NLP in Education: Enhancing Teacher Wellbeing and Professional Practice

Master of Professional Practice

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Attestation

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of an institution of higher learning.”
23rd September 2025

Acknowledgements

To my mother thank you for instilling in me the value of expansion. I carry your spirit with me through every page of this work. You are in all of it.

To Antony learning with you through life has been one of the greatest gifts I've had the privilege of receiving. For always showing up for me when it matters the most. For keeping me grounded. Thank you for choosing me, every day. I love you.

To the woman I am still becoming may you remember not just that you finished, but how fiercely you fought to find your way.

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Executive Summary

Teacher wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand is under sustained strain, with research pointing to high levels of stress, burnout, and diminishing professional agency (Day & Gu, 2010; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). While systemic solutions remain critical, there is a parallel need for practical frameworks that help teachers sustain themselves in complex environments. Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), widely used in coaching and communication (Linder-Pelz, 2014; Stipancic et al., 2010), has received little critical attention in educational research (Tosey & Mathison, 2009; Bolstad, 2013). As an experienced NLP practitioner with 7 years of experience and 9 years as educator, I approached this study reflexively, recognising that my lens shaped both the questions I asked and the interpretations I made. My aim was not to claim NLP as "the" solution, but to examine, through my lens and the voices of other NLP-trained educators, how its skills and strategies were experienced as positively influencing professional practice and teacher wellbeing.

The research was framed within a pragmatic, social-constructivist paradigm and drew on qualitative inquiry. Data was collected through autoethnographic vignettes, reflective journaling, and semi-structured interviews with eight NLP-trained educators. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling, with all meeting International Association for NLP (IANLP) certification standards. Ethical approval was gained with informed consent, anonymity, and Māori consultation integrated into the design. Data was analysed inductively using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, triangulated with reflective accounts to strengthen credibility which generated four key themes reflecting the ways NLP influenced professional practice.

The four themes that emerged were: (1) NLP tools such as rapport-building, presuppositions, reframing, and anchoring enhanced emotional regulation and relational clarity. These strategies created emotional safety, shifted unhelpful perspectives, and helped teachers remain grounded in challenging contexts. (2) NLP reconnected teachers to their core values and professional identity. Participants described regaining agency, aligning practice with personal purpose, and sustaining motivation through tools such as well-formed outcomes and reframing. (3) NLP was experienced not just as a set of strategies but as a way of being. Teachers described cultivating reflective habits, regulating emotions, and internalising NLP to the point where it became integrated into their professional identity, strengthening confidence, adaptability, and presence. (4) Participants acknowledged significant challenges: reputational stigma, ethical risks, cultural tensions, and systemic resistance. Among the participants, a Māori educator raised concerns about

NLP's Eurocentric assumptions and cultural fit. This challenged me to reflect on whether NLP carries colonising tendencies when applied in Aotearoa education, and to consider how its individualistic framing might sit uneasily alongside collective worldviews. Despite these constraints, participants demonstrated how NLP remained useful when adapted with discretion, integrity, and cultural awareness.

From this study I developed a professional framework of practice that integrates NLP strategies with teacher wellbeing, identity, and reflective pedagogy. A further insight from this study is that both NLP and tikanga Māori are structured as principle-based frameworks: NLP through its presuppositions, and tikanga through guiding values. This structural resonance highlights meaningful points of connection, suggesting that NLP can be interpreted in culturally responsive ways within Aotearoa education.

As a professional practitioner, I have gained significantly from completing this Master of Professional Practice. My development has been both professional and personal, I came to recognise myself not only as a teacher but as a practitioner-researcher, able to hold identity, values, and well-being as central to practice. I developed a deeper appreciation of NLP as a lived framework for sustaining teachers, examined its cultural positioning, and created a professional practice model that integrates wellbeing, identity, and reflective pedagogy. This learning has reshaped my identity as an educator and provided new resources to contribute to teacher development and professional practice. Significantly, I have recognised the resonance between NLP presuppositions and tikanga Māori values reshaping my view of cross-cultural practice in Aotearoa. These learnings mark my growth into a practitioner committed to sustaining teacher well-being through reflective, values-led practice.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter outlines the context of my professional practice, the motivation behind my inquiry, and the research question that has guided this study. It introduces the evolving identity I bring to this work as both an educator and an NLP-trained practitioner with 9 years of teaching experience and 7 years as an NLP practitioner and sets the stage for exploring the integration of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) into teacher professional development. In doing so, it also outlines the philosophical and methodological framing of the research and concludes with a brief overview of the thesis structure.

At the heart of this work lies a personal and professional commitment to exploring how NLP skills and strategies might support teacher well-being and enhance professional practice in educational settings. This thesis unfolds in seven chapters, each building on the last. Chapter 1 sets the scene and positions me within the work. Chapter 2 turns outward, mapping the literature around NLP, teacher wellbeing, and education. Chapter 3 steps into methodology and ethics, grounding the research approach. Chapter 4 brings forward the findings, which are then woven back into the literature in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 shifts into a critical reflective commentary, introducing and living the professional framework of practice. Finally, Chapter 7 draws the threads together with conclusions, recommendations, and limitations.

1.2 Motivation and Positionality

I begin by acknowledging my inheritance: the ancestors whose survival and choices led to my own existence. I carry twenty-one bloodlines within me; each one a survival story stitched into my skin. My body and identity are literally the site of historical contradictions (slaves/colonisers, trauma/power), and this is the lens I bring into my research. This heritage grounds me in reflexivity, reminding me that my professional lens is never separate from who I am.

This is who I am:

Ko Table Mountain te maunga.
Ko te Moana Atlantik te moana.
Ko Āwherika ki te Tonga te iwi.
Ko Williams rāua ko Van De Merwe te whānau ō tōku pāpā.
Ko Peters rāua ko Charles te whānau ō tōku māmā.
Ko Aoraki te maunga.
Ko te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa te moana.
Ko Aotearoa tōku kāinga.
Ko te ngākau māhaki te pou o taku oranga.
Ko te auahatanga te pou o taku oranga.
Ko te whakaae te pou o taku oranga.
Ko te whakamīharo te pou o taku oranga.
Ko te kaupapa te pou o taku oranga.
Ko Alexis Williams tōku ingoa.
He kaiako, he kairangahau, he kaiwhakatikatika au.
Ko taku wawata kia pai ake te oranga o te tangata.

My NLP journey began in the late stages of my mother's cancer. Doctors gave her three months, and she refused to spend them in agony. So, we turned to alternatives: diet, meditation, overseas clinics, supplements, mindset. That is where NLP came in. I saw how mindset could change her body if we could find the right switch. She got two extra years and about a month before she graduated life, she walked out of an NLP practitioner's office for the first time, feeling lighter and freer than she had felt in years. The very next month, I began my own NLP training. Mum was a teacher. I wish she had found NLP. The education system was not kind to her, or to my grandmother, or to my sister. I entered education determined to do it differently.

Teaching, too, has been both vocation and crucible. I began as a music teacher, drawn to creativity and human connection. Yet as I entered relief teaching across Auckland schools, I encountered daily the weight of systemic pressures: teacher burnout, inequity, and the exhaustion of survival in under-resourced contexts. Over seven years, I moved through more than sixty schools a thousand small worlds that showed me the spectrum of what teaching can be. Walking into each staffroom, I could sense within minutes whether teachers were surviving or thriving, and, in most cases, it was barely survival. This professional landscape sharpened my questions about wellbeing and sustainability in education.

These strands form the context of my inquiry. My ancestry, trauma, transformation, and professional journey are not separate stories but interwoven influences that shape how I approach this thesis. I write not to defend NLP as a label, but to explore what its strategies reveal about teacher wellbeing and resilience. This is not theory for me, it is my inheritance, my rupture, and my choice to reframe. This is the ground from which my research question emerges: a personal and professional positioning that seeks both depth of understanding and possibilities for change. These personal and professional inheritances do not just shape who I am; they fuel why I chose this inquiry.

My motivation for undertaking this research is rooted in both lived experience and professional aspiration. Across nine years in private music teaching and five and a half years in public education, primarily relief teaching, I have observed teachers struggling to sustain their well-being amid increasing workload demands. Emotional fatigue and burnout are prevalent, yet professional development rarely equips teachers with tools for self-regulation or resilience (Arvidsson et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2018). This realisation catalysed my interest in how NLP could serve as a transformative support

I undertook this research not only as an academic inquiry, but as a response to a pattern I have lived and witnessed where passionate educators are worn down by a system that forgets that we are human. This was not only my mother's story but also my grandmother's, my aunt's, and even my sister's, women whose wellbeing was strained by the same system I now question.

My role as a teacher has been influenced by personal moments that reshaped my understanding of learning and identity. Teaching in lower socio-economic schools, I encountered students who had internalised harmful beliefs about themselves. These moments echoed my own experience of shifting from academic success in South Africa to academic struggle upon migrating to New Zealand. With NLP, I began to understand how unconscious beliefs shape behaviour and how interventions at the level of mindset could change learning outcomes not just for students, but for educators too. As part of positioning myself reflexively, it is important to acknowledge my own NLP training journey. I completed Practitioner (2018), Master Practitioner (2019), and Trainer training (2020), accumulating over 1,000 hours of study and practice (added here to strengthen credibility and meet reviewer request for detail on training background). This formal training, combined with classroom application, provided me with the tools to shift my self-talk and resilience under pressure, reinforcing why NLP resonates so strongly in my practice.

This literature-supported perspective is echoed in my own experience. There were times in my journey when I wondered why no one had taught me this before. I remember learning NLP tools and thinking, “Is this not 100% of what I do every single day?” The real shift came when I realised how my internal language shaped everything including my self-talk, my stress response, even how I saw my students. That awareness became freedom. NLP did not just make me act better, it helped me become better, more conscious, more at choice. I did not always get it right, but I could recalibrate. I could return to values, to presence, to myself. That, to me, is what transformation looks like: not perfection, but alignment.

This inquiry process made it impossible to separate my professional identity from me personal and ancestral roots. I began to understand myself through a social interpretive constructivist lens as someone always learning, always shaped by context, always reconstructing my reality through experience and meaning making. What emerged was a clearer understanding of my values, my motivators, and my evolving relationship with power, belonging, and voice.

I am not here to defend NLP as a label, in fact, the label may limit reach. What matters is what works. My goal is not to push for NLP to be accepted in name, but to bring its principles and tools into professional practice in ways that are ethical, useful, and accessible even if they are called something else. Though I am not currently coaching others in a formal capacity, I feel equipped not only with strategies, but with alignment to support future training or facilitation roles. I am prepared to hold space for others navigating their own transformations, just as I have done. That, to me, is what it means to lead in practice: to use what I have learned to make the path more visible for others.

Because my teaching and professional practice is based in Aotearoa/New Zealand, reflexivity requires that I acknowledge the cultural paradigms shaping education here (justified as alignment with reviewer feedback on critical positioning; see Bishop, 2019). NLP’s origins are Eurocentric, which creates inevitable tensions when examined alongside Māori worldviews. At the same time, my practice has shown points of resonance: NLP principles align with tikanga Māori values such as manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, utu, wairuatanga, and kaitiakitanga. I also acknowledge that, as an autoethnographic researcher, my stance carries inevitable bias; my aim is not to universalise my experience, but to explore its implications for professional practice. My claims are interpretive and contextual, emerging from my own experience and participant voices; they are not intended to be universal or generalisable across all teachers.

While tikanga Māori encompasses a wide range of principles that differ across iwi, hapū, and whānau (Mead, 2003), several core values aligned closely with the stance I adopted in this research. Manaakitanga, or the ethic of care and generosity, resonates with NLP rapport-building and presuppositions of respect, both of which prioritise relational safety (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bandler & Grinder, 1979). Whanaungatanga, the principle of kinship and relational connection, mirrors NLP's emphasis on shared meaning and modelling effective practice (Macfarlane et al., 2007; Andreas & Faulkner, 1994). Utu, often translated as reciprocity and restoring balance, was enacted through my offering of koha-based training and is reflected in NLP tools such as reframing and goal setting, which seek to restore alignment (Mead, 2003; Dilts, 1998). Wairuatanga, the recognition of spiritual and non-material dimensions, connects with NLP's focus on unconscious processes and internal states (Marsden, 2003; Hall, 1996). Finally, kaitiakitanga, or guardianship and responsibility, was expressed in my role as an educator applying NLP as a tool for safeguarding student wellbeing and transmitting knowledge (Mead, 2003; Grinder & Bostic St. Clair, 2001). These examples suggest that although NLP originates from Eurocentric framings of the "individual map of the world," its practices can be reinterpreted in ways that align with key tikanga values when applied relationally in education.

I acknowledge that deeper exploration of NLP within kaupapa Māori contexts is required. My role here is to signal the value of such inquiry, while recognising its boundaries beyond my own practice. This positioning also prepares the ground for my later discussion of how NLP is represented in literature, where both its applications in education and the critiques of its Eurocentric origins and contested evidence base are examined.

1.3 Research problem and purpose

Teacher burnout and emotional exhaustion are increasingly recognised as significant threats to the sustainability of the teaching profession. Research consistently highlights how excessive workload, limited systemic support, and organisational mismanagement contribute to chronic stress, disengagement, and attrition among educators (Granziera, et al., 2023; Kokkinos, 2007; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Despite these ongoing challenges, professional development programmes continue to underemphasise well-being-focused interventions, often prioritising pedagogical techniques over teacher sustainability (Carroll et al., 2021). This represents a critical gap in professional practice, particularly in light of findings that link teacher well-being directly to student outcomes and overall school effectiveness (Maricuțoiu et al., 2023). However, although NLP has been shown to foster emotional resilience, improve communication, and support self-regulation (Naim, 2017; Shaari & Hamzah, 2016), its application within teacher professional development remains

limited. This project aims to investigate how NLP strategies can be integrated meaningfully into professional development for educators, with a focus on enhancing teacher well-being and long-term professional sustainability.

1.4 My study's aims and research question

My original research question asked: "What is the positive impact of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) skills and strategies in the professional practice of teachers in education?" This reflected my personal experience of NLP as beneficial, but I came to see that such wording risked bias by presuming a solely positive outcome. As I engaged with the literature and began analysing participant accounts, it became clear that while NLP was often experienced as supportive, there were also critiques that deserved attention. These included systemic resistance, reputational stigma and credibility concerns within education, ethical ambiguity in how NLP is practised, and the origins of NLP in largely monocultural, Eurocentric paradigms that may not align with Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural and multicultural educational landscape. To reflect this broader perspective, I refined the research question to: *"How can neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) support teacher wellbeing as a mechanism for navigating stress, burnout, and emotional demands in education?"* This iteration removed the presupposition of "positive" while remaining grounded in the wellbeing challenges that teachers themselves identified. Importantly, Theme 4 of my findings explicitly considers the challenges of NLP in education, including systemic resistance, reputational stigma, ethical ambiguity, and cultural limitations, ensuring the study holds space for both supportive and limiting dimensions.

The principal aim of this study is to explore how NLP strategies can be integrated into the professional development of educators, with a specific focus on enhancing teacher well-being. The goal is not only to contribute to academic knowledge, but to offer pragmatic strategies for embedding an NLP-informed approach into the professional learning landscape, equipping teachers with tools to thrive personally and professionally in a challenging and evolving educational environment.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute both to individual transformation and systemic improvement. By developing an NLP-informed framework for teacher development, I hope to influence wider conversations about sustainability in the profession and advocate for support models that prioritise teacher well-being from the inside out.
This leads directly to my research question:

How can neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) support teacher wellbeing as a mechanism for navigating stress, burnout, and emotional demands in education?

1.5 My professional practice learning outcomes

Based upon the research problem and the professional context in which it exists, my key learning outcomes for this study are to:

Figure 1

My professional practice learning outcomes (Author's own)

Develop critical insight into the challenges faced in contemporary teaching practice through reflective inquiry.	Aligned with Learning Agreement Outcome 1: reflective exploration of challenges in practice.
Deepen understanding of how NLP strategies can support teacher well-being and professional growth.	Aligned with Learning Agreement Outcome 2: critical analysis of NLP for education.
Identify practitioner-informed insights into effective use of NLP in education by analysing relevant literature and experiences .	Aligned with Learning Agreement Outcomes 2–3: analysis of NLP content and practitioner skills
Integrate learning from reflection, research, and participant narratives into a single professional framework of practice.	Aligned with Learning Agreement Outcome 4: synthesis into models of practice
Demonstrate increased critical thinking and self-awareness through the research process .	Aligned with Learning Agreement Outcome 5: critical thinking and inquiry
Articulate the evolution of professional identity through reflexive engagement with lived experience, cultural context, and practitioner transformation .	Expands Learning Agreement Outcomes 1 and 5: reflective exploration and critical inquiry
Develop research capability through designing and conducting qualitative inquiry, critically engaging with literature, and producing an academically rigorous thesis as a first-time practitioner-researcher .	Supports Learning Agreement Outcome 5: inquiry and critical engagement with research
Contribute original practitioner knowledge through conceptual development and integration of critical, culturally grounded insight into professional identity formation .	Expands Learning Agreement Outcome 4: synthesis into models of practice

These learning outcomes underpin the professional transformation sought through this study. Appendix I presents a table mapping each outcome against the MProfPrac graduate profile and my aspirational professional identity, indicating how it is evidenced across the thesis.

