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**The way forward –  
Strengthening the advocate-  
activist early childhood  
profession and teachers’  
professional identities**

NZARE Conference 2018

Māui Taumata Rau – Celebrating  
Transformative Educational Research





# CONTENT

- An overview of doctoral research
- Discourses and teachers professional identities – Complexities and contradictions
- The way towards the advocate-activist early childhood profession and teachers' professional identities



# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How have teachers' professional identities been constructed in ECE policies and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand over the last two decades?
2. How have discourses in policies and practice constructed teachers' professional identities, and what are their effects?
3. What identities are accepted, rejected and negotiated in teachers' specific institutional contexts, and why?

# METHODOLOGY

1.

Discourse-  
analysis  
of policy text



2.

Focus groups  
with teachers,  
professional leaders  
and managers

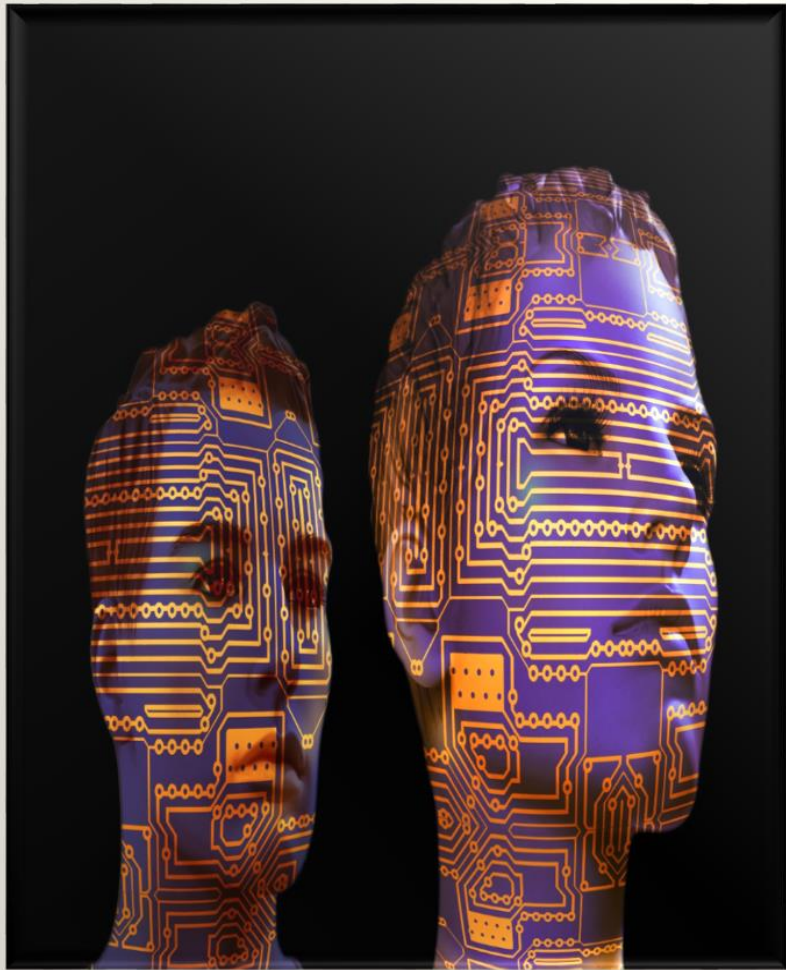


3.

Individual  
Interview



## THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY



“Teachers’ professional identities provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society and negotiate their experience and the sense that is made of that experience” (Sachs, 2005, p. 15).



