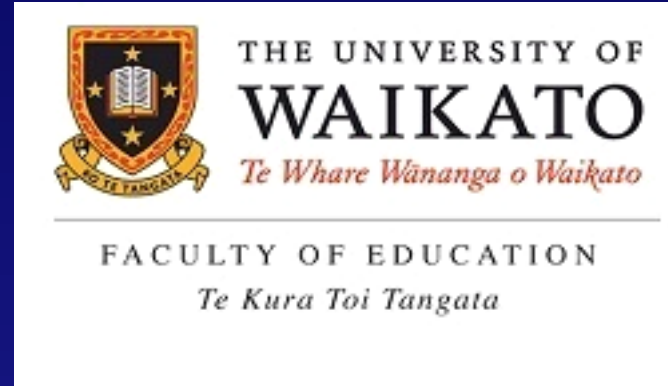


TEACHER PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES IN ECE: COMPLEXITIES AND CONTRADICTIONS



OLIVERA KAMENARAC
Email: ok15@students.waikato.ac.nz

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, the landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand ECE policies has notably transformed, and been the object of much scholarly discussion (Duhn, 2010; May & Mitchell, 2009; Mitchell, 2017; Smith & May, 2018). Changes within the policy directives have shifted views of the purpose of ECE and been a powerful catalyst for constructions of teachers' professional identities. Interestingly, only a few studies (Farquhar, 2010; Warren, 2013) have touched on how teachers' identities have been produced through multiple discourses (e.g. authority discourse of qualifications, professionalism) in the New Zealand ECE. On a global scale, however, it has been signaled that impacts of contemporary policy directives (e.g. corporatisation) on teacher's identity may stay hidden (Press & Woodrow, 2009), and yet teacher identity is one of the key aspects in introducing and sustaining a policy change and an improvement (Sumsion, 2007). Contributing to this research area, my doctoral study examines how teachers' professional identities have been constructed in response to competing and

confronting discourses in the New Zealand ECE over the last two decades. Through an analysis of some key policy documents, and collective and individual interviews with teachers, professional leaders and managers from both community-owned and for-profit services, the study reveals the powerful impacts of shifting policies and institutional practices on teachers' identities specifically, and professionalism and the teaching profession generally. It adds to scholarship about how contemporary early childhood discourses may weaken capacity for strengthening advocate-activist teachers' identities, which are both a priority and necessity at times when the market drives teachers' work, forcing them to favour for-profit interests over the wellbeing of children, families and community. The study offers some strategies that various stakeholders (e.g. the state, educational institutions, policy makers, teachers) may wish to consider to bring a much needed social change in the form of a more democratic, more plural, more just, and less unequal ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

