

‘This teaching life of mine’: A study of
teacher renewal through values and
purpose-based reflective practice

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Abstract

The purpose of this action research study was to investigate the impact of a form of professional development which focused on teachers' professional and personal renewal through a reflective group exploration of core values and purpose. Three teachers participated in a professional development program titled *This Teaching Life of Mine* which comprised six workshops over the course of three consecutive months, where the content of reflective conversations focused on core personal values and deeper purpose. Data was collected from the conversational interactions, participants' results from *A Values Inventory* (AVI), participants' reflective journals, their stories of Most Significant Change (MSC) and researcher's field notes and reflective journal. Interviews were also conducted with each participant four months after completion of the workshops. One major impact emerged from the participation in the program. Through reconnecting with their personal values and by articulating aspects of their vocational purpose, participants experienced a strong sense of "Coming Home to Self". This impact supported a re-alignment between their personal and professional selves, and each reported experiencing a sense of professional renewal. Data analysis suggested that this was due to at least five associated factors: addressing spiritual renewal as the first priority, a practical re-alignment with core values, commitment to practising critical reflection and taking consequent action, the provision of a nourishing physical and psychological environment and the use of mediational tools to support the dialogue, in concert with the careful guidance of the facilitator. The study also found that each participant had either maintained or increased their sense of renewal four months later, which runs counter to results from some previous research. A further finding was the difficulty all participants found in establishing a practice of regular written critical reflection without ongoing outside support. The research demonstrated that the process and focus of renewal is unique to each individual, that statements of vocation are similarly distinctive, and confirmed the importance of attending to the holistic wellbeing of teachers to sustain professional vitality. This research has implications for the content and style of future programs for teacher renewal.

Literature Review

1.1. Organization of Review

This chapter reviews literature exploring research and theory related to the study. Specifically, it examines research addressing the vocational nature of teaching where one's work in the world provides a personal source of meaning and deeper purpose. It also reviews studies that explore the disconnect between teachers' purpose and practice that results in disillusion and possible burnout. The review then focuses on reflective practice as a form of professional development, and how reflecting on the "person in the profession" (Intrator & Kunzman, 2006b, p. 16) can support ongoing teacher renewal. Strategies and foci for renewal are addressed, including existing structured programs and introducing the concept of values alignment as a way to connect with deeper purpose and thus engagement and motivation. In short, this review explores literature that advocates certain styles of reflective practice as effective methods to sustain the person who teaches and that contribute to vocational vitality and processes which help to sustain the spirits and hearts of our teachers. A summary analysis of prominent themes and findings within the reviewed literature is presented at the end of the chapter.

1.2. The Vocational Nature of Teaching

Research suggests that many people who enter the teaching profession have responded to a sense of calling or vocation (Carotta, 1999; Hansen, 1995; Palmer, 2000; Whitlock, 2003). Hansen suggests that one element of vocation is the intersecting of "public obligation and personal fulfilment" (p. 3) while another dimension is a pursuit of purpose and deeper meaning, a sense that the work is bigger than the person (Carotta, 1999; Daloz, Keen, Keen & Parks, 1996). In his observations of a congruent life, Thompson (2000) notes:

There is a need in almost all of us for a sense of connectedness and purpose in the events of our outer lives, and a deeply rooted desire for our inner lives to have a harmonious connection to a higher source of meaning and value. (p. 3)

To view the profession of teaching through a lens that highlights both the desire to make a real difference in the lives of others through one's work coupled with the urge to find richer life meaning for oneself (Whyte, 2001), indicates that teaching has the capacity to be more like a vocation, "not merely an occupation" (Metzendorf, 1987, p. 4).

Hansen (1995) tells us that “an individual who is strongly inclined toward teaching seems to be a person who is not debating *whether* to teach but rather is contemplating *how* or *under what circumstances* to do so” (p. 9). Though vocation may feel too strong a word for some, the wellspring of motivation for many teachers is the commitment to make a difference in the lives of children and the profession itself (Intrator, 2005; O’Sullivan, 2005; Richardson & Watt, 2005, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2008a, 2008b). In an Australian study, Richardson and Watt (2006) identified key motivators for students entering the teaching profession: a perceived ability to teach, the desire to work with children and adolescents, the intrinsic value of teaching, as well as the desire to make a social contribution and to shape the future. A most recent study with international colleagues from three other countries (Watt et al, 2012) found that desires for a teaching career had high levels of motivational similarity.

Associated research (Watt & Richardson, 2008b) found that the group of pre-service teachers identified as “highly-engaged persisters,” due to their high scores on the four factors of planned effort, planned persistence, professional development aspirations, and leadership aspirations, were also the most likely to describe their intention to become teachers as a vocation or calling, and something they were “supposed to do.” Their enthusiasm for the inherent rewards of teaching was captured in a sample of their comments: “Intrinsic satisfaction” ...“It’s my calling”, and “I am passionate about teaching and know I can be beneficial to students” (p. 417). These were students who intended to devote their entire career to teaching and their reasons included, ““Because I want to make a difference in the lives of kids”, and “Because I like to share my knowledge with others and make a difference”” (p. 417). These motivations were similar to the findings from a smaller sampled longitudinal study from the University of Sydney (Ewing & Smith, 2003), particularly noting the vocational incentive. It would seem that for many teachers who intend to stay the distance in the profession, a sense of deeper purpose is one of the key motivators.

It is not just the raw untested idealism of the new teacher that feeds the vocational drive. Many studies (e.g., Farkas, Johnson & Foleno, 2000; Lindley, 1993; Lokan, 2003), have noted the commitment and purposeful intent of teachers who continue to inspire students and their school communities even after decades of service. Many of these teachers become important mentors to those entering the profession. Their power, Palmer (2007a) tells us, is in their capacity to help those under their guidance to discover “a teacher’s heart by meeting a great teacher” (p. 22). As Huebner (1987) has observed after many years working with teachers, that while it may not be “a very effective way to earn a living ... it is a valuable life to live” (p. 17).

Teachers who have a sense of purpose or mission bring a quality to the classroom which is more than someone imparting knowledge. Intrator and Kunzman (2006b) suggest that a teacher's capacity to teach well is linked to a set of difficult-to-define qualities that "often become characterized as heart, passion, or connectedness...These intricate qualities emerge from the inner or core landscape of a teacher's life and represent the integral feature of inspired and memorable teaching" (p. 16). Westerhoff (1987) reiterates the widespread conclusion that, above and beyond the many tools, techniques and programs, "what finally surfaces as most important is the person who teaches" (p. 193).