# SHIFTING DIRECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

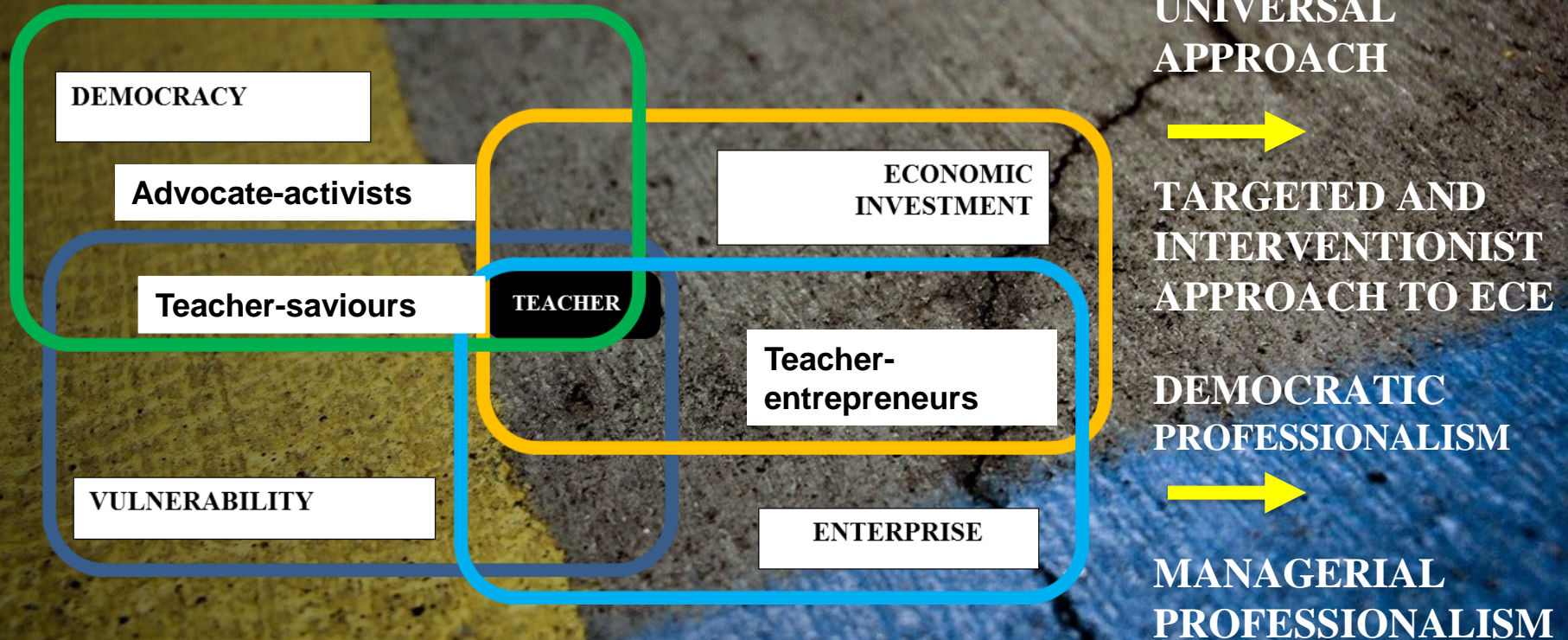
## 1996 to 2009

- Increasing participation of **all children** in **quality** ECE services
- ECE as a universal right – 20 Hours **Free** ECE
- Improving teachers' **status** and **professionalism**
- Strengthening collaborative relationships

## 2010 to 2017

- ECE for '**priority learners**'
- **Lowering targets** for the percentage of qualified ECE teachers
- TAP Grants available to both for-profit and not-for-profit services
- **Privatisation** and **marketisation** leading to **competition** and **division** of the sector

# SHIFTING DISCOURSES AND IDENTITIES



**“... Before, we were able to focus on what is best for children and whānau, to give honest assessment of children’s learning.... now we are forced to do what is best for the business ... and to keep families in our centre ...”**  
(Amy, a professional leader)

**“ ... there are so many centres in this area and not many children... we are forced to compete with others.... what is happening is the erosion of what we see as quality [e.g. free access, all qualified teachers, curriculum based on range of philosophies and play, less academic focus] ...”**  
(Sandra, a kindergarten teacher)





**Where Do We Go from Here?**

**Strengthening the advocate-activist  
early childhood profession and teachers'  
professional identities**

# A WAY FORWARD ...

- Understanding ‘a bigger picture’, the purpose of education and roles of teachers
- Regenerating democratic professionalism, strengthening alliance-building and reinforcing the sense of belonging to the professional teaching community
- Empowering collective actions and participatory decision-making through unionization of the sector
- Consistent and adequate state support to the sector is the key





**Never doubt that a small group of  
thoughtful, committed citizens  
can change the world; indeed, it's  
the only thing that ever has.**

Margaret Mead

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a woman's face, focusing on her wide smile and bright teeth. Her eyes are partially visible, and her hair is dark and curly. The background is dark and out of focus.

# Thanks!

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