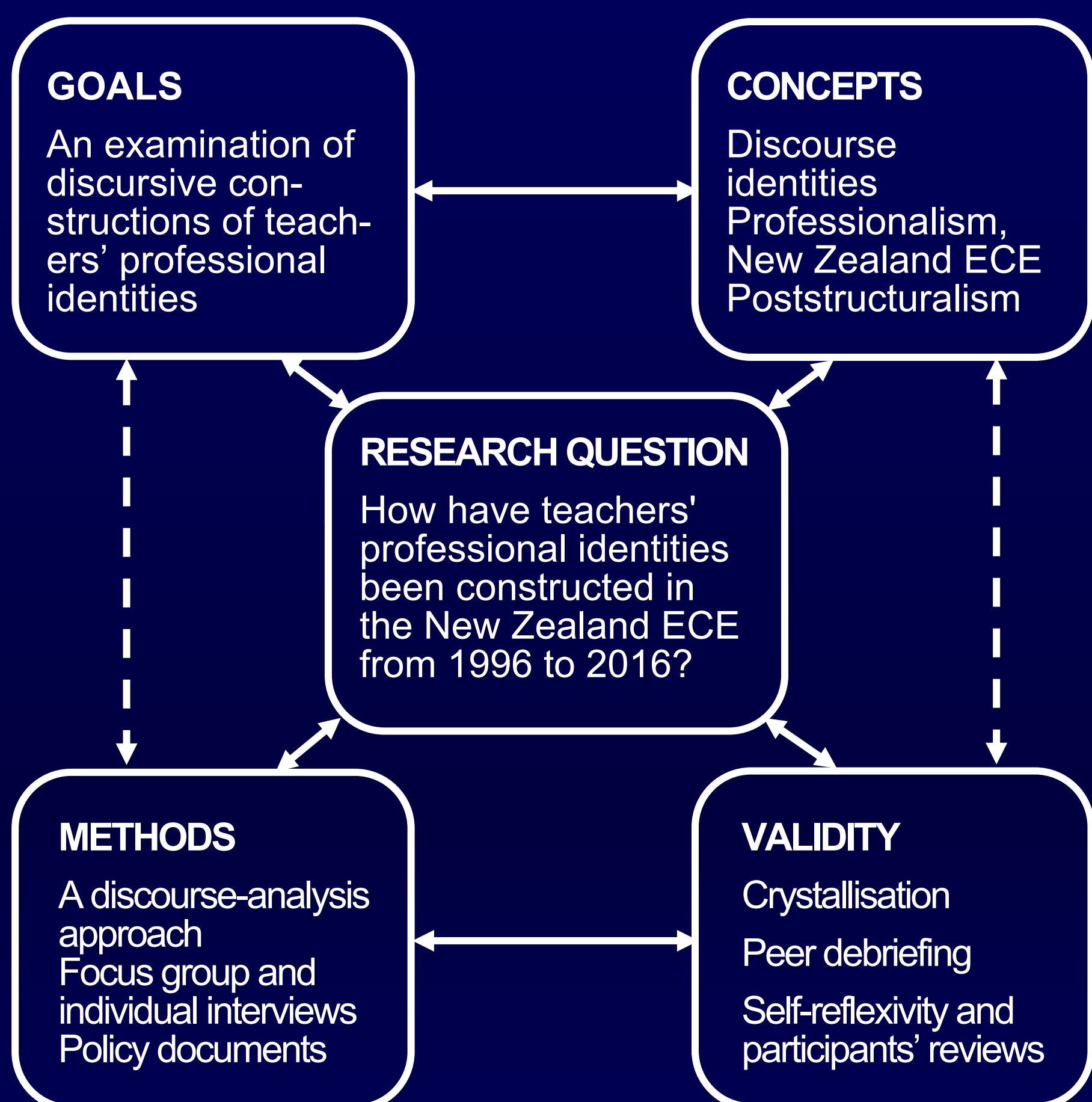


Figure 1. The research design map

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Many thanks to my supervisors Associate Professor Sally Peters, and Associate Professor Linda Mitchell for their support and to my research participants for their contribution. The NZARE Student Travel Grant is also highly appreciated.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