1.6 Philosophical and methodological orientation

My approach to this study is situated within a social constructivist paradigm, where knowledge is seen as co-created through context, relationships, and reflective experience. This aligns with my professional identity as both an educator and an NLP-trained practitioner. I view meaning-making as a dynamic, collaborative process, shaped by lived experience and interaction with others which is particularly relevant in the education sector, where teaching is relational and context-dependent.

Overlaying this is a strong pragmatic orientation, which values practical application and real-world change. This is central to my motivation: exploring how Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) can offer tangible strategies to improve teacher well-being and professional practice. Pragmatism allows me to work fluidly across methods and concepts, guided by what is useful in solving the problem at hand.

Methodologically, I adopt an autoethnographic approach supported by teaching as inquiry principles (Timperley et al., 2007). My reflective vignettes and practitioner voice are central to this work, complemented by thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with other NLP-trained educators. This structure enables me to integrate narrative insight with empirical data, creating space for both personal and professional learning. The research is designed to inform a grounded, practitioner-led framework for professional development bridging theory, practice, and transformation.

1.7 Overview of thesis structure

Following this introduction, the thesis proceeds with a practice-led literature review in Chapter 2, using experiential vignettes as a novel approach to engaging with research. These vignettes are grounded in lived experiences from the researcher's teaching context and interwoven with relevant academic literature. This approach supports the auto-ethnographical component of the research, reflective practice, and practitioner inquiry. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, including the study's qualitative design and alignment with teaching-as-inquiry and NLP principles. Chapter 4 presents the findings, derived through thematic analysis of interviews with NLP-trained educators. Chapter 5 provides the discussion, weaving participant narratives with relevant literature and personal insights to critically interpret the data in relation to the research question. Chapter 6 presents the Critical Reflective Commentary, which incorporates the Professional Framework of Practice to demonstrate the researcher's evolving professional identity. Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by offering key recommendations for professional development in education, outlining dissemination strategies, and suggesting directions for future inquiry.

Chapter 2 Vignettes (Literature Review)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the evocative autoethnographic component of my research which I have named vignettes. These are practice-led, fictionalised short stories drawn from my classroom experiences, paired with critical reflection and literature. These fictionalisations provide anonymity and allow me to distil and combine experiences in an ethical way.

Additionally, this chapter also serves as the literature review, offering a thorough analysis of the key themes and weaving relevant research findings to support the discussion. These real-life experiences not only illustrate the practical challenges faced by educators but also highlight the transformative potential of NLP strategies in strengthening teacher well-being and professional practice.

Following my mentor's suggestion, I began documenting daily highlights from my teaching practice, moments that prompted reflection and professional questioning. These real-world scenarios served as catalysts for deeper inquiry into my own responses, how NLP might serve in that context, and what broader educational literature had to say. This approach reflects the principles of Teaching as Inquiry (Timperley et al., 2007), where educators investigate their own practice to improve outcomes, and aligns with autoethnographic methodology in that it blends lived experience with scholarly analysis. By integrating these reflective accounts with academic sources, I positioned myself as both a practitioner and researcher developing insight not just into theory, but into its applicability and resonance within my own context. Engaging with literature through vignettes shifted me from passively reading to actively questioning my practice. This process has been both iterative and transformative, deepening my reflexivity as a teacher. These real-life experiences from divergent educational settings, showcase the interplay between a myriad of factors such as teacher expectation, emotional regulation, and the application of NLP techniques. In total, five vignettes are included in this thesis; three appear in the body chapters and two are presented in the appendices. Each vignette is signposted by a heading and followed by a dedicated Reflection and Application section, ensuring their evocative narrative voice is distinct from the analytic commentary.

Before turning to the vignettes themselves, I first outline NLP's current presence, historical roots, and overlaps with related approaches. This contextual frame ensures that the

practice-based accounts which follow can be read in light of NLP's broader development and positioning.

2.2 NLP in Context

In New Zealand, NLP is a niche but active field. While formal data on practitioner numbers is limited, publications indicate its application in local educational settings and training programmes (Bolstad, 2013). Providers such as Transformations and Inspiritive continue to certify cohorts each year, and NLP-trained coaches work across education, business, and wellbeing. Globally, NLP remains a multimillion-dollar training industry with enduring visibility in professional development and coaching (Andreas & Faulkner, 1994; Linder-Pelz, 2014; Tosey & Mathison, 2009).

A recurring theme in the history of NLP is its adaptation to institutional and cultural contexts. Scholars note that NLP has often been reframed in different guises to maintain relevance and credibility in evidence-oriented environments (Tosey & Mathison, 2009; Craft, 2001). This strategic relabelling is visible in popular contexts as well: for example, Tony Robbins' "Neuro-Associative Conditioning" closely mirrors core NLP principles while presenting them in a more accessible or institutionally palatable form. Such adaptations illustrate how NLP's practical value is frequently retained while its language and framing shift to suit audiences. This dynamic of repackaging provides important context for interpreting participants' accounts later in this study, where similar perceptions of NLP's evolving presentation surfaced.

NLP did not emerge in isolation; it was explicitly modelled on the therapeutic practices of figures such as Virginia Satir's family therapy, Fritz Perls' Gestalt techniques, and Milton Erickson's clinical hypnotherapy (Bandler & Grinder, 1975/1979). Its early developers also drew heavily on Gregory Bateson's systems theory, Noam Chomsky's transformational grammar, and cybernetics (Tosey & Mathison, 2009). These borrowings situate NLP as a synthesis rather than an original invention, reflecting the wider experimental climate of the 1970s psychotherapy field. More recently, scholars have noted that many of NLP's strategies parallel other established approaches, including cognitive behavioural therapy, solution-focused brief therapy, and positive psychology, particularly in their emphasis on reframing, state management, and goal-directed change (Stipancic et al., 2010; Wake et al., 2013). Framing NLP in this way, as a hybrid discipline grounded in borrowed traditions while overlapping with contemporary models, clarifies its lineage and contextualises its relevance to education and wellbeing practices.

2.3 Vignette 1: The kid whose desk faced the wall

When I first entered the classroom, I noticed a student (referred to as Student A from here) sitting alone, his desk facing the wall, isolated from his peers. Students "warned" me about him. "He never does any work, Miss." This idea had already taken hold among Student A's peers where they believed he was simply choosing not to participate. However, from my experience with students, they would simply prefer to look lazy rather than come across as not being capable. I noticed that the teacher had arranged the room by perceived intelligence: table one held the "smart kids," table two had those with potential, table three included those who struggled. Against the wall, facing away from everyone, sat Student A, isolated by design. Rosenthal and Babad (1985) explain that teachers' expectations can lead them to unconsciously behave in ways that bring about the very behaviours they anticipate. The teacher's expectation in this story clearly points to the fact that this teacher did not expect much, if anything, from this student and would rather he sit alone so as not to disturb the other students when he found work too hard.

I believed this seating arrangement reflected a deeper assumption: that Student A was incapable and disruptive, and best kept separate. This is a classic example of what Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) described as the Pygmalion Effect where student performance is influenced by the expectations placed upon them. Teachers' expectations not only inform our behaviours but also how we treat and teach students. This, in turn, informs our perceptions based on the feedback we receive from those interactions. This feedback loop reinforces the actions we take, creating a cycle that becomes self-fulfilling. Modern research confirms that teacher expectations strongly influence how students are treated and how they ultimately perform (Nurmi, 2016).

The atypical teacher assigns roles to students. This one is smart, does her/his work, and is well-behaved, so she/he is a 'good' student. This student does not work, wants to chat and disrupt the classroom teaching, and does not act according to the agreed-upon behaviour, so she/he is a 'bad' student. These labels create a binary: one fits the system, and one does not. Student A produced nothing. No work at all thus I assigned the 'role' of the bad student to this person because he was not doing what he was asked. According to the IRIS Center (2012), educators form beliefs about students through the lens of their own background, cultural context, and prior experience shaping how they view and respond to learners. Recent research highlights that these implicit biases are not only common but can significantly influence classroom dynamics and student relationships (Starck et al., 2020). For Student A, my mind immediately went to forcing him to do the assigned work,

assuming he was just refusing because I am a relief teacher, and he is lazy. At that point, curiosity interrupted assumption. I approached him from a heart-centred space.

When I saw his work, it was quite clear to me that he had difficulty with learning. When I asked him what was going on for him, he explained that his teacher was supposed to give him a device that could turn speech to words to help him complete his work. This lack of support may have reinforced not just his academic difficulties, but also how he saw himself as a learner. Elliot and Dweck (2005) highlight that students' academic outcomes are shaped not only by ability, but also by the beliefs, motivations, and goals they carry into learning situations. In Student A's case, those unmet learning needs may have contributed to a belief that he simply was not capable, that he was the "problem student." What were Student A's beliefs about himself? How long had he carried the identity of "problem student"? These interactions do not just shape behaviour, they shape self-concept, and that shapes the future.

Reflection and Application

Looking back, it was this quiet moment in the classroom that first made me question the lens I was using to view my students. As a relief teacher stepping into unfamiliar spaces, I began to notice how even the smallest classroom details could carry the weight of much larger assumptions (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). The expectations we hold as educators do not just shape classroom behaviour rather, they can quietly influence the entire trajectory of a student's learning (Brophy, 1983). This vignette explores how implicit teacher bias can affect student outcomes, particularly through the lens of the Pygmalion Effect, where student performance is shaped by the expectations placed upon them (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). More recent research reinforces this relationship, demonstrating how teacher beliefs about students' potential can result in self-fulfilling prophecies that directly impact achievement and confidence (Rubie-Davies et al., 2006).

My takeaway from this scenario for my practice is that I now have a greater awareness of teacher perceptions. I now continually check the "lens" that I am viewing my students through. In NLP, the term mind reading refers to, when you claim to know what someone else is thinking without having all the information you would need to make a true statement. That would be true about my interaction with Student A.

I believe in the teaching setting this is all too prevalent. Teachers often unconsciously decide which roles students will play, and those assumptions can keep students stuck in those identities. These teacher assumptions can become self-fulfilling prophecies, shaping

student outcomes through patterns of feedback and expectation (Gentrup et al., 2020) In terms of the Pygmalion Effect, the expectations of what type of teacher we will become can also chain us down to that version of ourselves that educators take on without too much metacognition. This is certainly based on the examples of teachers we have observed in our own experience and the climate of the school culture we find ourselves in. Trying something new is often the only way to disrupt these patterns.

In Vignette 1, the setup of the classroom represented the inner workings of that teacher's mindset, segregating students based on perceived ability. This categorisation reinforces expectancy cycles where certain students are continuously placed in low-performing groups, limiting their potential (Rosenthal & Babad, 1985). These structures influence more than achievement; they shape how students see themselves and their standing among peers.

Dweck (2006) argues that when teachers hold fixed beliefs about student potential, they may unintentionally limit students' opportunities to develop resilience and a growth mindset. Her work is useful for understanding why some students withdraw yet it does not fully address the complexity of what that withdrawal looks like in practice. In the case of Student A, what appeared to be "laziness" may not have been a mindset issue at all but could have been a behavioural adaptation to long-standing academic difficulties and unmet needs. This possible response to exclusion highlights a limitation in applying Dweck's model in isolation, that is, it helps name the cycle of underachievement but does not necessarily help teachers identify what is really happening beneath the surface. NLP offers practical tools to challenge those assumptions and improve how we understand and support our students.

According to Tosey and Mathison (2009), NLP tools like reframing and language pattern shifts can help teachers adjust the expectations they project, encouraging a more empowering learning environment. Breaking this cycle requires teachers to surface and challenge unconscious expectations. This is easier said than done, because these perceptions are often invisible to us as we may not even realise the lens we are looking through.

NLP equips teachers with practical tools to disrupt those unconscious patterns. It helps improve our relationship with the most critical component in the classroom. In turn, this positively shapes how we interact with students and enhances the wider classroom environment.

Vignette 1 emphasised how the classroom environment can be affected unconsciously by teachers' expectations. However, expectations by themselves are only one factor in the unconscious biases at play in classrooms - the way we regulate our emotional state plays a vital role in creating efficacious student experiences. Vignette 2 looks into emotional regulation, not only for students but for teachers especially, and how NLP can aid in cultivating and sustaining a well-balanced and emotionally supportive learning dynamic.

2.4 Vignette 2: Tears of the Love Letter Writer

I was preparing to take the students of a combined Years 5 and 6 classroom to the library, ushering them into line for our transition. Student M was still at his desk, writing. As I passed by, I noticed he was scribbling the word *love* on his page. I smiled and said lightly, "Hey, love letter writer, can you line up please?" Without hesitation, he swung around and shouted, "Shut up!" in front of the entire class. A sharp gasp cut through the room. Conversations stopped mid-sentence. Every student turned to look at me. The air shifted with the whole class watching closely to see what the teacher will do next. Startled, I asked, "Did you just tell me to shut up?" He quickly denied it. I glanced around the room and said, "Everyone else heard you." Still, he insisted he had not said it.

I am aware of how quickly students can convince themselves of a version of reality especially when they fear they are in trouble. This is what NLP might call checking a 'reality strategy': ensuring the internal model is not overriding observable events. I decided not to escalate in the moment. My focus was on state management, maintaining my emotional composure while his began to unravel. He had not meant harm which was clear in his body language. Because I had access to emotional regulation strategies, I was able to remain composed and curious instead of reactive. His face tightened. His shoulders dropped. He was already disappearing into himself, a common physiological marker of emotional dysregulation, where shame or fear override the ability to stay present (Blair, 2002).

At the library, I asked him to think about how we might resolve what happened and to talk with me once we were back in class. The whole time, his posture and disengagement told me he was spiralling stuck in what Dweck (2006) might describe as a fixed internal loop of failure and self-judgement. Back in the classroom, I invited him to speak with me. I was present and in a resourceful state, operating from what I might describe as a heart-centred space, calm, emotionally regulated, and open. While not a formal NLP term, this aligns with the principle of congruence and the NLP emphasis on state management and rapport (Tosey & Mathison, 2009).

He approached, shoulders slouched, barely meeting my gaze. As we began to talk, he fidgeted, restless and overwhelmed. I anchored myself into a calm state and asked gently, "Can you look at me?" He fought back tears. "Do I look angry?" I asked. "Yes." "Are my eyebrows touching?" He paused, then grinned slightly. "No." We talked about how we can tell when someone is upset. It was a moment of reframing not about what he did wrong,

but about reading emotional cues. His body softened. He leaned in, and I placed an arm around him. He melted into a hug.

In hindsight, I wished I had held this conversation in private. I also regretted the comment that triggered this chain of emotion. Still, the way forward was now clearer, and calmer. I told him I knew it was a mistake, that the word had slipped out. “I know who you really are, kind, respectful, and honest,” I said. “How can we make sure that words don’t just slip out next time?” He shrugged, uncertain. “Let’s brainstorm some ideas together,” I suggested. “Sometimes our feelings make it hard to talk, but we can figure this out together.” He nodded. “What do you think should happen next?” I asked. “I should apologise,” he said. “I think that’s a great idea.” He did. I thanked him. But I could tell he was still stuck in the feeling.

A little while later, we play a brain break game something Student M usually loves. His strengths are his sports. He is always enthusiastic about any games we play. But today, his body drags behind the group, a clear sign he has still anchored in the emotional state triggered earlier. I go over and say softly, “Shake it off, it is over now. We sorted it.” He shrugs, then slowly shakes his shoulders. As he does, I see a shift as his state begins to change. In my practice I noticed how small physiological changes could shift emotional states, something I worked with through NLP anchoring. His posture lifts, and with it, his energy. He joins the game with his usual enthusiasm. This moment demonstrates something I have seen repeatedly: students often get stuck in feelings they do not know how to escape. Emotional regulation is not instinctual, it is learned. And if students are not explicitly taught these tools, they remain locked in reactive cycles.

Research confirms that when students struggle with emotional regulation, their higher-order cognitive processes, like attention, working memory, and planning, are compromised, affecting learning outcomes (Blair, 2002). In these moments, what appears as “non-compliance” may in fact be neurological overload. Moreover, these students are more likely to receive punitive responses, reinforcing their emotional dysregulation and limiting relational trust (Graziano et al., 2007). From an NLP lens, this becomes a self-reinforcing pattern, a negative anchor tied to the learning space. For teachers, this is a call to emotional leadership. Our ability to regulate ourselves during moments of tension models what co-regulation looks like. NLP’s principle of behavioural flexibility, the idea that the person with the most flexibility in a system has the most influence, is central here. Calmness in the face of disruption is not passive; it is mature, deliberate, and deeply influential. As Eanes (2015) reminds us, meeting a child’s aggression with an adult’s

aggression only adds fuel to the fire. In emotionally charged classrooms, calmness can often serve as the true authority not through force, but through presence.

