person they could” (INT 05). In this context, the challenge posed to young people was about “personal development” and bringing “a just response in relationship with the young people, and you know, compassion with young people” (INT 05).

**Being hospitable**

The disposition of hospitality included being welcoming. It was related to the kind of treatment that people experienced when they walked into the school, “it doesn’t matter if they’re a young person, and everyone gets the same kind of treatment”. Being hospitable was also about being present to people, “hanging in with people” in order to maintain and sustain relationship, “even when they’re not coming” (INT 03). The disposition of hospitality required workers to be observant and attentive to what was emerging in the practice context – “I guess it’s a lot of being around it to watch what happens and see how it goes. So I guess a lot of time for reflecting on how things are done and why things are done that way . . . so there’s a lot of time for discussion and reflection” (INT 03).

The disposition of hospitality incorporated inclusion. One worker talked about the importance of including young children as legitimate members of the school community when their parents were reengaging in education. Building a community “that people feel welcomed into and feel part of, I think that is significant to young
people, they can be part of that” (INT 07), was viewed as important. Being non-judgemental and non-biased were other aspects of being welcoming that contributed to the creation of a community of safety.

**Being a role model**

Being a role model to the young people was associated with the underlying values of the context and embodying the principles in terms of being loving and treating people with “the same respect that you want to be treated yourself” (INT 07). This capacity of role-modelling required a disposition of being able to recognise the influence of self on others and others on self, including young people. Being a role model was associated with being a co-learner with young people and this sentiment was captured by a worker who said that “I feel I have as much to learn from the young people as they have to learn from me” (INT 06). In a similar fashion being sensitive to others and what the young people have to offer was another way of role modelling a sense of mutuality and respect in relationships. Role models also needed to be able to recognise the strength in others whether young people or colleagues. Whilst mentoring was clearly evident in relationships with young people it was also apparent between co-workers where more experienced staff were able to recognise the development of capacity in a less experienced worker and support this through being patient (INT 09). In order for workers to experience being mentored by a role model in a positive way they needed to adopt a disposition of being able to learn through participation in doing and being, especially in relationship with others in the school community “sucking in the importance I saw from people around me and learning and doing and just being” (INT 10).
**Being supportive and supported**

Being supportive of others and being supported was perceived by staff as important in their ways of being in the research context. As outlined in Chapter 6 when discussing staff support, the experience of staff in the context as reported in the staff questionnaire, indicated very strongly that staff felt supported most often within their local context by their peers and particularly through their site coordinator. In the interview data, the disposition of being supportive was expressed by one educator as a “responsibility to help one another out” (INT 06). She experienced that support between staff within her school community and found that “everyone is really supportive of each other” (INT 06). Similarly, another educator felt that the support offered by staff to each other was characteristic of the support commonly experienced within a family. This was echoed in a sentiment expressed by an educator who said that she had seen “extraordinary acts of generosity and support” when people [referring to other staff] have “been in strife” (INT 10). At times it was perceived that support also included being able to recognise the confidence level in others and support the development of this to enable positive risk taking in the learning context and in relationships with young people. The dispositions of being supported by others and being supportive of others were experienced frequently by educators in this context. “Just being supported and that’s from top down, it’s always there” (INT 11). Support was experienced from colleagues, and frequently experienced from the coordinator of the site. “Everyone’s been really supportive, the coordinator has been really supportive of my role” (INT 13).

For another person, the experience of being supportive in this context was about being able to work alongside others and that this was “different to pretty much everywhere else I’ve worked. So I’m working alongside them and I’m there to support
them, that’s it” (INT 06). When discussing what was valued, another interviewee mentioned commitment and support. She felt that the commitment of the staff to the young people and to this way of working was valued. It included “the relationships and the communication between one another and support . . . making sure people have access to that kind of support” (INT 09).

Another educator felt that staff appreciated “the fact that everyone is treated respectfully” and that this was a way of being supportive. Her perception was that “no-one wants to be in an organisation where young people are treated unfairly or without much dignity or like numbers” (INT 10). She valued “the fact that there was no staff room gossip about young people or their parents”, highlighting that the disposition of being supportive through expressing generosity, care and respect was enacted and valued in her learning community (INT 10). Some staff expressed the importance of experiencing support through being part of a unified staff team which was useful in then being able to support young people. Supporting young people required being able to recognise the tendency of young people to mask difficulties (INT 15). If this recognition was possible staff could more easily enact being supportive of their growth and development to be happy with themselves, “with who they are and where they wanna go . . . to be there for them” (INT 08).