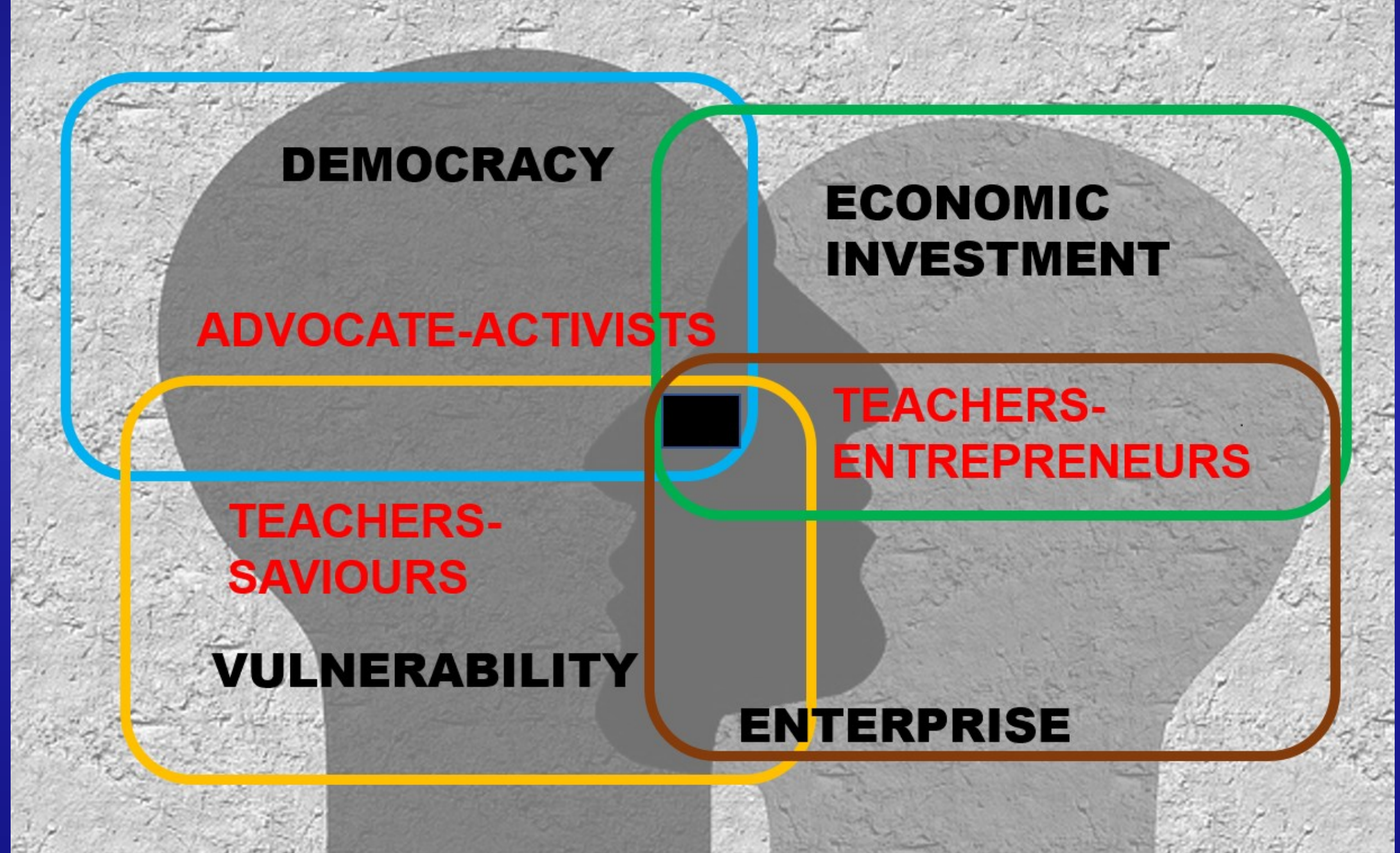
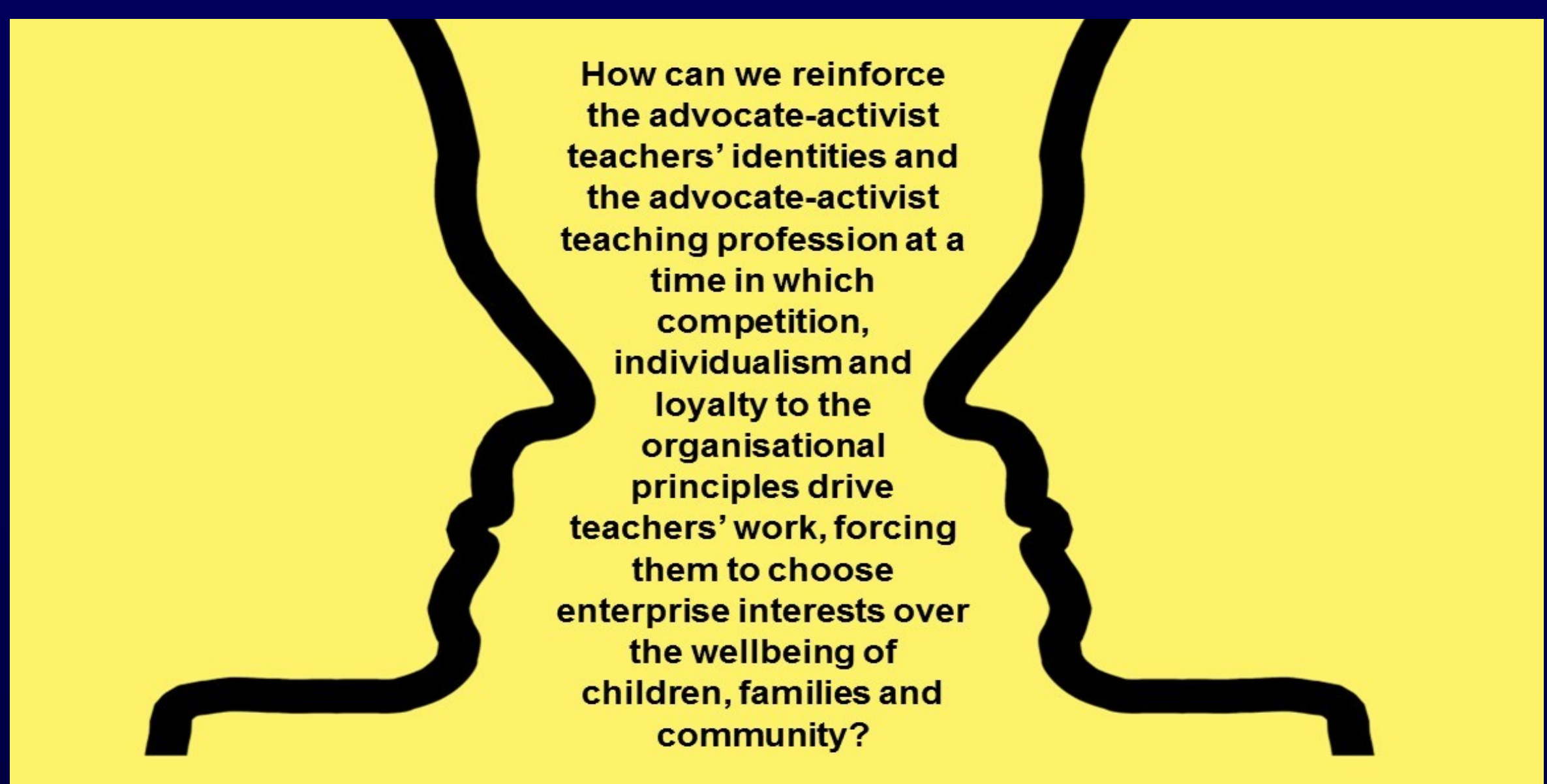