Most critically, passionate, committed teaching leads to improved student outcomes. Hattie (2012) calls attention to this when describing his meta-analysis involving over nine hundred studies of the variables influencing student achievement. This revealed that it is the relationship between teacher and student that is one of the greatest influences on students' successes or otherwise. Hattie emphasises that this emanates from the inspired teacher (Steele, 2009) who teaches with passionate purpose.

1.3. The Hidden Cost of Caring

The quality of the teacher defines in no small way the experience of the students. However, teaching is not for the faint hearted and sometimes too many "difficult days" can overshadow the satisfaction that comes from the importance and purposefulness of the work.

In his compilation of *Courage to Teach* stories, Intrator (2002) details the advice from a concerned father, which encapsulates what many people have come to believe is the teaching life: "As my dad told me, 'This job can wear you down. There's a lot of gratuitous clucking about how we must value and support teachers. Then you get in there and it's pretty lonely and tough'" (p. 3). Many participants in the Richardson and Watt (2006) study reported a high level of dissuasion, that is, "others had advised them not to go into teaching" (p. 51). These pre-service teachers seemed aware that teaching requires considerable resilience from the person who turns up in the class room each day. As Intrator tells us, "this earnest passion to make a difference, this zeal to contribute, this desire to share the richness of learning with students is what animates our teaching – yet the demands of teaching are intense" (p. xxxviii).

The assumptions placed on teachers' capacity to rise to any number of often simultaneous challenges are much the same more than two decades after this preface to a 1988 Times article about teachers' working conditions was written:

WANTED Men and women with the patience of Job, wisdom of Solomon and ability to prepare the next generation for productive citizenship under highly adverse and sometimes dangerous conditions. Applicant must be willing to fill gaps left by unfit, absent or working parents, satisfy demands of state politicians and local bureaucrats, impart healthy cultural and moral values and -- oh, yes -
- teach the three Rs. Hours: 50-60 a week. Pay: fair (getting better). Rewards: mostly intangible.

(Tifft et al, 1988, p. 58)

The significant daily demands of the teaching life include facilitating academic progress while providing a supportive learning environment, juggling the needs of the group with the requirements of each individual student and simultaneously guiding an array of learning tasks and assessments for students at different places of understanding and achievement, ensuring that all students' needs are met (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 2003). These multiple strands have the capacity to be woven into a dynamic classroom program or become a disjointed confusion for all. It is the artistry, time and commitment of the teacher that maintains ordered structure beneath this complexity.

One particular expectation of teachers in classrooms, which can often be filled daily with students displaying challenging behaviour, is that of emotional restraint and sometimes significant suppression of their feelings. Arlie Hochschild (1983, 2003) refers to this as the "emotional labour" associated with some types of work and notes that people in this kind of emotional work often change their feelings to fit a situation or change a situation to fit their feelings (1983, p. 13). To be regularly warm and loving towards a difficult child or children "requires emotions work" (p. 52).

Teachers are therefore required to present a certain kind of "emotional display" and Hochschild (1983) has noted that there is often an inequality in the emotional exchange. The student or visiting parent may choose not to smile but the teacher "is obliged not only to smile but to try to work up some warmth behind it" (p. 7). Hochschild calls this "deep acting" (p. 33) and cautions that, by pretending very deeply to feel something other than what is really felt, an internal alteration occurs. In the classroom, when teachers feel significant irritation but pretend otherwise at a deep level, they are eventually able to suppress that irritation. But when ongoing organized display of feelings is part of the professional transaction between student and teacher there may well be a cost. If it becomes too hard and teachers withdraw emotional labour and

“offer instead a thin crust of display” (p. 21) they may feel insincere or dishonest. On the other hand, if the suppression is successful, then they risk losing an authenticity in how they hear their feelings and what these feelings tell them about themselves. The disconnection between “soul and role” to which Palmer (2004, p. 13) regularly refers is clearly evident here:

Pretending is another name for dividedness, a state that keeps us from cultivating the capacity for connectedness on which good teaching depends. When we pretend, we fall out of community with ourselves, our students and the world around us, out of communion with the common center that is both the root and the fruit of teaching at its best. (Palmer, 2007a, p. 90)

When all these demands of teaching swamp educators in the classroom, and there is no support or intervention, teachers can start to feel disillusioned. Weissbourd (2003) stresses that “strictly speaking, disillusionment is freedom from illusion” (p. 10). It is not damaging of itself but rather an opportunity to respond to challenging circumstances with a sense of reality. However, disillusionment that leads to passivity heads down the slippery slope towards burnout, an insidious process that develops over time (Maslach, 1982). And it is all too clear that the teaching profession contains teachers “who are attempting to engage in transforming lives when their own vocational lives are tired, bored, spiritless and overwhelmed” (Carotta, 1999, p. 3).

For those who have often brought their hearts, souls and consequently their vulnerability with them into the classroom, it is also a place where it is easy for teachers to experience great self-doubt, disillusionment and even burnout (Burke, Greenglass & Schwartz, 1996; Schaufeli, Salanova, Vigonzalez-Roma & Bakker, 2002). For a weary, once committed teacher to feel disillusionment or burnout is not to revoke the idea that their teaching is (or was) purpose driven. If anything, the opposite appears closer to the mark. Pines’ (1993) existential model links burnout with the search for meaning and significance in one’s work, arguing that “the root cause of burnout lies in our need to believe that our lives are meaningful, that the things we do – and consequently, we ourselves – are useful and important (p. 33). Therefore, as Huebner (1987) reminds us, feelings of disillusionment or burnout really show us “how difficult it is to be a teacher in a school under today’s conditions” (p. 18).

1.3.1 Teacher Burnout

Burnout – a term coined by Freudenberg (1974) – is a phenomenon closely linked with professions where a high level of commitment and dedication is necessary (McMahon, 2003).

Teachers suffering from burnout feel emotionally and physically exhausted, disconnected from students and colleagues and feel ineffective in their job (Brock & Grady, 2000; Maslach, 1982). Burke, Greenglass and Schwartz (1996) identified disruptive students, red tape, self-doubts, isolation and lack of supervisor support as the common determinants of burnout.

Developing over time, the personal cost to a teacher who suffers burnout is far reaching. Not only work performance diminishes but so does a teacher's health, self-esteem and spirit, often in the form of physical exhaustion, heart symptoms and depressive moods (Brock & Grady, 2000, Burke et al., 1996). Maslach (1982) has described the three stages of burnout as exhaustion, then cynicism, followed by lack of professional efficacy. Teachers experiencing burnout have ceased to feel engaged with their job (Schaufeli et al., 2002). In a similar vein to Pines (1993), Cherniss (1980) specifically links burnout with a disconnection to vocation: "Burnout is used to refer to the situation when what was formerly a 'calling' becomes merely a job. One no longer lives to work but works only to live ... [with] a loss of enthusiasm, excitement and a sense of mission in one's work" (p. 16).