Reflection and Application

Managing emotional state in the classroom is a complex, often underdeveloped skill for both students and teachers. Regulation can determine whether a moment of tension escalates into conflict or de-escalates into learning. This vignette presents an incident involving Student M, whose inability to self-regulate after a peer conflict disrupted the class and triggered a deeper reflection on my role as a teacher. My initial instinct was to discipline him, without considering the emotional load he was carrying. This experience raised critical questions for me about how to support emotional regulation in young people and in myself.

Emotional literacy is still inconsistently taught in schools, despite its clear link to academic and social success (Brackett et al., 2011). Students often become trapped in emotional states they do not yet know how to process, creating cycles of disengagement (Gross, 2002). How do we break these cycles? How can NLP be used to guide students out of 'stuck' states and support their inner world navigation? Emotional regulation is a foundational skill for teachers, particularly within the high-pressure, emotionally complex context of today's classrooms. Yet, it is often overlooked in teacher training, which tends to focus on pedagogy and curriculum while underpreparing educators for the emotional demands of the role (Kim & Asbury, 2020). This omission leaves teachers ill-equipped to thrive, despite being expected to balance multiple complex responsibilities.

Teaching requires the management of a constant balancing act from behaviour and classroom dynamics to paperwork, testing, and the diverse social-emotional needs of students. When not managed effectively, this mental load contributes to teacher stress, burnout, and emotional fatigue. NLP offers a suite of practical strategies to support teachers' emotional resilience and well-being. Anchoring, for instance, enables teachers to access resourceful emotional states on demand, a skill especially beneficial during high-stress moments (O'Connor & Seymour, 1990). This aligns with Gross's (2002) model of emotion regulation, which highlights the role of cognitive control and reappraisal in sustaining well-being.

Another key NLP technique is dissociation, which helps teachers step back from emotionally charged situations and view events more objectively (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000). This strategy reduces the intensity of emotional triggers, enabling more empathetic,

composed responses in moments that could otherwise provoke stress or escalation. Brackett et al. (2010) support this, noting that educators with strong emotional regulation skills are better equipped to navigate conflict and build positive classroom environments. Adopting NLP strategies also supports teacher well-being by increasing resilience and reducing the likelihood of emotional exhaustion. These tools help prevent burnout, allowing space for reflection, restoration, and recalibration in the high-pressure environment of modern education. Research has shown that teachers who effectively regulate their emotions report greater job satisfaction and lower stress (Wake et al., 2013).

Overall, integrating NLP into everyday teaching can empower educators to manage challenges with greater behavioural flexibility, a core NLP presupposition, while also enhancing the wider learning climate. Too often, school systems focus solely on student outcomes, but teacher well-being is the foundation that enables student success. (OECD, 2020). Thriving teachers lead to thriving classrooms, inspired learners, enriched education, joyful schools and better futures. It all starts with focusing on the most important component: the well-being of our teachers.

The experience of this vignette highlights emotional regulation as a crucial skill for teachers. When educators are equipped with tools to navigate their own emotional state, they are better positioned to support students compassionately and effectively. Punitive responses often address symptoms rather than causes and may inadvertently escalate behaviour. As Jennings and Greenberg (2009) argue, teachers who regulate their emotions foster more positive classroom climates. The next vignette explores the limitations of punitive approaches and considers how NLP techniques, when paired with restorative practices, can offer more empowering, relational pathways for addressing behavioural challenges in education.

2.5 Vignette 3: Threats, humiliation and fear-based tactics

While relief teaching in a Year 7 and 8 space, I came across Student B. I noticed her immediately because she did absolutely no work, no writing, no reading. She had recently joined the school and quickly formed a friendship with one of the more boisterous students, Student C. Student C repeatedly told me that the reason Student B was not engaging was because she could not read or write. As a relief teacher, I know students sometimes fabricate stories, but this did not feel like one.

Student B could not even form words on the page. I tried different ways to encourage her, but I could see she needed more time and support than I could offer while managing 25

other students. My intuition told me that her lack of work was more about her belief that she could not do it than her actual ability. In my practice I saw how beliefs are stored and reinforced neurologically; when a student held a limiting belief like “I can’t do this,” it shaped their reality (Hallbom & Hallbom, 1998). To reach Year 7 or 8 and “not be able to read or write” would take a series of setbacks, reinforced over time. Townsend (2011) concluded that students having the belief in their personal capabilities, the opportunities and the support needed to achieve their goals is the pathway to their success.

As an overall theme in my experience, if students do not believe they can do something, they often will not even try. Hattie and Anderman (2013) reinforce this in their work on self-efficacy: “Academic self-efficacy, in particular, refers to the belief that one can successfully carry out the tasks and behaviours necessary to reach a designated level of academic achievement” (p. 64). This belief, or lack of it, becomes a barrier to learning, and a core pattern I see across multiple classrooms. How we respond to these beliefs matters deeply.

The following day, Students B and C were caught with a vape. The day began with our usual morning hui of karakia, notices, and quiet readiness. The principal was notified. What followed was an overwhelming display of punitive discipline. He entered our shared space visibly angry and began yelling at both girls. Student C who was the louder, more confident friend refused to let Student B go down alone. As a result, he directed his fury at them both. He threatened expulsion. He told them if they were kicked out of this school, no other school would take them. “That is, it. Your education ends here.” From an NLP perspective, this is a textbook example of anchoring but only in this case, anchoring fear, shame, and worthlessness to school itself (O’Connor & Seymour, 1990). Instead of separating the behaviour from the identity, this response fused the two, possibly reinforcing a negative self-concept in both students.

Maslow reminds us that belonging and self-esteem must be met before learning can occur (Snow & McCown, 2015). This moment shattered both. Misbehaviour was handled using a zero-tolerance approach, exclusionary, public, and demeaning. School policies grounded in zero-tolerance principles, while intended to enforce safety, often remove students from community contexts that are essential for growth. This is what happened here. The entire Year 7– and 8 hui, four classrooms, over 120 students, witnessed the principal screaming at two 12-year-old girls about bringing “poison” into the school. Zero-tolerance frameworks have long been criticised as ineffective and harmful (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Weaver & Swank, 2020). They rarely produce learning and often deepen disengagement.

What happened next prolonged their public shame. Over the school intercom, for the next half day, they were repeatedly called to the office. Everyone knew who was in trouble. Everyone heard it. The principal, an older white male, had weaponised fear as a tool of behaviour control. His approach was emotionally dysregulating for everyone present. Hostetter-Mullet (2014) writes that such policies promote exclusion and isolation without exception. Student B was suspended for three days. Warnick and Scribner (2020) argue that punishments like this are fundamentally incompatible with schools as spaces of moral development and community care. They suggest restorative justice built on mutual respect, reflection, and atonement as a better fit. If schools are not safe places to make mistakes and learn about ourselves and the world then where else do students get that opportunity?

NLP is grounded in systems thinking, which emphasises that context is everything and that responses must consider the wider environment, including the emotional state of both students and staff (Tosey & Mathison, 2009). When adults model emotional dysregulation, the implicit message is that explosive reactions are acceptable especially when you are in charge. What if schools embraced strategies like reframing, helping students see a poor choice as an opportunity for learning rather than a sign of failure? Or used dissociation by stepping back from heated moments to access more resourceful responses (James & Woodsmall, 1988)? These techniques do not dilute consequences. They elevate learning. Instead of shaming students into silence, NLP offers tools for reflection, self-awareness, and growth. And instead of embedding fear, we anchor courage, empathy, and choice. That is the kind of education our future deserves.

Reflection and Application

Looking back on this incident, I began to question the role of discipline in learning. When students act out, schools often default to punishment as a first response, but this rarely addresses the root causes of behaviour. From an NLP perspective, such reactions risk anchoring negative self-beliefs instead of associating consequences with specific actions. Techniques like reframing and shifting perspective help students reflect on their choices while preserving self-worth (O'Connor & Seymour, 1990). Not all students are fortunate enough to come from homes where emotional regulation, reflection, or communication skills are taught. For many, school is their primary learning space so why would not that learning include soft skills like conflict resolution, empathy, and emotional awareness? If schools are not safe spaces for learning from mistakes, where else will students gain these essential tools?

This vignette emphasises the use of NLP strategies to augment teacher-student interactions and manage classroom dynamics effectively. It also highlights the limitations of punitive punishment and the need for restorative justice. The punishment in this case unsettled the entire cohort and failed to provide a constructive solution. The emotional ripple effects were real and lasting. Zero-tolerance approaches like this have long been discredited (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008), yet they persist in schools that conflate discipline with control. NLP, which draws from systems thinking, offers a different lens. Applied to education, it sees schools as whole ecosystems where mistakes can be transformed into opportunities for relational and social learning. Restorative practices align naturally with this philosophy, privileging reflection over blame, repair over shame, and community over control. In environments like these, both teachers and students are more likely to thrive.

A common challenge that affects teachers' well-being is the managing of disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Continuous high levels of stress and frustration affect teachers' mental and emotional health while also reducing their effectiveness in the classroom. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) found that teachers with higher emotional competence create more prosocial classroom environments and experience less burnout, which reinforces the need for tools that support emotional resilience. NLP offers powerful tools and techniques in this context by supporting reflective practice and empathetic communication. Rapport building and reframing are fundamental NLP techniques that assist teachers in developing trust-based relationships which provide students with positive perspectives on their challenges.

Since this event, my approach to behaviour has shifted away from control and toward co-regulation, a space where mistakes become learning, and the emotional experience is separated from identity. Karunaratne (2010) explains that NLP tools such as reframing, and representational awareness can enhance learner agency and encourage emotionally intelligent responses from teachers. In a future incident like this, I would hold a restorative, private conversation with the student using perceptual positions to help them reflect, reframing to shift meaning, and the metamodel to unpack any limiting beliefs. I cannot always change the system, but I can create spaciousness inside it. Cozolino (2013) reinforces this, arguing that safety and connection activate the social brain, enabling learning to occur.

This event affirmed my belief that the most valuable thing I can offer students is care, presence, and recognition of their whole selves, emotional, mental, spiritual, and human. What this vignette made clear is that students do not learn through fear, shame, or interrogation and yet that is what many schools unconsciously model. We justify

punishment because it is all we have ever known. As Perry (2021) states, trauma-responsive classrooms must be built on trust, connection, and emotional safety, not fear. When students feel safe, anchored, and seen, everything else, even learning, starts to flow.

This final vignette explores the long-standing educational reliance on punitive responses to behaviour, contrasting it with the relational, systems-informed alternatives offered by NLP. It illustrates how disciplinary practices, when modelled from leadership, shape the emotional tone of a learning environment and embed unconscious messages into the culture of a school. What made this incident impactful was not just the behaviour of the students, but the modelling of emotional dysregulation from the very people entrusted to lead. The cost of this is not always immediate, but it is lasting. As Brackett et al. (2011) highlight, the emotional climate established by teachers significantly influences student conduct and the overall classroom environment. NLP, by contrast, offers a way to reframe, regulate, and restore. The next two vignettes, placed in Appendix K due to word count, explore what happens when these principles are applied well, both at the individual and systemic level, offering a vision of what is possible when emotional intelligence, safety, and values-aligned leadership are at the centre of school life.

2.6 Reflections Across Vignettes

Across these three vignettes, a powerful through-line emerges: that real learning, the kind that changes people, happens not only in the structured spaces of curriculum, but in the emotional and relational moments that define our classrooms. Each story reveals how unconscious systems, unspoken beliefs, and patterned behaviours shape outcomes far more than content alone. From teacher expectations to emotional regulation, from punitive discipline to leadership modelling, each vignette illustrates how deeply the inner world of educators impacts the outer world of learners.

What NLP offers in this context is not a fixed set of strategies, but a flexible framework for self-awareness, regulation, and intentional response. These vignettes show its potential as a toolset that helps educators' separate behaviour from identity, recognise the invisible narratives shaping student engagement, and anchor their practice in compassion rather than control. NLP enables us to intervene not just in what we do, but how we think, how we see our role, how we speak to ourselves and others, and how we recover from challenge. In this way, it serves as both a mirror and a map for the practitioner. This is supported by recent research demonstrating that NLP can positively impact emotional intelligence and reflective capabilities in educators (Zhang et al., 2023).

The vignettes also reflect my journey, one from unconscious participation in the system to conscious, reflective inquiry. Through these lived stories, my understanding of education has expanded: not just as academic instruction, but as a relational, emotional, and neurological ecosystem. The teacher is not separate from the learning; they are the environment. Their state, their words, their perceptions, their ability to regulate emotion and hold space, these are what set the conditions for growth.

While Vignettes 4 and 5 appear in the appendix, they serve a vital role in extending this narrative arc. They offer aspirational counterpoints, lived experiences of what is possible when NLP-aligned principles are modelled well at both classroom and systemic levels.

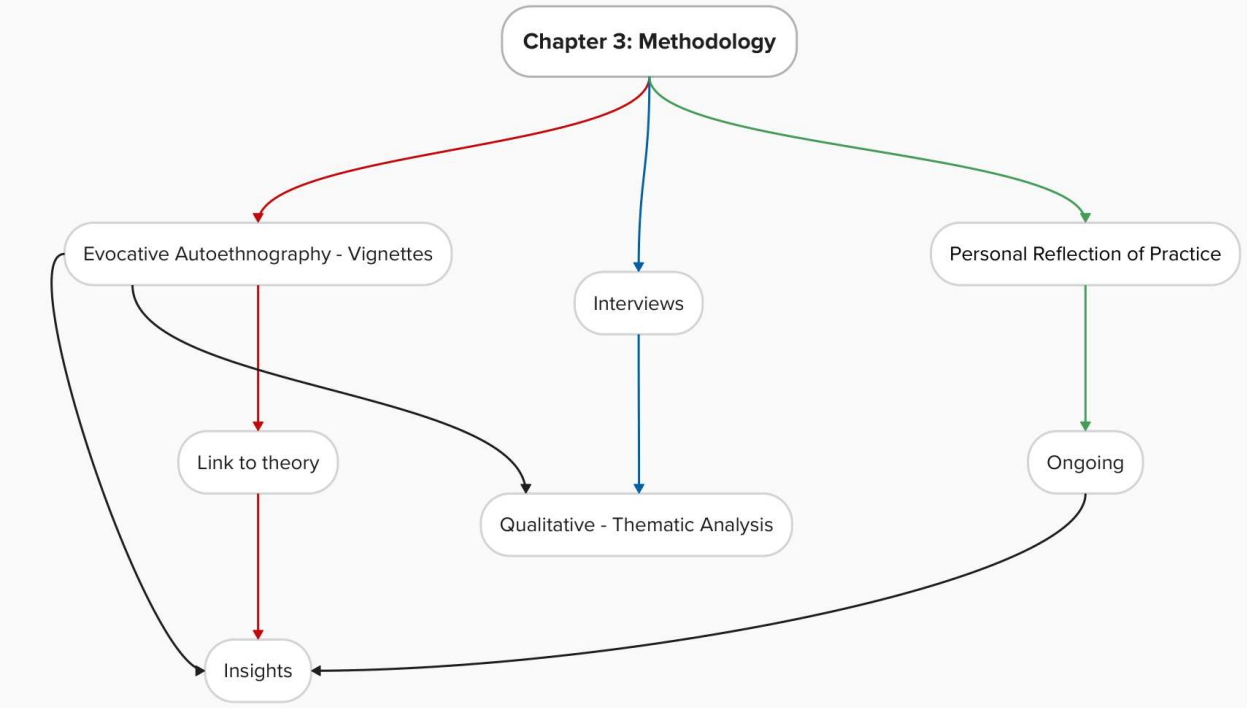
These vignettes do more than illustrate isolated incidents. They contribute to a larger inquiry: How can neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) support teacher wellbeing as a mechanism for navigating stress, burnout, and emotional demands in education. The answer begins here but continues and is carried forward in the next chapter, where I outline the methodology and methods that shaped this study.

Chapter 3-Methodology

The methodological structure of this research was designed to integrate autoethnography, interviews, and reflective practice into a coherent system of data generation. These components were intentionally selected to support the exploration of the research question: How can neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) support teacher wellbeing as a mechanism for navigating stress, burnout, and emotional demands in education? Each element functioned as a method for capturing data: interviews provided participant narratives, reflections enabled ongoing insight, and theory contextualised both.