Figure 2. Discursive windows and constructions of teachers' professional identities

The study found that the New Zealand ECE has been torn between tensions created through an interplay of the four divergent and opposing discursive windows (see Figure 2). Discursive windows of enterprise, economic investment and vulnerability have promoted competition, individualism, entrepreneurship and social-intervention emphases in the sector, and frequently overpowered discourses of collectivism, collegiality, and empowerment, in which democratic education and professionalism have been rooted. Through a constant struggle to resolve tensions among the confronting and yet simultaneously coexisting interests and priorities in ECE, teachers need to constantly re-invent their professional selves. Three prevailing identity constructions were identified in the New Zealand ECE - activist-advocate teachers, teachers-entrepreneurs, and teachers-saviors. The identity constructions revealed the complexities and contradictions of teachers work, as a negotiating act of juggling between diverse, and often confronting needs, interests, priorities and emphases of the state, the sector, local community and their own personal-professional-political stances.

4. CONCLUDING QUESTION



REFERENCES

- Duhn, I. (2010). 'The centre is my business': Neoliberal politics, privatisation and discourses of professionalism in New Zealand. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 11(1), 49–60.
- Farquhar, S. (2010). *Ricoeur, identity, and early childhood*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- May, H., & Mitchell, L. (2009). *Strengthening community-based early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Report of Quality public early childhood education report project. Wellington, New Zealand: NZARE.
- Mitchell, L. (2017). Discourses of economic investment and child vulnerability in early childhood education. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 22(1).
- Press, F., & Woodrow, C. (2009). The giant in the playground: Investigating the reach and implications of the corporatisation of child care provision. In D. King & G. Meagher (Eds.), *Paid care in Australia: Politics, profits, practices* (pp. 231–252). Sydney, Australia: Sydney University.
- Smith, A., & May, H. (2018). Connections between early childhood policy and research in Aotearoa New Zealand: 1970s–2010s. In M. Fler & B. van Oers (Eds.), *International Handbook of Early Childhood Education* (pp. 531–549). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.
- Sumsion, J. (2007). Sustaining the employment of early childhood teachers in long day care: A case for robust hope, critical imagination and critical action. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(3), 311–327.
- Warren, A. (2013). 'I wondered does this make me any less of a teacher ...?' Early childhood teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand claimed by and claiming authority within a dominant discourse. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 12(2), 185–194.