Data included in the ongoing longitudinal Australian study, The Factors Influencing Teaching Choice "FIT-Choice Project, conducted by Richardson and Watt over the last decade (Richardson & Watt, 2005, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2011) were related to disengagement and burnout. Findings included a perceived disconnection between the increasing administrative and testing and reporting requirements and "the relational work which many teachers see as their 'real' job" (Watt & Richardson, 2011, p. 29). Additionally, teachers were likely to experience burnout if they maintained their "high motivations in situations where they cannot be attained" (p. 29). In another Australian study focusing on teacher retention, Ewing and Manuel (2005) recommended "hearing the voices" (p. 13) of new teachers more regularly as a way of offsetting professional overwhelm, disillusion and disconnection:

When I first started teaching I wanted to be a teacher of excellence. Five years down the track I feel I am still a long way off ... I am also feeling somewhat worn out. This does a lot to my motivation levels... I think I'm reasonably good at it but it takes a lot out of me so I don't always feel happy. I feel sometimes that I have lost my sense of self. This is a really tough job if you want to do it well.

(Ewing & Manuel, 2005, p. 13)

In their research of teachers and school administrators over the course of one year, Burke et al (1996) confirmed burnout as a process that develops over time, and recommended the design of intervention procedures aimed at alleviating pressure earlier in order to lessen the risk of burnout in months to come.

1.3.2 Teacher Renewal

Renewal, Steffy (1989) tells us:

is a form of rebirth. It denotes a time of increased energy, a positive attitude, and a period of growth. Renewal is marked by the intensity of feelings and perception, and by the internal awareness of change. One becomes in tune with one's senses and risk-taking behaviour is attempted. (p. 83)

Steffy includes the following characteristics in a teacher experiencing renewal: conceptual clarity, passion and drive, sustained high energy, realism and humour, skilful teaching, enthusiasm, inquisitiveness and increased self-support and agency.

Renewal is more than simply replenishing a well that is emptying. Intrator and Kunzman (2006b) observe that our daily teaching practice mirrors the health of our inner world. Therefore it is important that renewal has an additional enriching quality so that "to the extent that renewal is like the phoenix rising from the ashes, it entails a different bird emerging each time" (p. 21). However renewal also includes re-aligning with what is actually personally important. Returning to one's passion and purpose for teaching is central to the notion of professional renewal. Noting again the research of Cherniss (1980) which specifically correlated burnout with disconnection to vocation, and that of Pines (1993) which concluded that "burnout is always the end result of a gradual process of disillusionment in the quest to derive a sense of existential significance from work" (p. 40) it is confirmation indeed that having a deep sense of purpose in teaching, that is, making meaning through one's work, seems to create resilience against disillusionment and burnout (Briskin, 1998; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Korthagen, 2004; Peppers & Briskin, 2000).

Loehr and Schwartz (2003) make a straightforward link between definition of purpose and full engagement in one's work. While they state, like Covey (1989), that full engagement involves harnessing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual energy, it is spiritual energy which is "the most powerful source of our motivation, perseverance and direction", where spiritual energy is defined as "connection to a set of deeply held values and to a purpose beyond our self-interest" (p. 110). Korthagen (2004) agrees. Deeper than notions of professional identity, full

engagement focuses on “the question of what it is deep inside us that moves us to do what we do” (p. 85).

Teachers filled with vocational vitality display presence, connectedness and purpose. Reviving tired, disillusioned teachers requires processes of both rejuvenation and personal remembering. In his exploration of the link between work and purpose, Whyte (2002) remarked:

I often think that the moment you walk through the door of your workplace can be the moment that you begin to forget why you began the journey in the first place. One of the great tasks of any human being of any human work is to remember the core conversation that lies at the centre of it.

(Sound recording)

Therefore, processes that help teachers remember those “core conversations,” that act as reminders of motivation and seek to re-invigorate a teacher’s sense of idealism, energy, and purpose, practices that support and encourage teacher renewal, appear fundamental to maintaining a vibrant teacher population. One such process for teachers is that of reflective practice.

1.4. Reflective Practice: A Brief Overview

Erlandson and Beach (2008) suggest that the spotlight on reflective practice in education began with the visionary work of Dewey’s (1910) *How We Think*, and gained significant momentum with the publication of Schön’s (1983) influential text, *The Reflective Practitioner*. These foundations have been further developed by many, including Mezirow (1990), highlighting reflection’s role in transformational learning.

While there is no precise definition of what it means to be reflective, there are some central principles. Jay (2003) describes reflection as entailing “a process of contemplation with an openness to being changed, a willingness to learn’ (p. 1). Within most definitions is the notion that there is a situation that is ‘puzzling, curious or perplexing’ on which to reflect (Loughran, 2002, p. 33), a phenomena Mezirow (1990) describes as a “disorienting dilemma” (p. 5). Higgins (2011) tells us that an important role of reflection is that of reviewing practice, “taking time to step back and to ponder the meaning of what has happened, the impact of it and the direction one is taking” (p. 584). Perhaps the impasse encountered in reaching a universal definition relates to the observation of Oberg and Artz (1992) that practising reflection is not specifically about acquiring behaviours or skill sets. To become reflective is rather an attitude, “an approach that permeates everything, something one becomes” (p. 140).

The purposes for teachers' reflective practice are numerous. Ghaye (2000) declares that 'coming to know in different ways is a central epistemological point of reflective learning' (p. 7), but most of these motivations are underpinned by a common intended outcome: to influence future actions (Barnett, O'Mahony & Matthews, 2004). Wellington and Austin (1996) name five orientations to reflective practice: the immediate, the technical, the deliberative, the dialectic and the transpersonal, thus implicitly supporting the growing consensus that the definition of reflective practice is fluid, depending on the orientation of the practitioner.

Many studies have identified reflective practice as the cornerstone strategy for teachers to remain integrally linked to their teaching, (e.g., Butler, 1996; Larrivee, 2000; Wagner, 2006) and the practice of regularly reflecting on aspects of one's teaching is now an expectation attached to career advancement (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, AITSL, 2009). However, the time deemed available for deep reflection in a teaching life is diminishing (Jay, 2003).