Figure 2

Interconnected Elements of the Research Process (Author's own)



The interconnected elements of the research process are visually represented in Figure 2. At the centre is *Chapter 3: Methodology*, which links to three main components: evocative autoethnography (including personal narratives), interviews, and personal reflection of practice. These components are connected to theory, and the interview data is analysed using thematic analysis. The personal reflection of practice is described as ongoing, which indicates an approach that creates continual insight. Figure 2 illustrates how each element helped to gather the information necessary to answer the research question: How can neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) support teacher wellbeing as a mechanism for navigating stress, burnout, and emotional demands in education?

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodology used to explore the impact of NLP on the wellbeing of teachers within educational settings is detailed. First, the research approach is discussed, outlining the rationale for selecting pragmatism and a social-constructivist paradigm and qualitative inquiry. The subsequent section specifies the data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews with NLP-trained educators and autoethnographic reflections. Ethical considerations, and Māori consultation, are also discussed. Thematic analysis is introduced as the method for data analysis, with a clarification of the way that core themes were established and streamlined. Lastly, the chapter outlines limitations of the methodology and challenges that were encountered during the research process, alongside adaptations made to support the validity of the study.

3.2 Research Design and Rationale

In modern education, the search for professional development strategies that enhance both teacher wellbeing and teaching effectiveness remains essential. This research explores the transformative potential of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) within educational practice by examining how its techniques support educators' emotional resilience and pedagogical impact. By analysing the lived experiences of NLP-trained teachers, including my own, this study explores how these tools were experienced as contributing to wellbeing and enriching classroom practice within our specific contexts.

The methodology utilised in this research is rooted in a pragmatic inquiry approach, which focuses on practical application and problem solving in real world contexts (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). This approach aligns with the research's aim to find how NLP techniques are applied in the practice of educators in diverse educational contexts.
It combines teaching as inquiry (Ministry of Education, 2007; Timperley et al., 2007) with a social-constructivist paradigm (Vygotsky, 1978; Creswell, 2014) to assure a comprehensive exploration of teacher's experiences.

Pragmatism allows for versatility in methods instead of following one fixed approach or research method. Rather, flexibility is encouraged by enabling the use of different methods that best answer the research question (Morgan, 2014), making it especially effective for analysing complex issues such as educator wellbeing and teacher effectiveness as it employs a diverse perspective to fully comprehend their lived experiences.

Additionally, this study implements a social-constructivist paradigm which asserts that knowledge is co-created through shared experiences and social encounters (Vygotsky, 1978). This point of view aligns with examining teacher wellbeing, as it takes into consideration that teachers, through consistent interactions with students, colleagues, and professional learning environments produce their professional identity and practice alongside their emotional regulation and perseverance. By including an awareness of the experiential and relationship quality of well-being, this approach connects to the focus of this research on the ways that NLP knowledge and skills assist teachers in managing the demands of their profession.

To acquire a comprehensive understanding into the real-life experience of educators, this study leverages qualitative and evocative autoethnography. Creswell and Poth (2018) report that qualitative methods are especially effectual in embodying specific, subjective, meaningful personal experiences, which fits within the exploration of how educators integrate NLP into their professional practice. According to Ellis and Bochner (2016) evocative autoethnography allows the researcher to blend personal narratives with the larger societal or cultural frameworks. This paradigm offers a reflexive discovery of the way that professional practices and personal experiences, such as NLP, meet.

This methodology provides a robust and reflexive foundation for exploring the potential of Neurolinguistic Programming in the field of Education. Through the amalgamation of pragmatism, a social-constructivist paradigm, qualitative enquiry and evocative autoethnography, this study considers not only the practical application but also the profound personal insights of educators using NLP. These methodological approaches support the study's central theme on teacher wellbeing allowing an extensive understanding on the impact of NLP in the educational context. The section that follows defines the research aims and how the selected methodology contributes to these aims.

3.3 Methodology / Research Approach

By foregrounding participant experience, reflective analysis, and thematic interpretation, the methodology directly aligns with the research aim: to examine how NLP supports professional growth and well-being in educational settings. The research approach of this study is pragmatic and combines teaching as inquiry and a social-constructivist paradigm. It incorporates qualitative inquiry including evocative autoethnography as its principal methods. This approach enables a thorough inquiry of the subjective experiences of NLP-trained educators and contextualises these experiences within their educational settings.

Rationale for Choice:

This approach was selected to unearth a nuanced understanding of the multi-faceted phenomena under consideration, that is the impact of Nuero-Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques on the professional practice of educators with a lens on wellbeing as the core focus. Pragmatism allows a flexibility in utilising different methods to answer the research question being asked (Morgan, 2014). Qualitative Inquiry, specifically autoethnography, enables researchers to systematically examine personal experiences generating links to the broader cultural context and personal insights. (Elliset al., 2011).

Teaching as Inquiry:

The Teaching as Inquiry cycle is a reflective guide and organising framework that teachers can use to help them learn from their practice and build greater knowledge. It cultivates self-reliant professional development by engaging what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described as an optimal learning state of immersion, often called flow. NLP echoes this emphasis, framing curiosity as its optimum state for learning (Bandler & Grinder, 1979; Andreas & Faulkner, 1994). Timperley et al. (2007) highlight that teaching as inquiry encourages evidence-based reflection, through consistent iterations of questioning, investigating, and adapting, educators can improve their practice.

In my experience as an educator, I have found that committing to lifelong learning including the growth of my professional self has been essential for sustaining my practice. Teaching as inquiry provides a framework that allows the practitioner to formulate their own question about their teaching practice, objectively evaluate their experiences, and use the data gained to improve their pedagogy and teaching strategies.
A key component of this approach is that it is practitioner-led. Learning is constructed by the practitioner enabling an engagement in reflective problem solving when faced with unfamiliar challenges in personal and professional contexts.

Teaching as Inquiry also highlights the gaps in knowledge encouraging practitioners to look into extended learning beyond the perspective being investigated (immediate practice). It creates a space where critical reflection can take place without external judgement or pressure from institutions. This approach fits this research especially well as NLP promotes curiosity driven learning, a state where the practitioner is empowered and actively engaged in their own learning. The practitioner is “at cause” (explain this) having produced their own questions, analysed their experience and gained an insight into what works and does not work allowing a refinement of strategies. In this way, this method becomes a suitable

framework that allows teachers to navigate professional challenges, build self-awareness through reflection, and continually improve their practice

Qualitative Inquiry and Autoethnography:

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003) qualitative research emphasises the investigation of personal viewpoints and experiential perspectives/subjective realities providing a comprehensive analysis of meaning and context. In this study, qualitative inquiry is employed to explore how NLP trained educators experience its impact, particularly in relation to their well-being and professional practice.

A qualitative approach is adopted to answer how and why questions, particularly regarding the real-world insights of educators using NLP in their practice. Through semi-structured interviews and literature reviews, this methodology aligns with the research goals of capturing subjective human experiences and deriving meaning through thematic data analysis.

Autoethnography enables me to share my personal narratives while systematically locating them within the wider educational setting, providing richer understanding into the way that NLP skills have influenced my teaching and professional identity.
Additionally, autoethnographic reflections are triangulated with semi-structured interviews to create a multi-faceted perspective, establishing a nuanced understanding of the data. This integration strengthens the study by combining self-reflections integrated with broader perspectives, creating a well-rounded and contextually informed view of NLP in educational practice. Due to ethical considerations regarding my role as a relief teacher, reflections on practice are fictionalised (see 3.8 Ethical Considerations for details)

Social Constructivist Paradigm:

I will be integrating a social constructivist paradigm as a basis for my research. Central to this paradigm is that every interaction between two or more people opens a window of possibility for acquiring new information or augmenting knowledge that already exists. Meaning is created as a direct result of these interactions. Vygotsky (1978) describes learning as an inherently social process. Learning is co-created through social interactions and adapted by cultural and professional contexts.

I see education as a social construct that builds knowledge through social exchange. The exchange of knowledge is further modified and defined by the cultural foundation that

constructs/configures how people code their experiences and the meanings they give them. Bruner (1996) stresses that its culture, that gives individuals frameworks and tools to interpret and construct meaning from their interactions, emphasising that our memories and perspectives are shaped by culturally driven schemas.

Acknowledging that teachers' experiences with NLP are influenced not only by their social interactions and professional contexts but cultural structures as well, this study adopts a social constructivist lens to analyse these experiences as socially constructed realities. By gathering and analysing in-depth qualitative data, my intention is to understand how NLP impacts educators' professional practice and wellbeing utilise these insights to inform my models of practice professional development frameworks.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

The data collection for this study occurred across two primary sources: (1) semi-structured interviews with NLP-trained educators and (2) autoethnographic reflections presented as narrative vignettes. These were supported by a continuous journaling process that recorded shifts in my professional identity, classroom decisions, and moments of insight. This layered method allowed for the collection of diverse practitioner perspectives and personal interpretations, aligning with the study's focus on teacher well-being and NLP integration.

Reflective Vignettes

A "Highlights of the Week" model was used to document key moments in my teaching practice. These reflections focused on emotionally or professionally significant classroom events that revealed how NLP tools were consciously or unconsciously embedded in my decision-making. The vignettes combined fictionalised accounts with critical reflection and relevant literature to protect anonymity and synthesise themes across multiple experiences. By structuring these reflections thematically, I was able to capture patterns in my own evolving practice.

I intermittently revisited and expanded on these reflections throughout the research period, using a learning journal to explore what was working, what was not, and what insights were emerging. This journaling process helped me become more self-aware and attuned to the systems shaping my teaching environment. In line with NLP's axiom that "there is no failure, only feedback," this reflective framework enabled me to explore challenges without judgement and use them as learning tools.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Eight NLP-trained educators were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. I began with my own professional NLP networks and extended invitations to educators who met the inclusion criteria. All participants held at least an NLP Practitioner certification from an International Association for Neuro-Linguistic Programming (IANLP) accredited training provider; some were trained at Master Practitioner level. Participants initially included primary and secondary teachers, but the definition of 'educator' was expanded during recruitment to include tertiary lecturers, learning designers, and facilitators.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom or in person at cafés, based on participant preference. The conversations explored the practical impact of NLP strategies and the ways in which they influenced classroom presence, student relationships, and professional growth. Participants were reminded not to disclose identifying student or colleague information (see Ethics Cat B in Appendix D). All responses were anonymised through the use of pseudonyms and reviewed to ensure no inadvertent disclosure.
The interview questions were framed around the research aims and explored the following:

- Describe your perception of your classroom and practice before you learnt NLP.
- What would you say is the difference in your practice after you integrated these skills and techniques?
- What tools and strategies have you found most effective, and why?
- What tools and strategies have you found ineffective, and why?
- Knowing what you know about the education system, how do you see NLP fitting into that system?
- What do you believe made NLP work for you?
- Give me a general view of your current (or most recent) responsibilities. How do you use NLP in relation to those?
- How did you integrate NLP into your classroom?

Practitioner Journaling

Alongside the vignettes, I maintained a reflective journal throughout the research period. This allowed me to track inner shifts in understanding, frustrations, breakthroughs, and tensions that emerged as I deepened my inquiry into NLP and its place in education. These reflections were not submitted as primary data but were instrumental in refining my awareness as a researcher-practitioner and deepening the interpretation of interview themes.

3.5 Participant Recruitment

Description of Sampling Strategy:
This study used purposive sampling to intentionally recruit educators with Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) training across diverse educational contexts, and snowball sampling, where existing participants helped identify further participants through their networks ((Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) Initial recruitment focused on teachers working in the public sector, particularly primary and secondary school educators who had completed at least an NLP Practitioner-level qualification. All participants were required to have completed training that met IANLP certification standards, ensuring international quality.

To address the limited pool of NLP-trained educators in Aotearoa New Zealand, the definition of 'educator' was broadened to include facilitators, trainers, learning designers, tertiary lecturers, and coaches. This allowed for greater diversity in participant background, teaching context, and NLP application. Snowball sampling was then used to extend reach, with initial participants recommending others who met the study criteria. As noted in the Māori Consultation subsection, the dual requirement of NLP training and teaching experience limited Māori representation, constraining the depth of cultural analysis. I mitigated this by engaging with literature on colonising education paradigms and drawing on these perspectives to critically frame my analysis (Smith, 2012; Walker, 2004).

Justification for Sampling Approach:
Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure participants possessed both formal NLP training and practical experience in education. This included those working in public schools, tertiary institutions, or adult learning environments. This sampling approach was essential to align with the research question, which explores the positive impact of NLP on professional practice with a focus on teacher well-being.
Eight NLP-trained educators participated in the study. All participants met the inclusion criteria and were identified through my personal NLP networks or extended contacts via snowballing.

Figure 3

Participant Demographics (Author's Own)

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Educational Context	NLP Qualification	Teaching Experience
Ben	Male	40s–50s	Tertiary Education	Master Trainer	15 years
Hiroshi	Male	30s -40s	Secondary + Training/Facilitation	Master Practitioner	~10 years
Gagan	Male	40s–50s	Secondary	Master Practitioner	~20 years
Faiz	Male	50s+	ESOL + Secondary	Master Practitioner	~25 years
Esmurelda	Female	50s+	Secondary (Science) → Retired	NLP Master (since 1980s)	22+ years
Diana	Female	40s–50s	Private Music & Drama	Practitioner/Master	24 years
Anahera	Female	40s–50s	Coaching/Training (incl. children)	NLP Trainer	20+ years
Carina	Female	40s–50s	Tertiary Lecturer + Academic Tutor	Master Practitioner (since 2001)	20+ years

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Thematic Analysis and Model Development

I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify patterns and develop meaningful themes from both the interviews and autoethnographic reflections. This process laid the foundation for constructing a practitioner-informed model of NLP integration in educational contexts.

Steps to Ensure Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, I designed interview protocols that aligned closely with the research aims and were structured to elicit rich, experience-based responses. I triangulated interview data with reflective vignettes and practitioner journaling to cross-validate key findings. This triangulated data was then analysed thematically to generate nuanced insights, which directly informed the development of the model discussed in Chapter 6.

Methodology for Data Analysis (Thematic Analysis)

Transcription: Interviews were recorded and transcribed simultaneously using Otter.ai. My previous academic mentor specifically advised against spending time correcting minor errors in the transcripts, encouraging me to prioritise analysis over verbatim accuracy.

Coding: Using Microsoft Excel, I manually highlighted key phrases and grouped recurring ideas into initial codes. These codes were revisited and refined multiple times to ensure depth and alignment with the research focus.

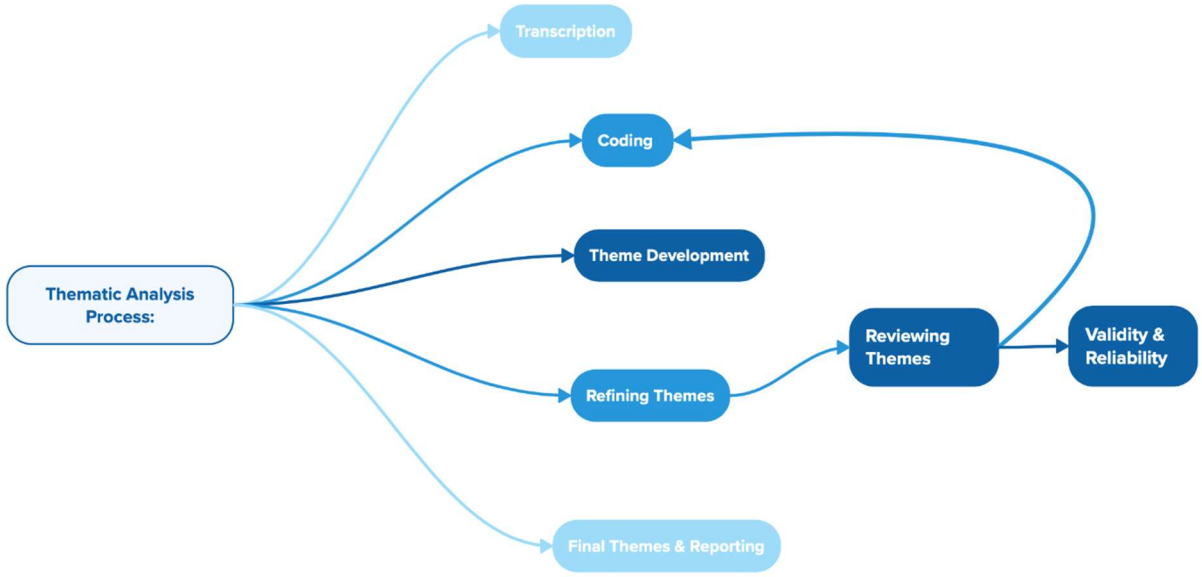
Theme Development: I grouped the refined codes into broader thematic categories, using visual mapping within Excel to explore relationships and intersections across the data set. Refining Themes: I further refined these categories into finalised themes that accurately reflected the perspectives of participants and the recurring principles of NLP-influenced practice.