**Being authentic**

The disposition of being authentic and genuine was recognised as significant especially in relationships with young people. It was discussed in terms of being authentic and consistent in living the four principles, acting on the principles, following the principles and internalising the four principles. One worker talked about the importance of being able “to enter into an authentic relationship with young people . . . around the boundaries of those principles” (INT 16).
Being authentic was viewed as something young people could easily identify – “someone from the heart, not someone from the head”. He commented that “Our kids learn more from not what we say but what we do. They learn from me, from who I am, the person first, rather than the four principles, then they get it” (INT 02).

Being authentic was also expressed as being able to be yourself because “I get treated like a really valuable human being” (INT 14). The disposition of being human was associated with “respecting the dignity of each person” and “the humanity of everyone – the staff, the young people and the volunteers” (INT 01). Being treated in this way enabled young people and staff to be able to recognise their own self-value and strengths. In an education context it was important for staff to develop the disposition of being able to recognise the balance between teaching and learning and the development of decency in each person. Another disposition that supported the fostering of this balance was being able to appreciate the value of humour and being playful or young at heart (INT 04).

**Being understanding and patient**

The disposition of being understanding of young people at a deep level was a feature of practice described in ways of working with young people in Chapter 5. Understanding young people at a deeper level than face value was a starting point for one worker. “It’s about understanding I think, and saying ‘yea well I see where you’re coming from, you know, it seems like you’re getting back on your feet’ ” (INT 11). The importance of being understanding was also relevant for staff relationships if they were to be based on honesty and trust.

Being understanding was linked with being patient. One interview participant appreciated that other staff were being patient in supporting her as she was learning how to do this work. Being patient and able to develop this patience was mentioned by
another worker who talked about the patience between staff and the patience extended towards young people as aspects of the supportive environment within his particular school community (INT 09). Another person mentioned being patient and tolerant in relation to understanding the nature of the young people and “why they are the way they are, which is the trauma and the effect of abuse” (INT 15). This person felt that the young people were equals and did not need her or need anything from her except being patient, being understanding and being accepting.

Being understanding and willing to take time with others was an important disposition for relationships between staff and with young people. This was exemplified in the disposition of being trusting and demonstrating this trust in an ongoing way, which often required understanding and patience.

**Being consistent**

For one worker being consistent was described as “being solid” especially in relation to being unified as a staff and working towards this unity in an ongoing way (INT 13). Being consistent and unified in setting boundaries for young people was seen as a team responsibility which could become a catalyst “for a place to flourish”. This worker understood being solid as being consistent with boundaries and how they are applied and having a common understanding around that as a member of a team. This was particularly important when team members had different perspectives and opinions about how certain issues should be handled. “You need to participate as a whole team and I find that when one person doesn’t participate, and it only takes one person, within this environment, the whole team has to carry it” (INT 13).

**Being spiritual and just**

For staff working with young people in this context, being able to recognise the spiritual dimension of their work was seen as valuable. Being loving in an
unconditional way and being able to recognise ‘unconditional love’ as an essential aspect of the work, were expressions of spiritual dispositions that were valuable for developing relationships (INT 13). Staff also equated being caring with expressions of being unconditionally loving and forgiving, commenting that “All these kids realise is that no one gets expelled, what they’re getting here is unconditional love and that constant forgiveness. They don’t know that cause out in the world it’s three strikes and you’re gone OK?” (INT 13). In a similar vein another worker felt that everything functioned on the notion of unconditional love which she described as “a love for our work and a love for our young people and a love for what’s going on . . . a love and respect for the circumstances that are going on [in young peoples’ lives]” (INT 15).

If staff were wanting to foster the disposition of being spiritual and just, they may seek to demonstrate the disposition of being able to encourage aspiration and values in others. For example, one adult worker encouraged young people “to be a bigger person” (INT 5) as an internalised state, especially when faced with challenges. Being just and being ethical was expressed when staff were being responsive to the needs of those who were marginalised, for example, those in physical or literal poverty. Other dispositions of spirituality and justice included being able to recognise social justice and the responsibility of solidarity and political action. Being socially inclusive and just, and being “open to learn from young people and their families” (INT 16) were also expressions of the disposition of being spiritual and just.

Dispositions of changing perspectives through reflection

Being aware

Being aware was talked about in terms of being self-aware and able to find inner resources. “I think you have to be strong within yourself. You have to know what you’re about” (INT 02). Self-awareness included being aware of personal strengths of
patience, honesty, openness, love and humour. Self-awareness was also talked about in terms of being aware of pressures on others, especially young people, by exercising passion, compassion, empathy and knowledge of trauma informed practice. It included being aware of personal changes and transformation.

Being aware was significant in terms of being aware of the primacy of relationships and this was highlighted by an interviewee who stated that “Staff need to be aware that the curriculum is second and the relationships are first” (INT 12). Being aware involved being aware/sensitive to others. This was mentioned by one staff person who appreciated how some staff were aware of the impact of their behaviour on their colleagues and were prepared to apologise and make things right when necessary – being able to make amends (INT 01). For example, another participant described a conversation between two staff that she had overheard. “I’ve seen people go and apologise to other people and say ‘I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have spoken to you in that way’ or something like that” (INT 14).