Schools as educational institutions are historically designed to support the learning and development of the students rather than that of the teachers (Levine, 1989) and "more often deter rather than facilitate the development of adults for whom the school is a workplace" (p. 61). A price is paid when combining this fundamental deterrent with time constraints, pace and structure of the school day and the implementation of multiple reforms. Reflective practice about anything other than requirements for the job becomes "the last item on the priority list" (Jay, 2003, p. 84). This has implications for the vitality of the teaching profession and is central to the current study. In addition to regularly reflecting on one's teaching practice for professional development, it has also been shown to be a key factor in the professional and personal health of teachers (Brookfield, 1995; Loughran, 2002; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). That is, reflective practice specifically supports teacher renewal.

1.5. The Role of Reflection in Teacher Renewal

Teachers regularly involved in reflective practice are undertaking important work. Through engaging in deep, critical reflection teachers grasp the opportunity to ponder deeply by themselves or to engage in collegiate conversations about those concerns that are important to them as professionals and, equally important, as human beings. Larrivee (2000) asserts that the demanding role of teachers requires self-awareness, self-inquiry and self-reflection. Therefore, sustenance for one's professional health (Loughran, 2002) is seen as the prime reason for teachers to engage in reflective practice as it is important for 'improvement, discovery,

survival’ (Jay, 2003, p. 39). Farrell (2004) is unequivocal: ‘reflection is crucial for teachers to avoid burnout’ (p. 2).

One fundamental factor that links reflection with renewal is that ‘reflection requires a *pause*’ (York-Barr et al, 2006. p. 9). Swenson (2003) describes this as a margin, a space between workload and energetic capacity. He concurs with Bryner and Markova (1996) who suggest in a chapter titled, *In the Center of the Storm* that “by taking a moment to allow your body and soul to catch up with your mind, you can reconnect and operate from your integrity rather than being blown off course by the winds of change” (p. 39). Thompson and Pascal (2012) note the irony of choosing not to take time to reflect because of a busy workload.

Ghaye (2000) suggests that choosing to be a reflective practitioner may offer teachers a way of “trying to make sense of the uncertainty in [their] workplaces and the courage to work competently and ethically at the edge of order and chaos” (p. 7) and reflecting as part of a teacher’s professional development covers many aspects of what, how, when and why they teach. Not so regularly however, does reflective practice focus in an intentional way on *who* does the teaching.

1.5.1 Reflecting on the “person in the profession”

While examining one’s teaching practice is essential to continuing professional development, equally affirming and sustaining is reflective consideration about what really matters to “the person in the profession” (Intrator & Kunzman, 2006b, p. 16). According to Hamachek (1999), while students may initially value the mind of the teacher, “it is the essence of a teacher’s selfhood that is remembered” (p. 208). Palmer (2007a) is blunt:

Though technique-talk promises the “practical” solutions that we think we want and need, the conversation is stunted when technique is the only topic: the human issues in teaching get ignored, so the human beings who teach feel ignored as well. When teaching is reduced to technique, we shrink teachers as well as their craft – and people do not willingly return to a conversation that diminishes them. (p. 149)

The professional and the personal selves of the teacher appears forever intertwined and often entangled (Jersild, 1955; Day, Kington, Stobart & Sammons, 2006). Hamachek (1999) and others (e.g., Kottler, Zehm & Kottler, 2005; Newman, 1998) assert that “the more teachers know about themselves – the private curriculum within – the better their personal decisions are apt to be to pave the way for better teaching” (p. 209). Ritchhart (2002) encourages teachers to

define their 'Red Thread', a metaphor "for describing the beliefs, passions, values and goals that tie together and unite a teacher's practice over time and contexts" (p. 182). In a similar vein, Henderson (1992) endorses the practice of teachers creating their own personal metaphor for teaching that reflects their current pedagogy with a view to rewriting or 'reframing' (Schön, 1983) as their values and beliefs develop.

An entire issue of the *Cambridge Journal of Education* (1996) is dedicated to the emotional lives of teachers. It addresses concerns including teacher vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 1996), feeling deprofessionalised (Jeffery & Woods, 1996), the pressure to get it right (La Porte, 1996), never feeling good enough (Acker & Feuerverger, 1996), masking declining idealism from parents (Hayes, 1996) and the heightened emotionality experienced by teachers pushing for reform (Little, 1996). Nias (1996) tells us that, "One cannot help teachers develop their classroom and management skills without also addressing their emotional reactions and responses and the attitudes, values and beliefs which underlie these" (p, 294). The articles in this issue contain the implicit understanding that part of a teacher's role is to carry the responsibility for the quality of the human relationships as part of children's learning. Golby (1996) tells us that "to be fully present as an educational agent, teacher or learner, is to make no distinction between the learning of the head, hand and heart" (p. 424). Faced with the magnitude of this brief, reflective practices that support the ongoing renewal of the head, hand and heart of the person who teaches is perhaps the cornerstone of the educational experience.

Anglea (2009) reflects much of the literature concerning the emotional life of the teacher (e.g., Intrator & Kunzman, 2006b; McMahan, 2003; Palmer, 2007a) when she tells us that the kind of professional support, or professional development, that will best help teachers must not only include what and how one teaches but also provide support to the inner teacher. Rarely, she tells us, "is professional development designed to nurture the heart and spirit of teachers, from which good teaching comes" (p. 41).

To begin that professional support, Palmer (2007a) asks his fundamental question: "Who is the self that teaches?" (p. 4) and Intrator and Kunzman (2006b) state that we require "important ongoing conversations about the inner landscape of teachers' lives" (p. 16).

1.6. Effective Reflection or "just going to courses"?

While professional conversations are certainly ongoing, what counts as valuable reflection remains contentious. Dewey asserted that there were three dispositions required for reflection: open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness (1933, cited in Zeichner & Liston,

1996). Schön (1983) added that a vital component of effective reflection is for teachers to frame and reframe problems – deciding anew what is worthy of attention. Larrivee (2000) and others (e.g., Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton & Kleiner, 2000; Zeichner & Liston, 1996) expand on this idea by alerting us to the personal lenses we create and through which we view the world; lenses forged from past experiences, beliefs, expectations and personal agendas, combined with a filtering system unconsciously applied to remove data (such as unpleasant truths) from the reflective gaze. Argyris (cited in Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross & Smith, 1994) describe this process as ‘the ladder of inference’ and Senge et al. note that this ascent is so fast we are often not aware that we have started with an incident, added selected data and personal meanings, made assumptions, drawn conclusions, adopted beliefs and taken subsequent action without any critical questioning or objective analysis. Brookfield (1995) also urges us to go ‘assumption hunting’ (p. 218).