These steps were followed to ensure that the final themes provided an authentic account of how educators experienced NLP's impact on their professional identity, classroom dynamics, and well-being.

This process is illustrated in Figure 4, which depicts the recursive relationship between coding and theme development central to thematic analysis.

Figure 4

Thematic Analysis Process: Coding to Theme Development (Author's own)



Adapted from Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Six-phase framework for thematic analysis. Visual representation created by the author. *Adapted Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. Creative Commons Attribution Licence 3.0* A validity and reliability check was incorporated during the theme reviewing stage to ensure methodological rigour.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Note: In line with teaching as inquiry, I gained new insights which informed my pedagogy. However, I did not formally test in the classroom because of the nature of my employment as a relief teacher. Any discussion in this thesis on my practice will be via reflection and fictionalisation.

Ethical Process

This study did not require sensitive or specific information about schools or students, and no classroom observations were conducted. The research focused on teachers' lenses and their lived experiences of NLP within their professional practice. The aim was to surface gaps, patterns, and shared themes from a diverse range of educators across primary and secondary sectors.

Māori Consultation

This study does not claim to speak for Māori but acknowledges the value of further work that explores NLP in Kaupapa Māori contexts. Consultation with Otago Polytechnic's Kaitohutohu office was undertaken to ensure alignment with bicultural research expectations and Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles. This process prompted reflection on the cultural positioning of my inquiry. One participant, Diana, explicitly spoke from a Māori perspective, and her insights highlighted tensions around NLP's monocultural framing. While NLP training and practice are grounded in Eurocentric premises of individual mapping and subjective experience, I became increasingly aware that such framings do not necessarily align with collective worldviews, including Māori perspectives centred on whānau and whakapapa. In response, I sought to remain critically reflexive about how these differences shaped both the scope of my research and its limitations.

While tikanga Māori encompasses a wide range of principles that differ across iwi, hapū, and whānau (Mead, 2003), several core values aligned closely with the stance I adopted in this research. Manaakitanga, or the ethic of care and generosity, resonates with NLP rapport-building and presuppositions of respect, both of which prioritise relational safety (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bandler & Grinder, 1979). Whanaungatanga, the principle of kinship and relational connection, mirrors NLP's emphasis on shared meaning and modelling effective practice (Macfarlane et al., 2007; Andreas & Faulkner, 1994). Utu, often translated as reciprocity and restoring balance, was enacted through my offering of koha-based training and is reflected in NLP tools such as reframing and goal setting, which seek to restore alignment (Mead, 2003; Dilts, 1998). Wairuatanga, the recognition of spiritual and non-material dimensions, connects with NLP's focus on unconscious processes and internal states (Marsden, 2003; Hall, 1996). Finally, kaitiakitanga, or guardianship and responsibility, was expressed in my role as an educator applying NLP as a tool for safeguarding student wellbeing and transmitting knowledge (Mead, 2003; Grinder & Bostic St. Clair, 2001). These examples suggest that although NLP originates from Eurocentric framings of the "individual map of the world," its practices can be reinterpreted in ways that align with key tikanga values when applied relationally in education.

Practically, I honoured bicultural expectations by attempting to include Māori educators in my participant pool, although this proved challenging given the dual requirement of NLP training and teaching experience. On reflection, I recognise that this design choice constrained Māori representation and limited the depth of cultural analysis. If I were to redesign the study, I would take a more intentional approach. This could include partnering with Māori educators or researchers to co-design recruitment strategies; broadening

inclusion criteria to invite Māori educators who apply NLP strategies outside IANLP certification pathways; conducting targeted outreach through Māori professional associations, iwi-based education groups, or kaupapa Māori schools; and extending consultation beyond recruitment by inviting Māori colleagues to contribute advice on analysis and interpretation. These steps would provide fuller pathways for Māori voices to be present and strengthen the cultural integrity of the research. Although I did not adopt a formal kaupapa Māori methodology, and I acknowledge that my narrow participant criteria (requiring both NLP training and teaching experience) limited inclusivity, I still sought to uphold tikanga values such as manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, utu, and wairuatanga in the way I engaged with participants throughout the research process.

A limitation of this research is the limited Māori participation, which constrained the depth of cultural perspectives represented. However, the resonances identified between NLP and tikanga Māori suggest fertile ground for further inquiry into how such frameworks might interact in educational practice. Appendix C provides evidence of the Māori consultation process undertaken for this project.

Ethical Reflections

This research prioritised participant privacy and informed consent, ensuring that all individuals were made fully aware of the research purpose, process, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any point. Interviews were conducted in respectful, non-intrusive environments to minimise risk and maximise participant comfort. Sensitive information was handled in accordance with ethical research guidelines, with consultation available from an ethics review board if necessary.

3.8 Methodological Limitations

A challenge that did arise during the sampling process was the limited number of NLP-trained educators available for engagement, particularly those within a small geographic region like New Zealand and within the education sector (e.g., primary and secondary schools). To address this challenge, the scope of “educator” was broadened to include anyone who passed on knowledge and influenced the developmental trajectory of learners. This redefinition encompassed trainers, facilitators, learning designers, coaches, and professionals in the tertiary education sector.

Additionally, a snowball sampling technique was employed, where initial participants recommended others who met the criteria. While this expanded the pool, it can introduce

bias by over-representing like-minded networks; to mitigate this, I began with diverse initial participants ('seeds') and encouraged broad referrals (Browne, 2005; Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). Efforts were made to ensure diversity across educational backgrounds, cultural identities, years of NLP experience, and teaching contexts, which enhanced the representativeness and depth of the data.

To address these limitations, future research could expand the sample size and include a more diverse range of participants from various educational settings and geographic locations. Combining quantitative measures with qualitative inquiry could further strengthen the research design, allowing for deeper triangulation and generalisability of findings.

3.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the chosen methodology of integrating qualitative inquiry, evocative autoethnography, and thematic analysis within a social-constructivist paradigm offered a sound, context-sensitive framework for exploring the impact of NLP on educator practice and well-being. Despite limitations in sampling scope, methodological integrity was upheld through triangulation, ethical transparency, and alignment with the study's aims. This blend of approaches demonstrates how practitioner-led inquiry can generate rich, credible insights, contributing meaningfully to both NLP-informed pedagogy and the broader discourse on teacher well-being and professional development.

Chapter 4 Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

The findings in this chapter are drawn from semi-structured interviews with NLP-trained educators. The chapter addresses the central research question: How can neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) support teacher wellbeing as a mechanism for navigating stress, burnout, and emotional demands in education? The chapter is framed through teacher wellbeing, defined as the interplay of resilience, identity, and context. It reports participants' accounts of how NLP influenced pedagogical approaches, emotional resilience, and professional identity, consistent with prior work on reflective and adaptable practice (Bolstad, 2011; Tosey & Mathison, 2010).

Findings are organised into four themes with subthemes, and all findings are presented in figures that synthesise participant accounts. Pseudonyms are used, and participant background information is provided in Appendix L. These findings provide the basis for the subsequent discussion and report how participants described NLP as influencing their states, practice, and relationships.

4.2 Theme 1: Advancing Pedagogical Practice and Well-being through NLP

This theme reports participants describing NLP as enhancing practice and wellbeing, including stronger student connection, flexible responding, and increased confidence and clarity. Participants also described NLP as supporting regulation, communication, and pedagogical growth.

Sub-theme 1.1 (Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7, Figure 8) reports how rapport building, presuppositions, anchoring, and reframing supported student engagement, emotional safety, and in-the-moment state management, contributing to teacher wellbeing through practical, relational, and cognitive strategies. Sub-theme 1.2 (Figure 9) reports on well-formed outcomes, a goal-setting process that participants said reduced stress and sustained motivation. Sub-theme 1.3 (Figure 10, Figure 11) reports on meta model questioning and self-talk, which participants described as enhancing confidence and communication. Sub-theme 1.4 (Figure 12) reports on modelling expert practice, which participants said helped them grow professionally and support students' identity development.

These subthemes report participants describing how NLP supported confident, values-aligned teaching where wellbeing and effectiveness were interdependent.

Figure 5

Building Teacher Wellbeing through relational and state biased NLP tools (Author's own)

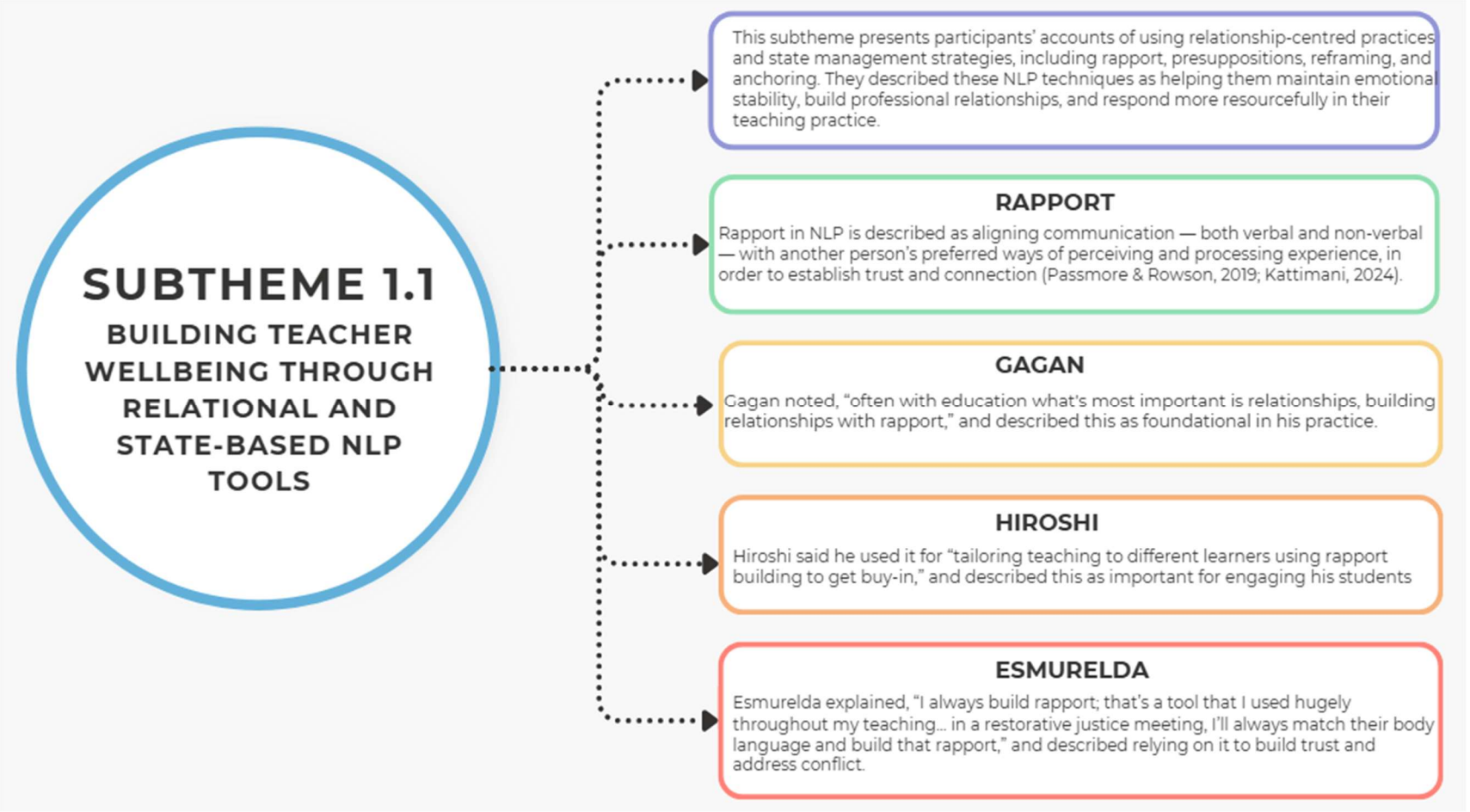


Figure 6

Building Teacher Wellbeing through relational and state biased NLP tools (Author's own)

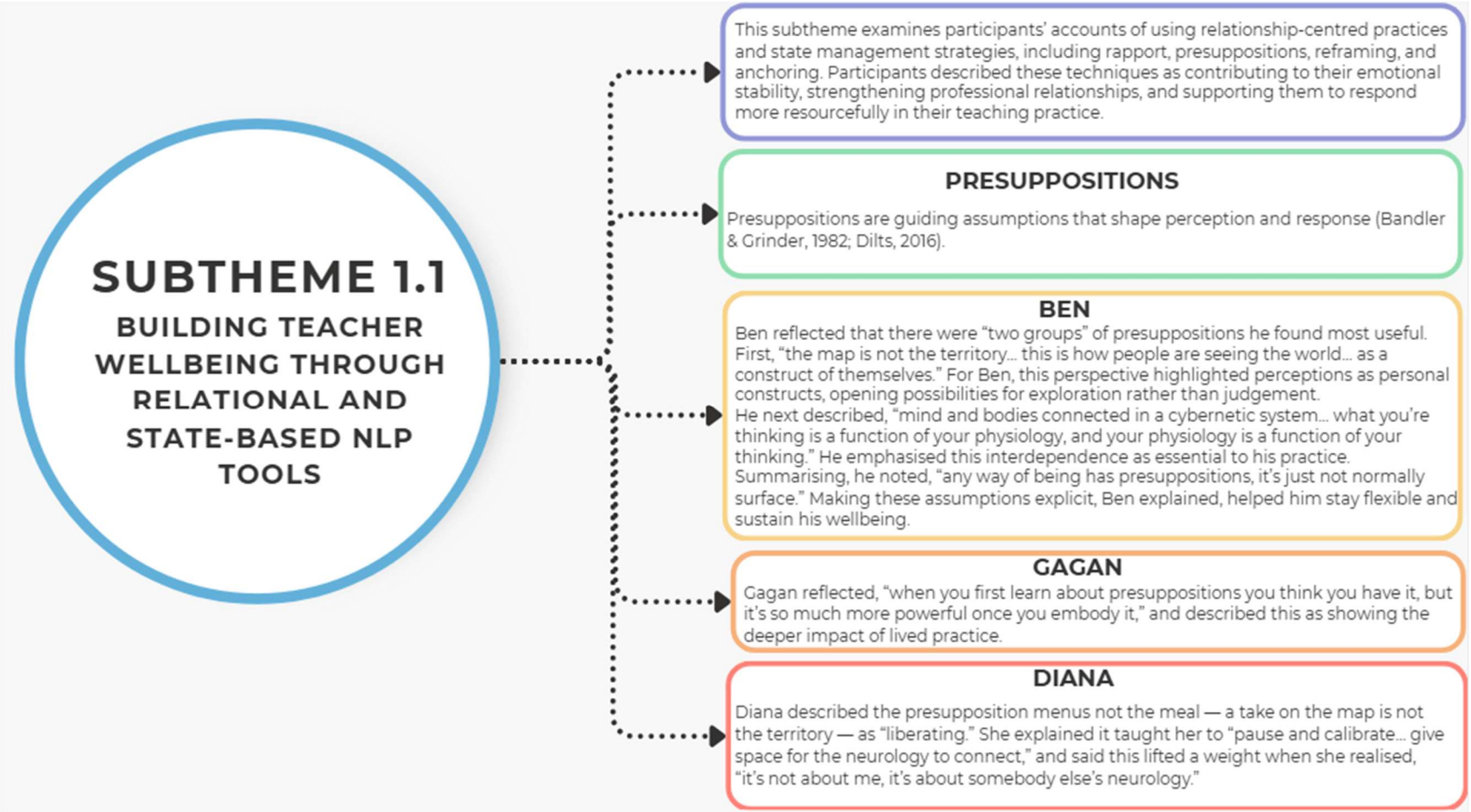


Figure 7

Building Teacher Wellbeing through relational and state biased NLP tools (Author's own)