The disposition of being aware was evident when staff demonstrated being able to appreciate the workload of others. “There are times where maybe a lot has been expected of them [teacher aides]. But I think they take on an awful lot, outside their role here” (INT 14). Another participant talked about the need to be aware of the different strengths and preferences of other staff and wherever possible, trying to arrange and plan the work to align with those strengths and preferences. Being self-aware required people to be able to recognise strengths in others, to be able to recognise empathy in others and to be able to celebrate gentleness/empathy as a strength within self and others (INT 01).

Being aware was talked about in terms of being able to recognise the uniqueness and dynamic nature of the work and the context, in particular, being able to respond to
the needs of those that are marginalised . . . those who are in some sort of physical or literal poverty (INT 16). Being aware was about understanding that this was the work of the organisation. At the same time, being aware was discussed in terms of appreciating that you cannot reach all young people. In many ways this was a challenging dimension of the work.

**Being reflective**

Being reflective was discussed as being self-reflective through doing your own “soul searching and discovery” (INT 15). Being able to self-reflect and develop self-understanding, which was also expressed as ‘soul-searching’, was understood by another worker as a capacity to look within. He felt that this self-reflection supported his capacity to listen and be able to interrogate self-bias, prejudice and values (INT 02).

As well as self-reflection the notion of critical reflection was evident in staff interviews. It was evident when people were willing to ask the difficult questions, being able to grapple with conflict and work through to some resolution. Being critically reflective was evident when questions were asked about staff roles and issues of equity, for example with teacher aides who were perceived at times as not being fully appreciated. Critical reflection was evident in situations in which staff were open to challenge themselves to “reflect on their own stuff and delve into themselves . . . and at the same time, want to work with this disadvantaged group of young people” (INT 16, p.9). This questioning aspect of reflection was part of critical reflection on practice, a moment when unquestioned assumptions were challenged and in some instances changed. This kind of critical reflection was mentioned in another way by a worker who highlighted that it was easy to be seduced into wanting quietness and order with young people being on task in classrooms. This worker felt that there was always a
need to ask the critical reflective questions such as “Who is not here? Who is being shut out?” (INT 10, p.22).

Being critically reflective demanded that staff challenge themselves to be able to discuss practice with others. The disposition of being critically reflective and aware of the importance of this in creating safe places for others required openness and honesty. Being critically reflective was seen as a requirement of working within relationships around the four principles and it was recognised that this was not easy. It was acknowledged that it was complicated and yet it was perceived as an essential dimension of practice in this context (INT 16).

**Being strong**

Being strong and assertive were linked with being able to confront young people when necessary and yet be able to combine this with a sense of caring. The disposition of strength was described as being able to find inner strength. This was associated with the disposition of being able to challenge the young people to be better people. Being strong was linked with being able to draw on past life experiences when working with young people (INT 5). All of these situations of being strong required some degree of being aware, being self-reflective and being critically reflective on one’s practice. The multifaceted nature of the disposition of reflection was intricately linked with the disposition of being able to hold complexity.

**Dispositions of holding complexity**

**Being able to hold complexity**

This disposition was connected to the capacity to sit in the midst of uncertainty and be able to open up dialogue without needing to fix or save, without having answers or certainty but by being open to a solution that may emerge from the group and which included the perspective of young people. Being able to hold complexity was often
necessary in situations where conflict and chaos erupted in a group with young people. One worker described this notion of holding complexity with two metaphors – tumbling cards and broken eggs. It was having a classroom situation that was like a pack of cards that came tumbling down. Holding complexity included the ability to view that as “not necessarily a bad thing, [it] could be a good thing. If you’re gonna open it up though, you’ve got to have people who feel confident about dealing with the broken eggs once they’ve been broken” (INT 10). Being able to hold complexity required adults to work with processes that may be intense and that required time, but enabled conversation, dialogue and problem solving within the group. A view of conflict as a potential catalyst for change and growth was an important dimension of being able to hold complexity. Being able to enter into authentic relationships with a cohort of young people that was “extremely complicated and complex” (INT 16) and not to move into the paradigm of ‘control’ but rather operate out of a relational, cooperative model, required being open and honest. It was described by another educator as ‘complicated’ and ‘not easy’. In his experience this process supported young people “who for really complex reasons have been outside the mainstream, and have been hurt, [and who] can find a place of safety. And like us, they want to learn” (INT 16). Being able to hold complexity was a challenging yet essential aspect of practice in the relational work with young people and colleagues in this context.
LIST OF REFERENCES


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