For some researchers, there is a clear distinction between thoughtful habits that are usefully reflective and those that are not (e.g., Finlay, 2008; Marcos, Miguel & Tillema, 2009). Loughran (2002) cautions us about the pitfall of misconstruing rationalization of one’s practice as reflection and calls for ‘*effective* reflective practice’ (p. 42) This is similar to the notion of Senge et al. (1994) who speak of ‘shifting the burden’ (p. 136) and shifting the focus rather than facing the problem. From Butler’s (1996) perspective this is often translated as just ‘going to courses’ (p. 266). Forde et al (2006). caution that if reflection does not lead to effective action it merely becomes an end in itself, while Brookfield (1995) is candid: ‘Reflection in and of itself is not enough; it must always be linked to how the world can be changed’ (p. 217).

1.6.1 Critical Reflection, Transformative Learning and Reflective Poetic Inquiry

Developing awareness for previously hidden assumptions (Brookfield, 1995; Senge et al, 1994) is the pathway to critical reflection, a key component of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1997, 2000). For Mezirow (1991), critical reflection reconsiders views, beliefs and opinions with a mind open to reframing, allowing for a new frame of reference. Critical reflection allows for depth and breadth (Thompson & Pascal, 2012), looking beneath the surface of a situation and examining thoughts, feelings and values that are not always voiced and add complexity and subtlety to the conversation. This is echoed in the Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) model of “Multi-Level Learning” which invites teachers to peel back the layers of the onion, from more surface concerns of behaviours and further in towards the “core reflections” (p. 53) pertaining to beliefs, identity and mission and revealing the core qualities of the teacher, such as empathy, creativity, compassion, love, sensitivity, courage, decisiveness

and flexibility. As Korthagen and Vasalos note (somewhat drily), “these are indeed essential qualities for teachers, qualities seldom appearing on the official lists of important basic competencies” (p. 56).

Underpinned by constructivist principles, transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1990, 1991) is based on the premise that we construct personal meaning from our experiences, and then confirm that meaning in dialogue with others. Our experiences are filtered through our beliefs, perspectives and habits. Echoing Senge et al (1994), Cranton and Wright (2008) tell us that “we can only see the world through our own eyes, and our way of seeing includes distortions, prejudices, stereotypes, and unquestioned belief systems” (p. 34).

While transformative learning began as a largely cognitive, rational process (Mezirow, 1990), it is now recognised that the process and experience is unique to each person (Taylor & Cranton, 2012) and transformative learning can be accessed from an imaginative, intuitive and soulful approach to learning (Dirkx, 1997, Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006; Henderson & Gornik, 2007). Regardless of the pathway in to the experience, “those of us who take seriously the ‘transformative’ in transformative learning are interested in the kind of ‘deep’ learning that challenges existing, taken-for-granted assumptions, notions, and meanings of what learning is about” (Dirkx, Mezirow & Cranton, 2006, p. 126).

Transformative learning occurs when something happens such that we are called upon to question our beliefs and reframe our perspective. While it can be a dramatic event that causes us to pause, most often it is a more gradual process made up of many factors. These events, known as Mezirow’s (1991) disorienting dilemmas, may be extreme such as an illness, or “may be evoked by an eye-opening discussion, book, poem or painting” (p. 14). In this regard, they have much in common with Palmer’s (2004) metaphoric use of “third things”, such as poems, stories, works of art or music. As Palmer explains:

They represent neither the voice of the facilitator nor the voice of a participant. They have voices of their own, voices that tell the truth about a topic, but ... tell it on the slant. Mediated by a third thing, truth can emerge from, and return to, our awareness at whatever pace and depth we are able to handle – sometimes inwardly in silence, sometimes aloud in community. (p. 93)

Wertsch (1998) refers to tools such as these as the “mediational means” for an action to occur. (p. 28). He underscores that these tools should not be viewed as an “undifferentiated whole,”

as different combinations or emphases of each of these elements will affect final outcomes (p. 27).

Incorporating more aesthetic approaches to cognitive, rational inquiries is in tune with “reflective poetic inquiry” introduced by Henderson and Gornik (2007, p. 71). This form of inquiry includes the intellectual, emotional and spiritual elements and is specifically attached to personal inquiry in which teachers give conscious focus to the connection between their personal and professional lives. For Henderson and Gornik, through this kind of “qualitative thinking, the ordinary becomes the sacred; the prosaic becomes the profound; and the fragmented becomes the whole” (p. 72). In parallel with the intentions of Palmer’s (2007b) *Courage to Teach* program, reflective poetic inquiry allows for learning through and renewal of the spirit. Noting again the correlation between disillusionment and vocation (Pines, 1993), through this specific reflective process, “one examines why we are called to facilitate student learning” transforming teaching from a “role or a function into a calling” (Henderson & Gornik, 2007, p. 72). At the heart of teacher renewal is a desire for authenticity: a conversation between personal identity and purpose with the requirements and circumstance of the teaching work (Intrator & Kunzman, 2006b).

Critical reflection, transformative learning and reflective poetic inquiry are all pathways to effective reflective practice, requiring a form of artistry to shape new meaning and from there, to craft steps towards meaningful action (Henderson, 2001; West, 2010). Within this artistry is the quality of contribution to the reflective conversation.

1.6.2 The Reflective Conversation

Ghaye (2000) and others (e.g., Whitehead, 2000) ask teachers to engage in reflective conversations as a central component of their reflective practice. Taylor (2009) tells us that dialogue is the essential medium through which transformation is promoted and developed (p. 9). Kemmis (1985) asserts that reflection is not, at its best, an individual process and that “like language, it is a social process” (p. 140) and others (e.g., Zepke et al., 2003) also indicate that ongoing critical reflection with others often leads to more useful insight and is more productive. Mezirow (1997) and Grabove (1997) go further and state that it is *through* communication or critical discourse that transformative learning takes place and is thus “a social rather than solitary process” (p. 91). Knights (1985) describes the important role that the undivided attention of a listener plays in useful reflection, while Jay (2003) advocates the construction of

a group of critical friends, including some kind of structure with an agenda rather than purely an ad hoc arrangement.

Isaacs (1999) who is founder of and researcher within the Dialogue Project at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), describes dialogue as “a conversation with a center, not sides” (p. 19). York-Barr et al (2006) distinguishes dialogue from discussion, where dialogue supports and encourages expansion while discussion contracts, edging towards ultimate solution. “In a dialogue, people are not just interacting, but creating together (Isaacs, 1999, p. 174). This dialogue can, paradoxically, enable participants in the conversation to “hear their own voice” more powerfully than when in solitude (p. 165). Often, it is through speech that the deeper insights reveal themselves.