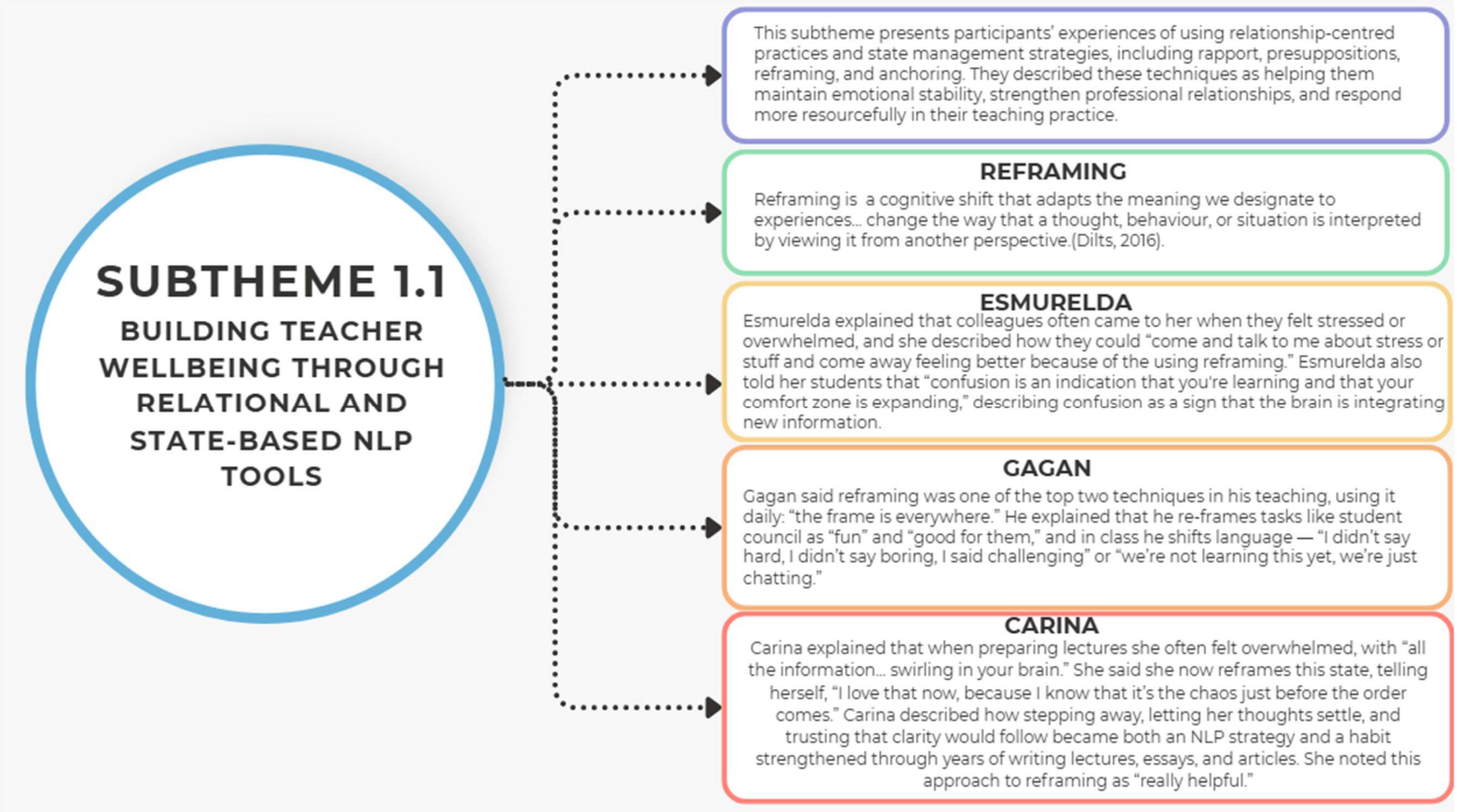


Figure 8

Building Teacher Wellbeing through relational and state biased NLP tools (Author's own)

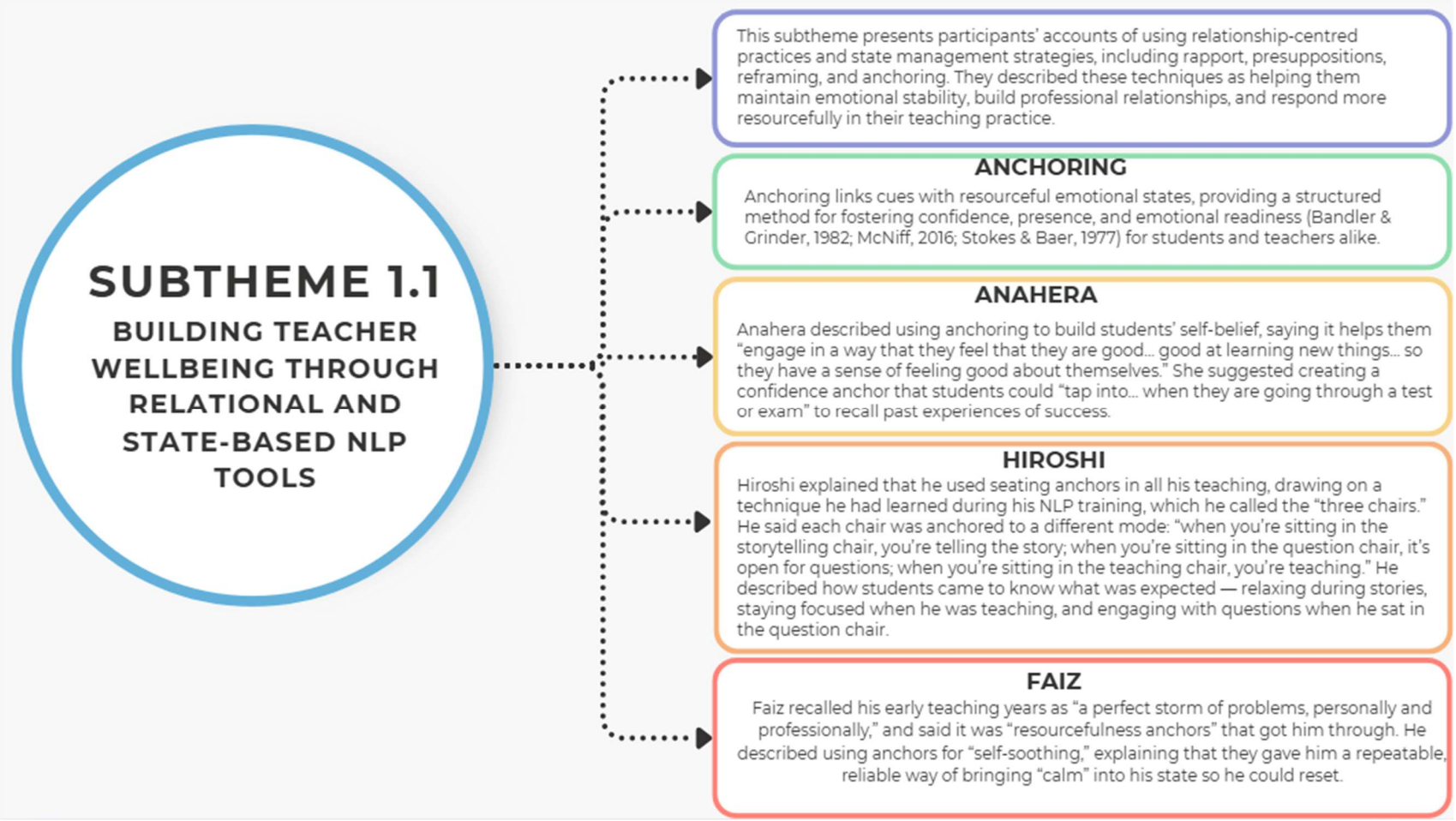


Figure 9

Clarifying Purpose to enhance motivation and reduce stress (Author's own)

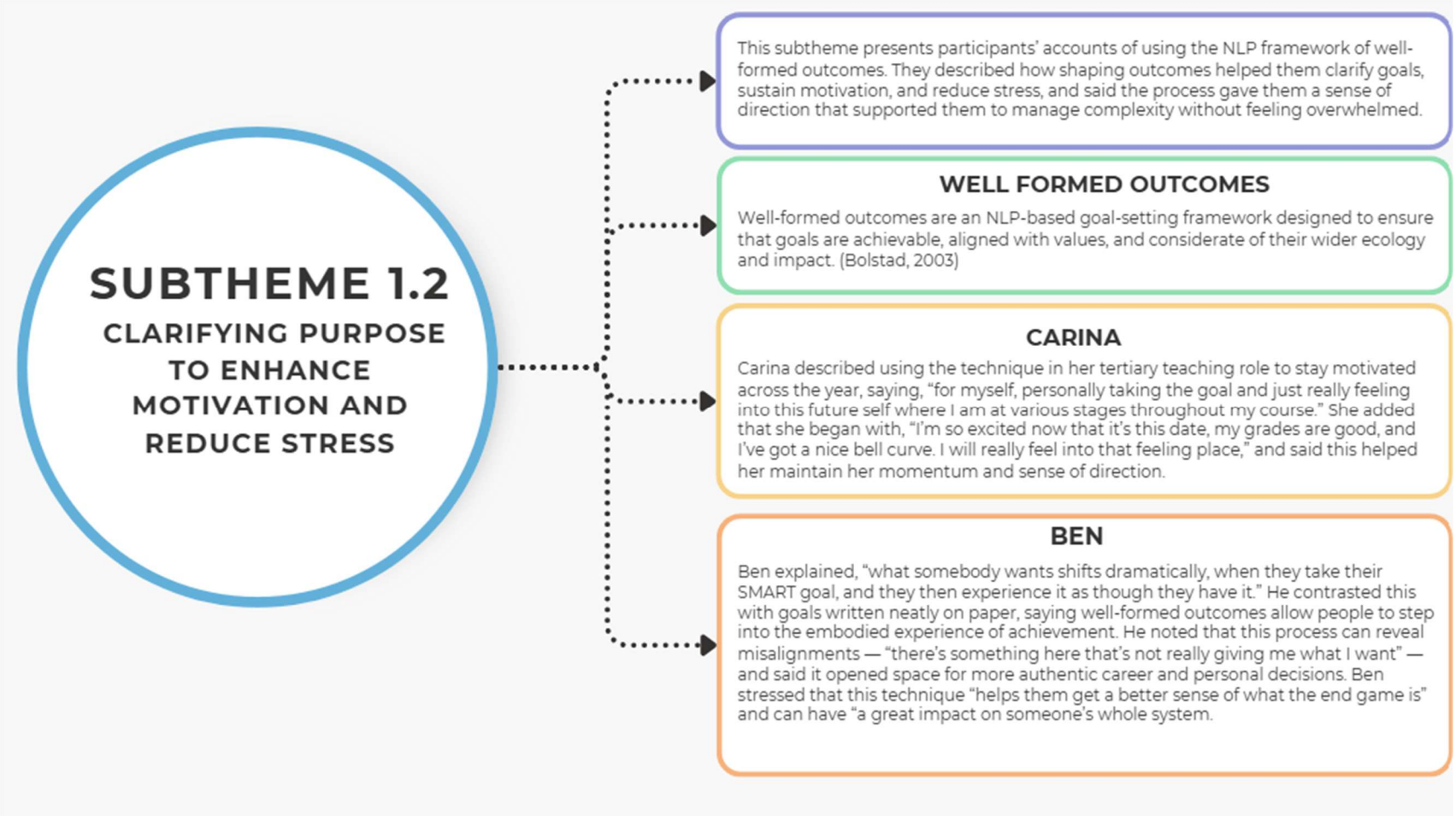


Figure 10

Strengthening Confidence through Language Awareness (Author's own)

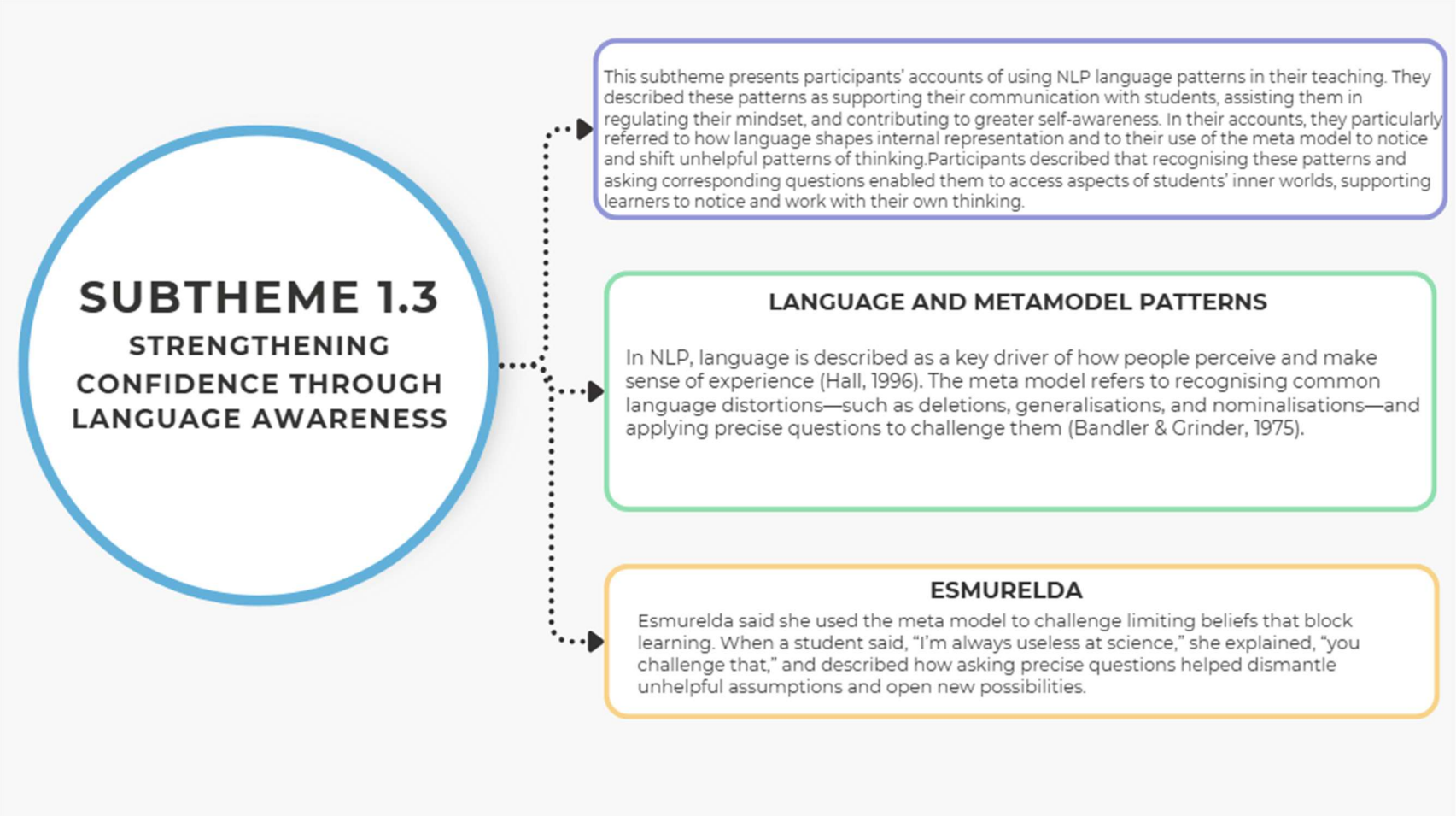


Figure 11

Strengthening Confidence through Language Awareness (Author's own)

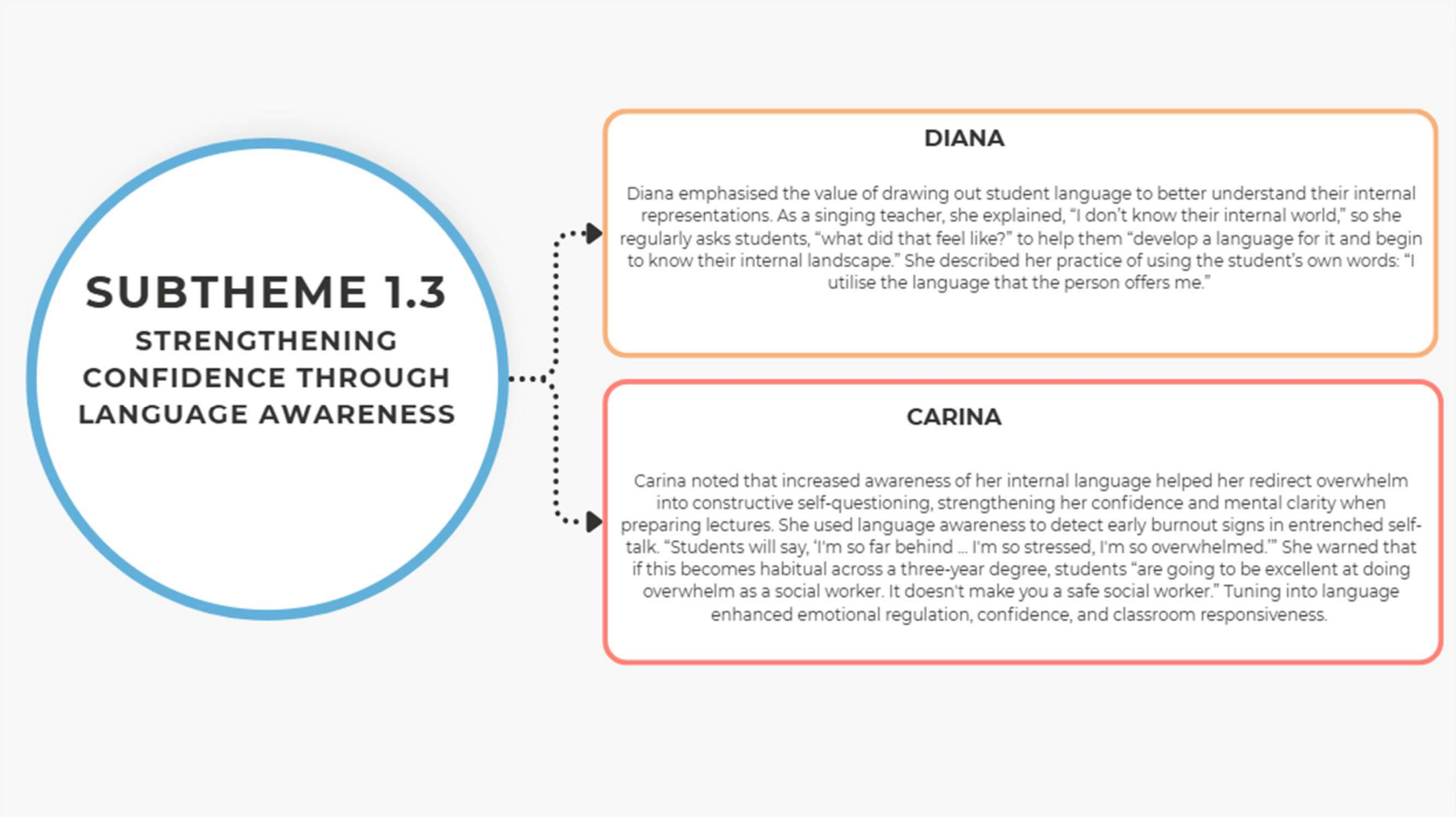
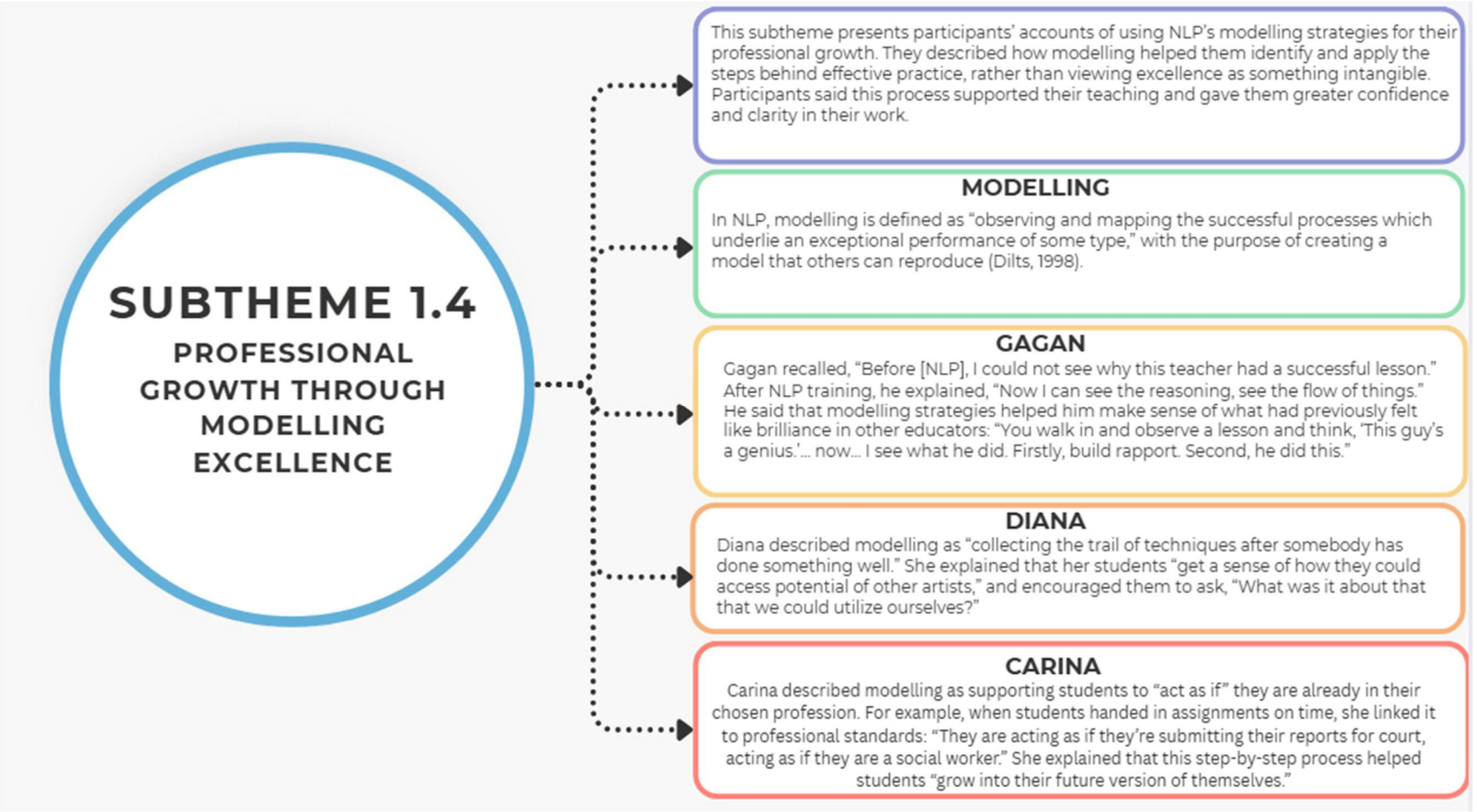


Figure 12

Professional Growth Through Modelling Excellence (Author's own)



Theme 1 Conclusion:

The four subthemes report participants describing NLP strategies as supporting both pedagogical advancement and teacher wellbeing through practical and values-driven application. Participants described using rapport-building, reframing, anchoring, well-formed outcomes, and language patterns to support classroom practice, teacher identity, and wellbeing. They reported these tools as helping them manage emotional flexibility, clarify intentions, and build more responsive relationships with students, colleagues, and themselves. Participants also described presuppositions and linguistic awareness as supporting self-awareness, which they used to navigate emotional challenges and sustain positive classroom dynamics. Overall, participants reported NLP as contributing to a values-aligned teaching identity, with wellbeing described as a necessary foundation for sustaining growth in their practice.

Figure 13 summarises participant reflections before and after engaging with NLP.

Figure 13

Teacher Identity Before and After NLP (Author's own)

PRE-NLP	POST-NLP
FELT OVERWHELMED AND EMOTIONALLY DRAINED	REPORTED GREATER RESILIENCE AND CAPACITY TO SELF-REGULATE
REACTIVE IN CLASSROOM SITUATIONS	ABLE TO PAUSE, REFRAME, AND RESPOND MORE RESOURCEFULLY
QUESTIONED PERSONAL EFFICACY	EXPERIENCED RENEWED CONFIDENCE AND CLARITY OF PURPOSE
CARRIED WORK-RELATED STRESS HOME	DEVELOPED STRATEGIES TO MAINTAIN BALANCE AND WELLBEING

Note. Theme 1 – Advancing Pedagogical Practice and Wellbeing through NLP

4.3 Theme 2: Sustaining the Self: NLP and the Inner Work of Teaching

Participants reported that NLP was used to develop internal practices supporting wellbeing and professional clarity. Accounts indicated that the pressures of teaching extended beyond pedagogy, requiring emotional regulation, values alignment, and a sense of agency. Participants described NLP as a framework they applied to navigate these demands with flexibility, reflection, and intentionality.

Sub-theme 2.1 (Figure 14) reports on how connecting with personal values helped participants anchor their professional identity. Sub-theme 2.2 (Figure 15) reports on emotional regulation strategies used in moments of pressure or complexity. Sub-theme 2.3 (Figure 16) reports on the shift from reactive to empowered mindsets, showing how NLP supported responsibility and choice. Sub-theme 2.4 (Figure 17) reports on the limits of resilience, including both growth and disillusionment.

Figure 14

Activating Teaching Identity through Personal Values (Author's own)

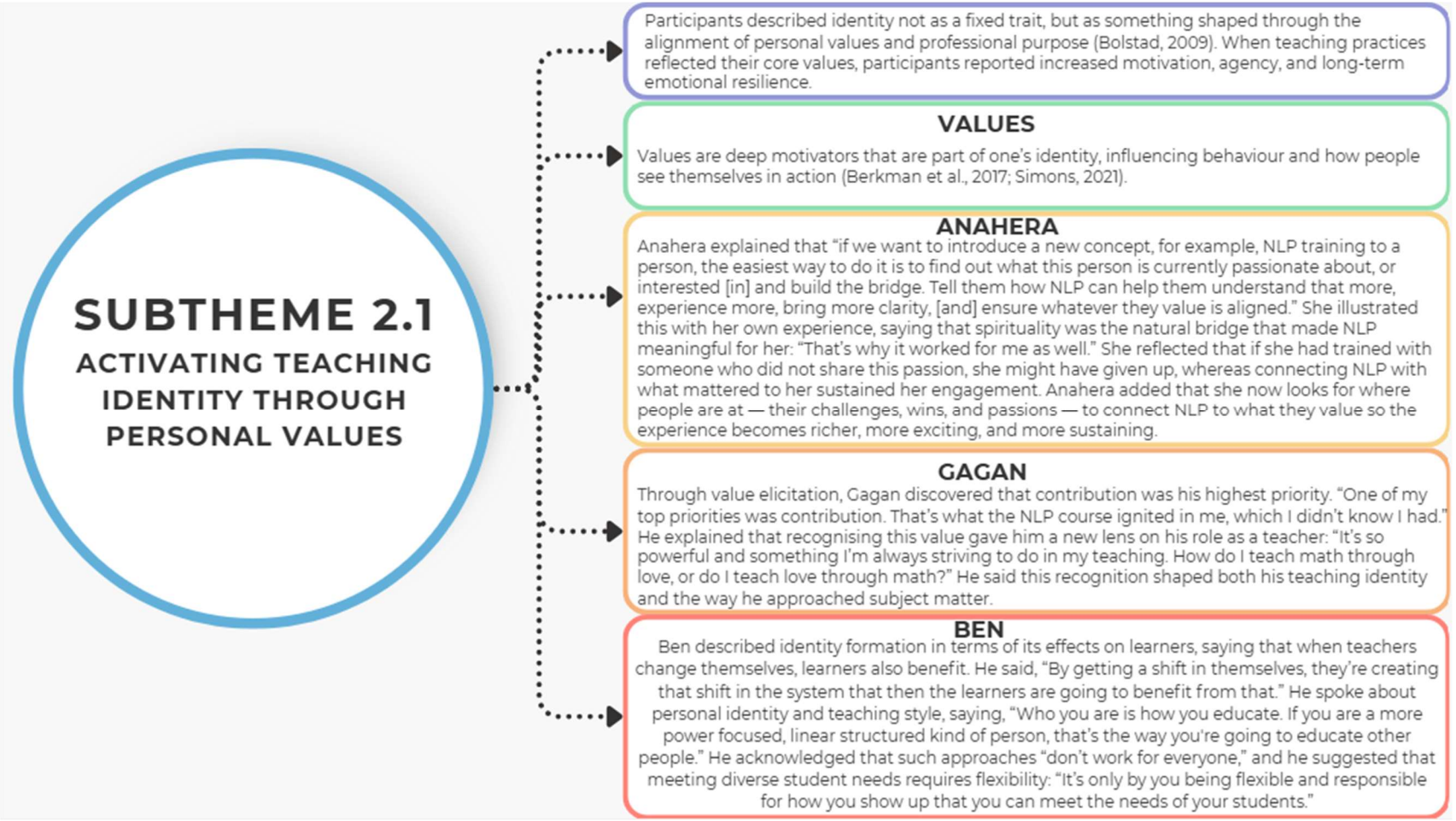


Figure 15

Cultivating Emotional Regulation and Self-Management in Complex Contexts (Author's own)

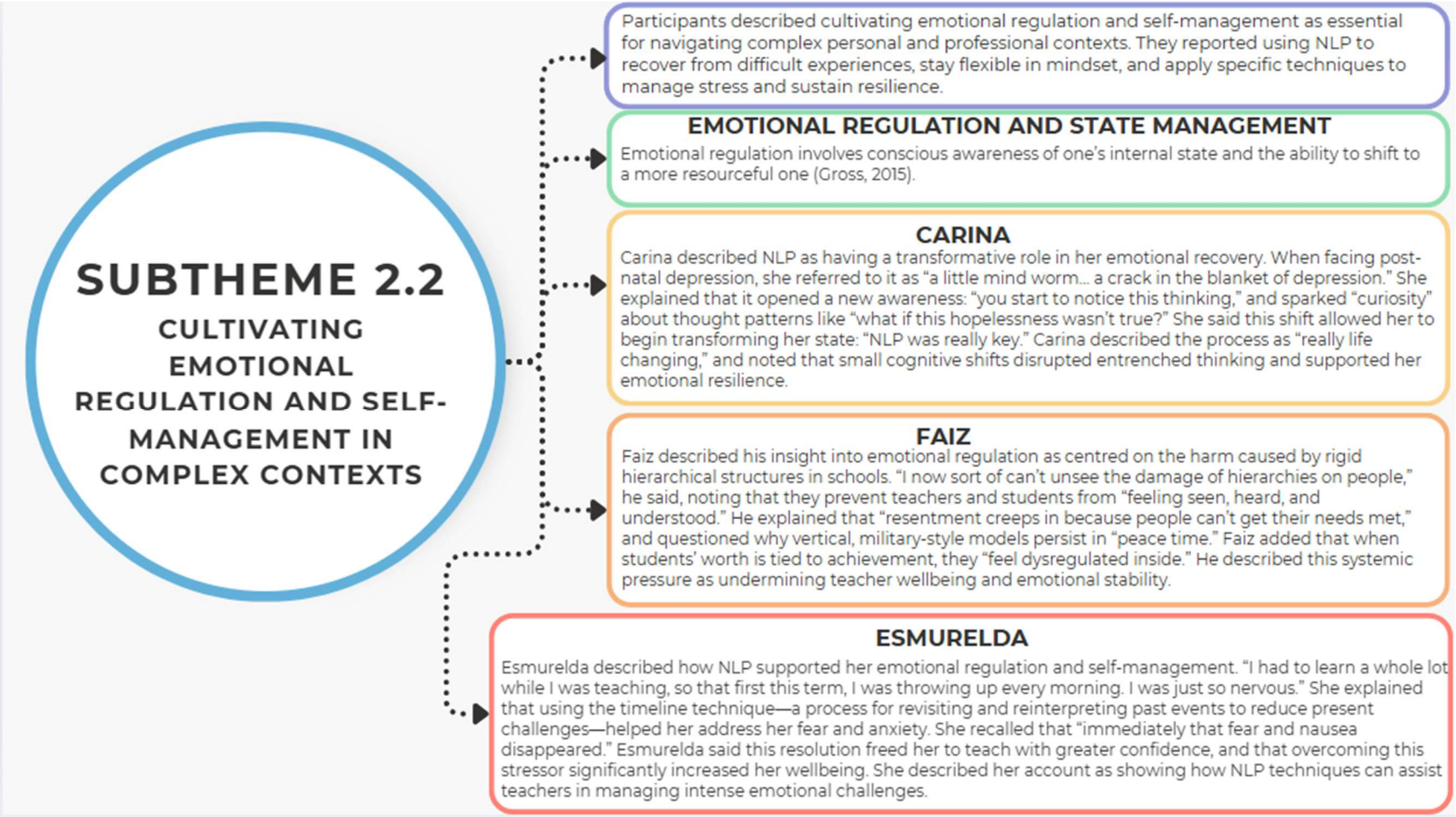


Figure 16

Empowering Agency through Personal Responsibility (Author's own)