Isaacs (1999) tells us that valuable conversation can only occur in a “container” created whereby “deep and transformative listening becomes possible” (p. 242). Different atmospheres produce certain qualities of conversation. For example, a library sets a tone of quiet, studious contemplation, and whispered exchanges, while a busy, crowded railway station encourages agitation but limited human connection. The setting for a reflective conversation requires thoughtful consideration to shaping the space in the dimensions supporting the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual.

Physical considerations include privacy, comfort, warm lighting, circular seating and elements that enhance feelings of community such as light food and drink. Intellectual space supporting reflective conversation is not filled with knowing and telling, rather it is opened up for dialogue within which to wonder and explore (Palmer, 2007b). Creating a space that is hospitable rather than unreceptive to feelings supports intellectual or emotional truth telling and Isaacs (1999) cautions us that people in deep dialogue need a setting capable of holding “the intensities of their lives” (p. 243). Providing a space with a commitment to confidentiality creates an atmosphere of dignity and regard that encourages emotional honesty (Livsey & Palmer, 1999). A container that supports the spiritual element is one where deep listening with presence occurs, such that people are able to listen more deeply to themselves. This kind of deep listening does not seek to provide answers. Instead, it offers welcome, empathy and the opportunity to be heard without judgement (Palmer, 2007b).

When these criteria are met, new “fields of conversation” are possible (Isaacs, 1999, p. 261). The conversations are driven by curiosity and the silences, when they occur, are filled with people looking inward, listening for new possibilities. Silences within these conversations are

“whole and, at times, sacred. The wisdom of the wider group takes precedence over the chatter of the individual” (p. 288). It is this attentive presence that makes possible what David Whyte refers to as the “courageous conversation that engages people at their creative edge” (2012, para. 6).

The importance of this kind of conversational container was noted by Hunt (2010). During a two year long seminar series exploring the role of spirituality in life-long learning, Hunt ran meetings with a small group in which they took a cooperative-inquiry approach to insights and issues. At its completion, Hunt concluded:

There would seem to be a real need for opportunities in professional settings where practitioners feel free to share and reflect with others not only on the how and why of practice situations, but on the myths, narratives, life experiences and ultimate questions that are integral to the ‘intangible fabric’ of being human as well as a professional. (p. 168)

Hunt (2010) acknowledged that professional settings are starting to create frameworks designed for collegiate conversation and structured processes of reflection within teams. She questioned whether more of these groups are required or whether instead there is the need for what she terms “unfettered spaces” – “spaces in which professionals feel it is safe to explore, with others, their ‘inner self’ as well as their professional role” (p. 161).

That said, the construction of valuable questions to bring to these dialogues is an integral element of useful reflective practice.

Valuable Questions

Block (2002) tells us that ‘transformation comes more from pursuing profound questions than seeking practical answers’ (p. ii). This is not a new or foreign concept for teachers who are encouraged to create a “questioning atmosphere” in their classrooms where questions are rich and “fertile” and thus have the capacity to stimulate and motivate (Harpaz & Lefstein, 2000, p. 55). Such questions may be open-ended, perhaps questioning the status quo, directly connected and relevant to the learner, or perhaps charged with an ethical dimension. This quality of questioning is creative and promotes spirited dialogue, controversy and collaboration. However when teachers are in conversation with other teachers, particularly in a professional capacity, there is often a sparseness of rich questioning and instead a tendency for questions to become closed, to seek solution quickly, and to problem solve towards a speedy outcome (Block, 2002; York-Barr et al., 2006).

Block refers to this as the “how to do something” question and suggests that this “expresses our bias for what is practical, concrete, and immediately useful, often at the expense of our values and idealism” (p. 13). These ‘how’ questions are not useful at the beginning of a reflective dialogue. As teachers immerse themselves in critically reflective conversations surrounding the central question of “Who is the self that teaches? (Palmer, 2007a, p. 4) a question such as: *How much will it cost?* becomes instead, “What is the price I am willing to pay?” Instead of *How long will it take?* they may consider the person-centred alternative, “What commitment am I willing to make?” (Block, 2002, p. 29) Block suggests that good questions are not projects to be completed, but opportunities for deeper truths to be revealed.

The reflective conversation which includes rich, broad and deep questions to consider is thus a key component of effective and useful reflective practice. As Senge et al (1994) and others (e.g., Colins & Chippendale, 1995) remind us, these dialogues are underpinned by participants’ beliefs and assumptions about the world, the outer manifestation of their personal values, which are often unconscious motivators (Nanschild & Davis, 2007). As will be discussed below, identifying and living aligned to one’s core values is a central component of reconnecting “who you are with what you do” (Palmer, 2007b, p.144) and therefore another key element of teacher renewal.

1.7. Values Alignment and Teacher Renewal

Disconnection from that which is personally and professionally important to teachers is one of the key indicators of disillusionment and possible burnout (Carotta, 1999). Conversely, reclaiming “a sense of integrity or congruence between core values and practice” (Gardner, 2009, p. 180) is a fundamental component of re-engagement and renewal. Intrator and Kunzman (2006b) see this as vital:

Renewal is a word that has many connotations. Though a common definition— filling again by supplying what has been used up—may seem apt in this context, this notion of refilling misses a central point. What teachers need is not simply a refill of energy and vigor, but careful exploration of the question: How should I allocate my energy in ways that are consistent with the deepest values I have about myself as a teacher and a person? (p. 21)

Defining and aligning to one’s personal core values is a central component to the process of professional renewal. Nieto (2009) considers teachers’ values to be at the forefront of professional engagement. Whitehead (2000) asks: `How do I live my values more fully in my

[teaching] practice?’ (p. 100) and Block (2002) tells us that when we reconnect with our centre, “we expect our values to be embodied in all that we do” (p. 90).

Hall (1994) defines ‘values’ as: “the ideals that give significance to our lives, that are reflected through the priorities that we choose, and that we act on consistently and repeatedly” (p. 21). That said, the term “values” is often used to describe desirable ideals as seen by others (Mergler, 2008) and the subsequent value choices as a determining factor of good character (Lovat, 2006; Lumpkin, 2008; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Toomey, 2006). Indeed Rohan (2000) has noted the marked inconsistency with definition in values theory and research. Observing the Australian research emphasis above of *teaching* values to students (Lovat, Toomey, Clement, Crotty, & Nielsen, 2009), it is important in the context of this study’s definition to distinguish between values and the more morally weighted virtues. Rather than being synonymous, Hall views virtues or morals as a subset of values. Aligning with Hall, Australian researchers such as Feather (1995), Nanschild and Davis (2007) and Colins and Chippendale (1995) concur that ‘the critical factor in the transformation of people and organizations is their values’ (Hall, 1994, p. 21). Rokeach (1973) demonstrated the significance of priority in the value structure and the importance of personal choice, and this seminal research and values survey design has influenced later values measurement models (Chippendale, 1988-2014; Hall, 1987/2000; Schwartz, 1992, 1996).

That values provide motivation was demonstrated in a study by Lydon (1996) who found that there was a high level of commitment to projects, goals or decisions when these were strongly affirmed by the personal core values of participants. Moreover, this commitment “prompted persistence with a goal or project under adversity” (p. 204). So too Johnson (2002) noted the centrality of values as connected to behaviour, their strong motivational component and the way they apply broadly across specific objects and situations. Consciously connecting to and aligning deeply held values with their work in schools may support teachers in today’s classrooms in answering: “How does your work reflect what’s most important to you in life?” (Henderson, 2003, p. 158)

The proposition that values play a fundamental role in the success or otherwise of both corporate and educational learning organizations, has been widely explored (e.g., Argyris & Schön, 1998; Schechter, Sykes, & Rosenfeld, 2004). Uncovering and declaring the core values of organisations is now a widely held business practice (see Fitzpatrick, 2007) but less

frequently are the individual values of employees elicited and highlighted (Gardiner, 2008), and as Nanschild and Davis (2007) note:

Whilst shared mutual values can lead to harmony, understanding and shared vision; a clash in values can and does cause conflict between people. Indeed the clashing of values is often the root cause of failed change management initiatives. (p. 138)

Schools as organizations may be run in ways that are contrary to the deeply held values of individual teachers. In a workplace where often “the focus is on efficiency and outcome focused practice rather than on professional values combined with flexibility and creativity” (Gardner, 2009, p. 180) a tension can be created between how teachers want to proceed in alignment with their core values and what their school expects of them in terms of accountability and results. A notable exception was described by Scalfino (2005) in an initiative by a South Australian school undergoing whole school change through engaging with the values of the school community. Using the Hall-Tonna Values Inventory (Hall, Harari, Ledig & Tondow, 1986) – from which evolved the values measurement tool used in the study reported on in this book– the school first surveyed the values of the staff, senior students in the school and other key members of the school community. Alert to the tension described by Gardner, Scalfino reflected on the importance of identifying complementary and conflicting values, which revealed different viewpoints in a variety of areas. This values identification process opened up a wide range of dialogues about education, teaching, learning pedagogies and disposition to work. This provided pertinent data that would support the resolution of several major ethical dilemmas. Scalfino’s (2005) process for school change is uncommon but welcome, as Trelfa (2005) observed that identifying one’s core values creates a solid place to stand and manage the current nature of one’s organization more effectively.

Eliciting core values, and the assumptions that exist alongside (Argyris & Schön, 1998; Senge et al, 1994) that consciously and unconsciously govern behaviour, and holding them up for scrutiny with an openness to shifts in perception, is a process integral to critical reflective practice.

1.7.1 The Exploration of Values within Reflective Practice

Both Whitehead (2000) and Ghaye (2000) place importance on the exploration of values as central to reflective practice. Within his own reflective practice, Whitehead contemplates ways of “representing the influence of [his] spiritual, aesthetic and ethical values” in his professional

capacity as teacher and colleague (p. 100), while Ghaye highlights the centrality of values in the reflective conversation:

A distinguishing feature of a [reflective] conversation is its focus upon questioning and exploration of the values that we are committed to and try to live out in our work. This is not easy as most of us have difficulties articulating our values and trying to put our values into practice. (p. 8)

In another Australian qualitative study (Gardner, 2009), critical reflection was used to rigorously explore the professional practice of ten staff from a child welfare agency, where there was “a prevailing sense of powerlessness and hopelessness” (p. 183). By uncovering and articulating core values of staff during a series of workshops it became apparent that there was “a sense of disconnection between their preferred but unarticulated values and their values in action” (p. 187) and a resulting clarity about what mattered to them. Through a change of practice there was a noticeable congruence between values and behaviours. Of important note for this current study about teachers, by reconnecting with their deeply held ideals and values, the child welfare agency staff were reminded of the motivations behind choosing their profession. They found identifying their values an empowering experience and professionally sustaining if they were kept in view. Thus, critical reflection played a vital role in helping participants to reconnect with a sense of what mattered, creating a powerful link between their articulation of core values and a reminder of vocational purpose.

1.7.2 The Relationship between Values and Purpose

As noted earlier, Thompson (2000) asserted that meaningful work has the capacity to “be an outlet for our deepest values” (p. 331). Conversely, with a disconnection from purpose through job restructuring or simply climbing the career ladder, Peppers and Briskin (2000) note that this often takes people to “a place absent of your values” (p. 116) while Loehr and Schwartz (2003) underscore the energetic association that a connection with values and purpose has to a sense of full engagement. If any one of these sources of energy is neglected, “our capacity to ignite our talent and skill is diminished” (p. 10).

Heifetz (1994) takes the role of a teacher’s values in sustaining vocational purpose one important step further. He acknowledges the challenges that a vocationally driven teacher has in a swiftly changing and demanding profession, but distinguishes between problems that require technical solutions and ones that require adaptive work. Carotta (1999) agrees, giving examples of adaptive challenges: Superhuman Expectations, Apathy, Complex Issues and Complex Times, and Mediocrity. These challenges requiring adaptive responses involve

reconnecting with what is really important – what one values – and developing practices for bringing those values into daily reality. “Practices are a mirror of things that are valued in life, and in fact, when they are enacted, they become life giving and allow individuals not only to survive but also flourish” (p. 51).

Rediscovering a sense of meaning allows a reconnection with anticipation and dreams about future possibilities. Peppers and Briskin (2000) combine values and purpose with hope, “Our hopes represent the deepest, most important parts of ourselves. Imbedded with our values, they offer the key towards purposeful living” (p. 117). For Intrator and Kunzman (2006b), this conscious realignment of hopes, values and purpose is a return to authenticity. This, they tell us is at the heart of teacher renewal.

This review of the literature relating to conditions supportive of teacher renewal has included the importance of a welcoming space where reflection is valued, inviting materials, questions and themes with which to guide the conversations, and time to reflect where there is no specific problem to solve. It will now turn its attention to specific environments that have been created for teacher renewal.

1.8. Environments for teacher renewal through reflective practice

1.8.1 Structured programs

In recent years, a surge of studies have addressed the role structured reflective practice programs have played, specifically in the support of teacher renewal (Carotta, 1999; Coward, 2003; McMahon, 2003; Poutiatine, 2005; Pressley, 1992; Simone, 2004; Whitlock, 2003).

Coward (2003) examined a professional development model that was created to renew (and retain) quality teachers, the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT). This analysis revealed a cycle of teacher renewal: Leaving the known resulting in Disequilibrium; Entering the retreat-based centre, which requires Trust; Being treated with Respect; Learning in a different way which reignites a Love of Learning; Thinking in a different way, leading to Transformation; and returning to work with Renewed Commitment. Findings included that the programming led to deep introspection on teaching practice and an increase in teachers’ vocational reconnection and satisfaction.

The “*Courage to Teach*” program

Inspired by the works of Parker Palmer (e.g., 2000, 2004, 2007a) the US based “*Courage to Teach*” (CTT) retreats focus on what Palmer calls “teacher formation”. Different to teacher training, “formation is a concept from the spiritual traditions and it involves a concern for

personal wholeness ... formation offers the person help in discerning his or her identity and integrity” (Palmer, 1992, cited in Simone, 2004, p. 35). Based on the premise that teaching is a challenging profession Palmer asks teachers to “enter, not evade, the tangles of teaching” (2007a, p. 2). That the curriculum is large and cumbersome and that students are unique and complex are commonplace understandings. The third “tangle” is the acknowledgement that “we teach who we are” and as Palmer describes it: “The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul” (p. 3).

Many studies (Intrator, 2002; Intrator & Scribner, 1998, 2002; McMahon, 2003; Nollet, 2009; Poutiatine, 2003, 2005; Simone, 2004; Smith, 2007) have researched the effects that the extended retreat experiences have on teachers’ feelings of personal agency and vocational engagement. In one such evaluative report (Smith, 2007), the most popular reason given by participants for attending these retreats was Personal Development, closely followed by Professional Development, Exploring Vocational Questions and To Experience a Circle of Trust. Key common findings among the evaluative studies included feelings of personal reconnection to self and professional re-engagement, albeit at different levels and for different reasons (Intrator & Scribner, 1998; Poutiatine, 2005; Smith, 2007) as is articulated below:

The quality of my work and life has advanced significantly each time I complete a retreat. It is as if I identify a key piece of who I am.

(Participant response from Smith, 2007)

In 2012, a pilot Australian Facilitator Preparation Program (FPP) for CTT retreats was launched, to run over a two year period with just twelve participants Australia wide. These sparse numbers means the program is yet to reach a significant number of teachers. Currently there is only one Australian CTT facilitator who organises a small number of open weekend retreats in Canberra, while most of the other CTT retreat opportunities provided are requested by specific workplaces, schools, universities and churches (Smith, written correspondence, 2009; 2011).

While a retreat centre appears an ideal solution, time and money constraints make this possibility not always practical. Anglea (2009) explored the concept of a book study group where participants met monthly to share conversation about insights from the chapters in Palmer’s (2007a) *The Courage to Teach*, taking discussion questions from the accompanying guidebook (Palmer, 2007b). Findings were similar to those of the full retreat programs,

suggesting the need for schools to allow a teacher time to reflect on and dialogue about vocational purpose and classroom practices with colleagues as a form of professional development. Another study (Nollett, 2009) concluded with a recommendation to use critical reflection as the focus of teachers' professional development design through CTT or similar models as it "meets the needs of teachers at every stage of their career" (p. 144). Concerns about sustaining the sense of renewal gained from a retreat have also been raised. In her case study research of the CTT program, Simone (2004) found that teachers had minimal success integrating their increased sense of personal agency and optimism into the rigid, unforgiving structures of their school systems.

1.9. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide a theoretical framework for this study, reviewing literature that explored the desire to teach as a reflection of purpose or vocation, the hidden costs of teaching which can result in disillusionment, possible burnout and a disconnection with purpose. The review of the literature revealed that engaging in a form of reflective practice, specifically rich, reflective conversations, with a focus on core values where these values are realigned with purposeful intent, can provide a process whereby teachers experience renewal and a sense of connectedness with what is meaningful to them as teachers and as humans. Environments that support such programs were also explored.

1.9.1 Program Rationale – Investigating Teacher Renewal

Taking into account elements from the literature that appeared to support teacher renewal including recent evaluations of the *Courage to Teach* retreat-based program (e.g., Nollet, 2009; Poutiatine, 2005; Simone, 2004; Smith, 2007, 2012), it appeared that there was a need for research on the impact of such programs which included some modifying elements. Recognising the limitations mentioned of the retreat experience (Simone, 2004), I wished to investigate whether a program with the aspects highlighted in the literature leads to sustained renewal. The above research suggested that a series of workshops in an invitational environment spaced over a period of time, a focus on the articulation of and discussion about personal core values, with close attention paid to the focus of the questions within a critically reflective conversation may be more effective. Consequently, the present study provided a program for a small group of teachers who were experiencing some sense of professional disillusionment and evaluated the impacts. In accordance with Schaufeli et al (2002), the more

reactive question of ‘How do we prevent burnout?’ was resisted in the program design and instead the question was “reframed” (Schön, 1983) to consider how engagement might be promoted, adopting Covey’s (1989) four broad areas for renewal: physical, mental, social/emotional, and spiritual.

This program incorporated *A Values Inventory* (AVI, Chippendale, 1988-2014b) within the design as a tool for eliciting participants’ core values, thus both acknowledging the importance of exploring one’s values as well as recognising the difficulty in their articulation, as noted by Ghaye (2000). The program emphasis was a focus on how teachers’ prioritised values were manifested rather than the values themselves. While being mindful of research advocating preference for certain values over others, specifically in regard to values education in schools (Lovat et al., 2009; Lumpkin, 2008; Mergler, 2008; Nielson, 2005; Shaw, 2007) this definition of values has more in common with ethics (Seligman, 2011) and as such, was beyond the frame of reference for this study’s attention.

Attention was also paid to what constitutes effective and useful reflective practice and key principles of critical reflection, transformative learning and reflective poetic inquiry were utilised in the workshop structure.

Thus, this study sought to investigate the impact of a group exploration of personal core values and purpose, as a form of reflective practice, on a teacher’s sense of professional renewal and the implications of such a program for teacher renewal.

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