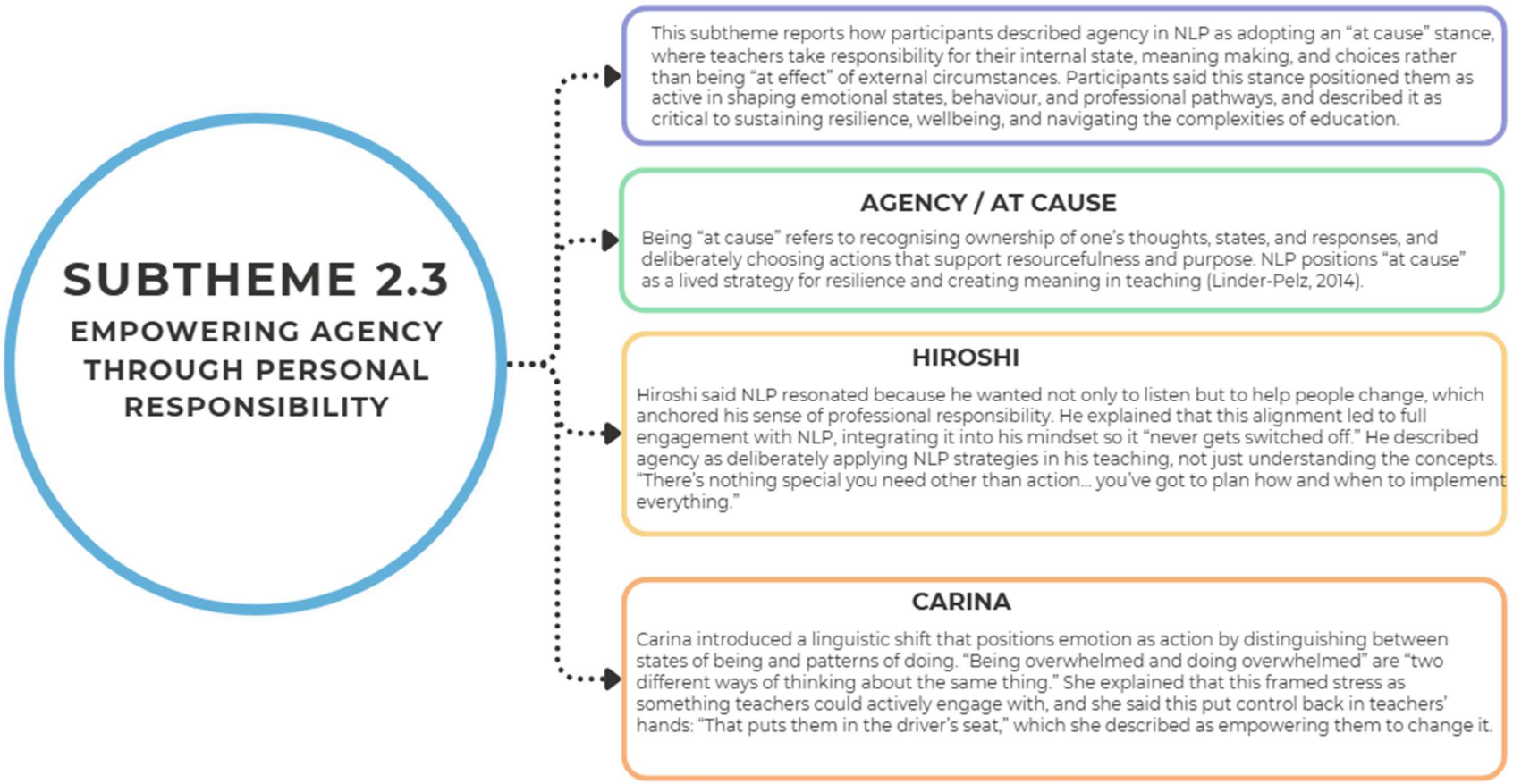
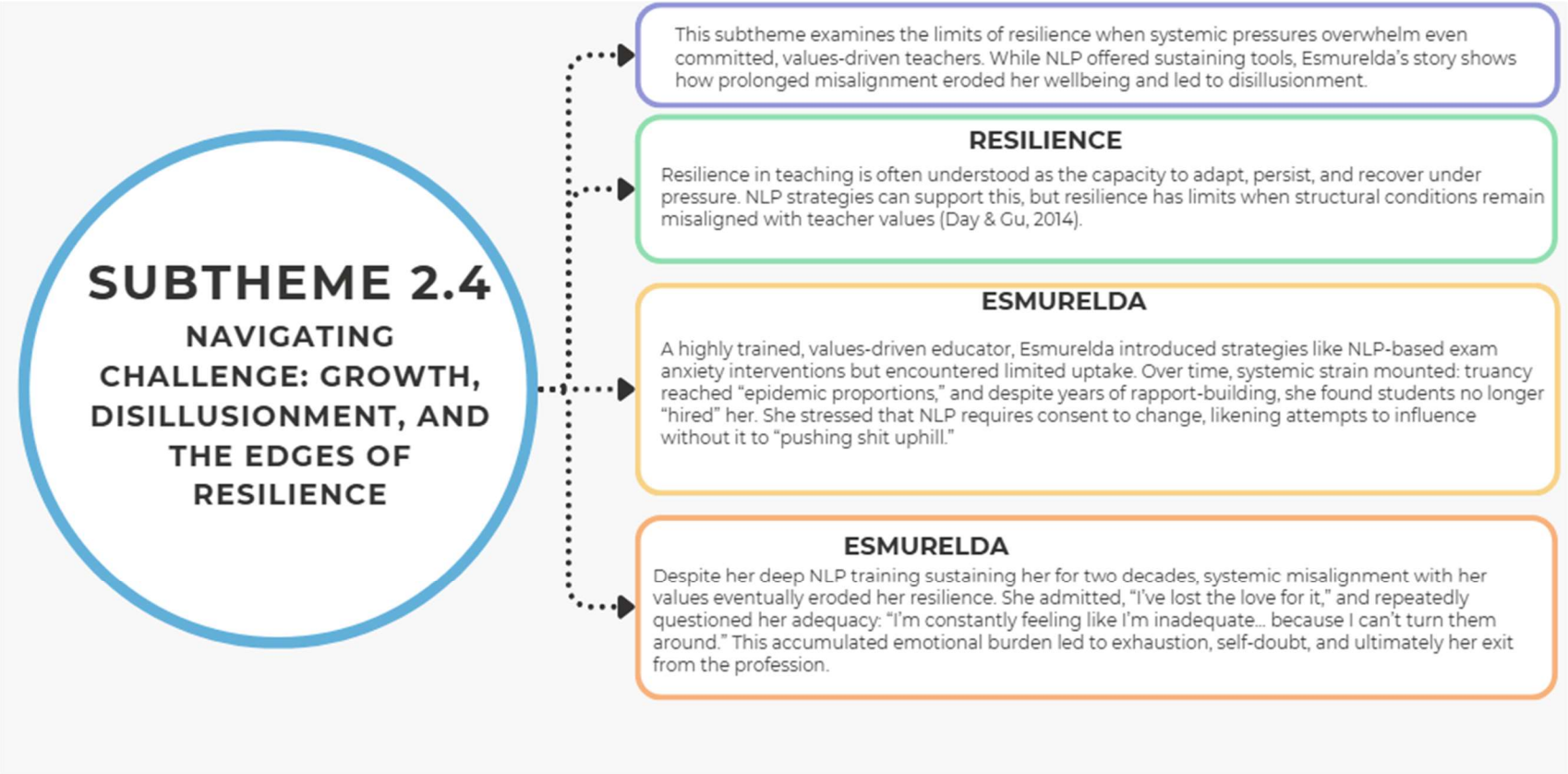


Figure 17

Navigating Challenge: Growth, Disillusionment, and the Edges of Resilience (Author's own)



Theme 2 Conclusion:

Participants described teacher wellbeing as connected to internal clarity, emotional regulation, and values-based action. Participants reported that NLP tools and perspectives were applied to manage emotional demands. Accounts indicated that using presuppositions, reframing, and reflective techniques supported greater self-awareness, intentionality, and purpose.

This theme also reported the limits of resilience. Some participants described growth, while others reported systemic strain, emotional fatigue, and trauma-related disconnection. In these accounts, NLP was described as a framework participants used to navigate tension. Participants connected this inner work with sustaining a teaching identity that was ongoing and relational, and with drawing on cultural understandings of resilience and identity.

Figure 18 presents the relationship participants reported between NLP strategies, their classroom application, and professional outcomes.

Figure 18

NLP Strategies and Reported Professional Outcomes (Author's Own)

NLP STRATEGY	APPLICATION IN TEACHING	REPORTED OUTCOME
ANCHORING	RESETTING STATE BEFORE CLASS OR AFTER CONFLICT	IMPROVED PRESENCE, CALMER CLASSROOM TONE
REFRAMING	SHIFTING PERCEPTION OF "PROBLEM" BEHAVIOUR	REDUCED STRESS, MORE CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSES
RAPPORT-BUILDING	MATCHING LANGUAGE AND BODY LANGUAGE WITH STUDENTS	INCREASED TRUST AND ENGAGEMENT
META-MODEL QUESTIONING	CLARIFYING VAGUE STUDENT STATEMENTS	BETTER COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES
PRESUPPOSITIONS	"THERE IS NO FAILURE, ONLY FEEDBACK"	PROMOTED PERSISTENCE AND POSITIVE MINDSET

Note. Theme 2 – Sustaining the Self: NLP and the Inner Work of Teaching

4.4 Theme 3: The Practitioner Transformed: NLP in Self, Mindset, and Method

Participants reported that NLP influenced both personal and professional domains. Accounts indicated a progression from learning techniques to applying them as part of professional identity, mindset, and classroom presence. Participants described greater capacity to reflect, respond in real time, and approach teaching with confidence and authenticity.

Sub-theme 3.1 (Figure 19) reports on its impact on self-concept and professional identity. Sub-theme 3.2 (Figure 20) reports on how techniques became embedded in daily practice. Sub-theme 3.3 (Figure 21) reports on sustaining emotional resilience. Sub-theme 3.4 (Figure 22) reports on experiences where NLP shaped behaviour, language, and decision-making.

These sub-themes present participants' accounts of how NLP was described as influencing self, mindset, and professional practice.

Figure 19

Transforming Identity through NLP (Author's own)

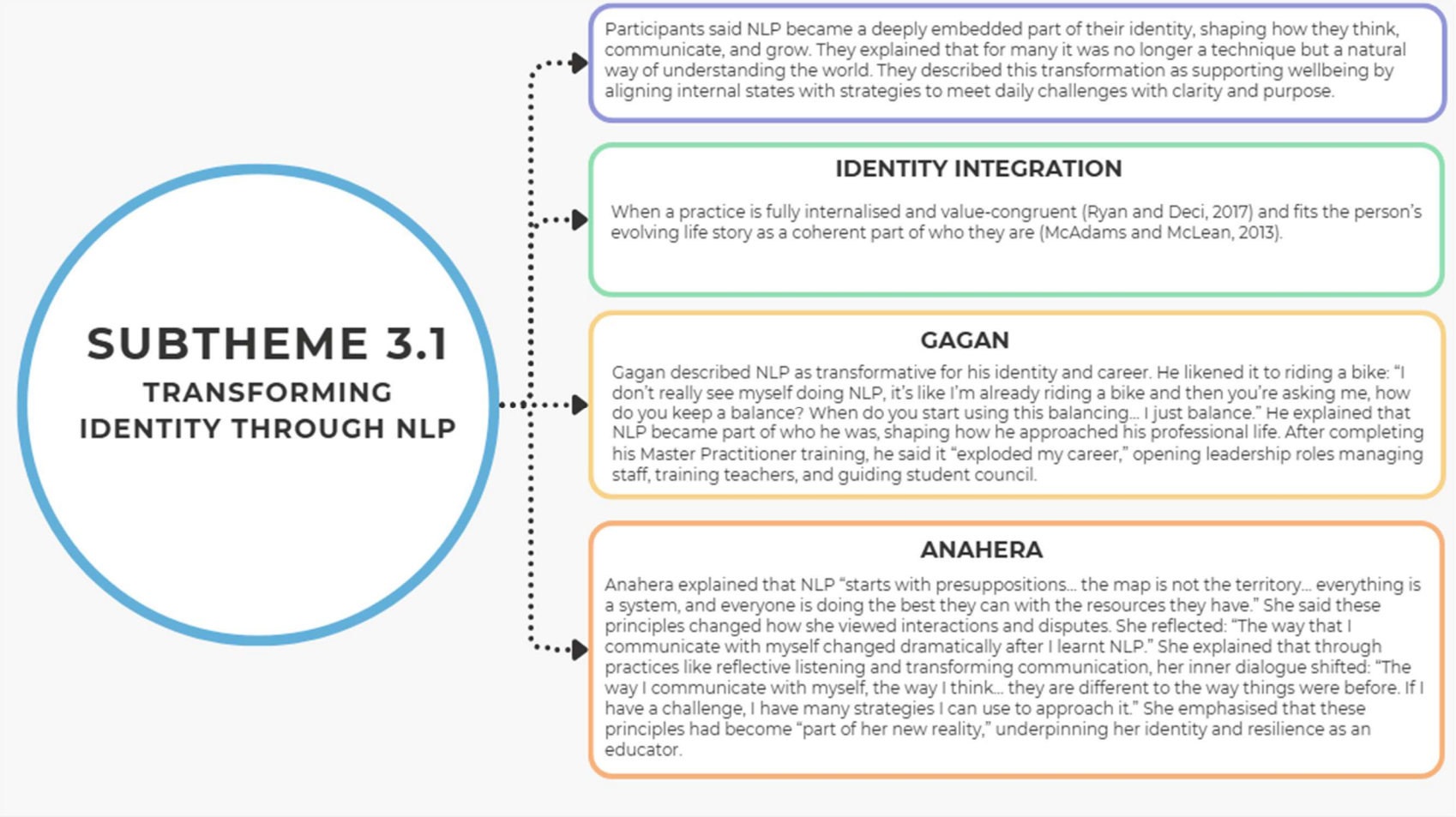


Figure 20

Applying NLP for Reflective and Responsive Pedagogy (Author's own)

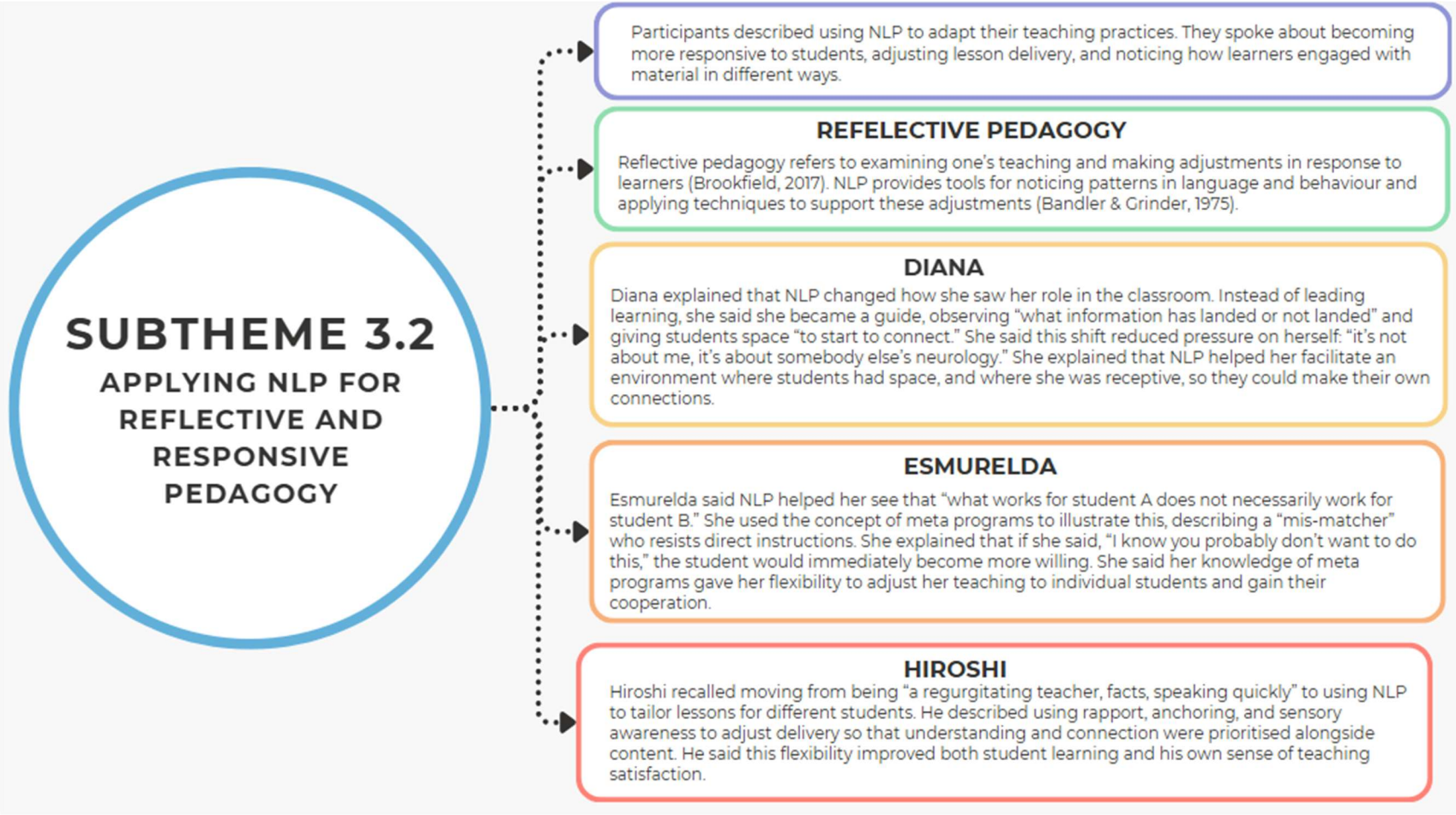


Figure 21

Supporting Emotional Resilience through NLP (Author's own)

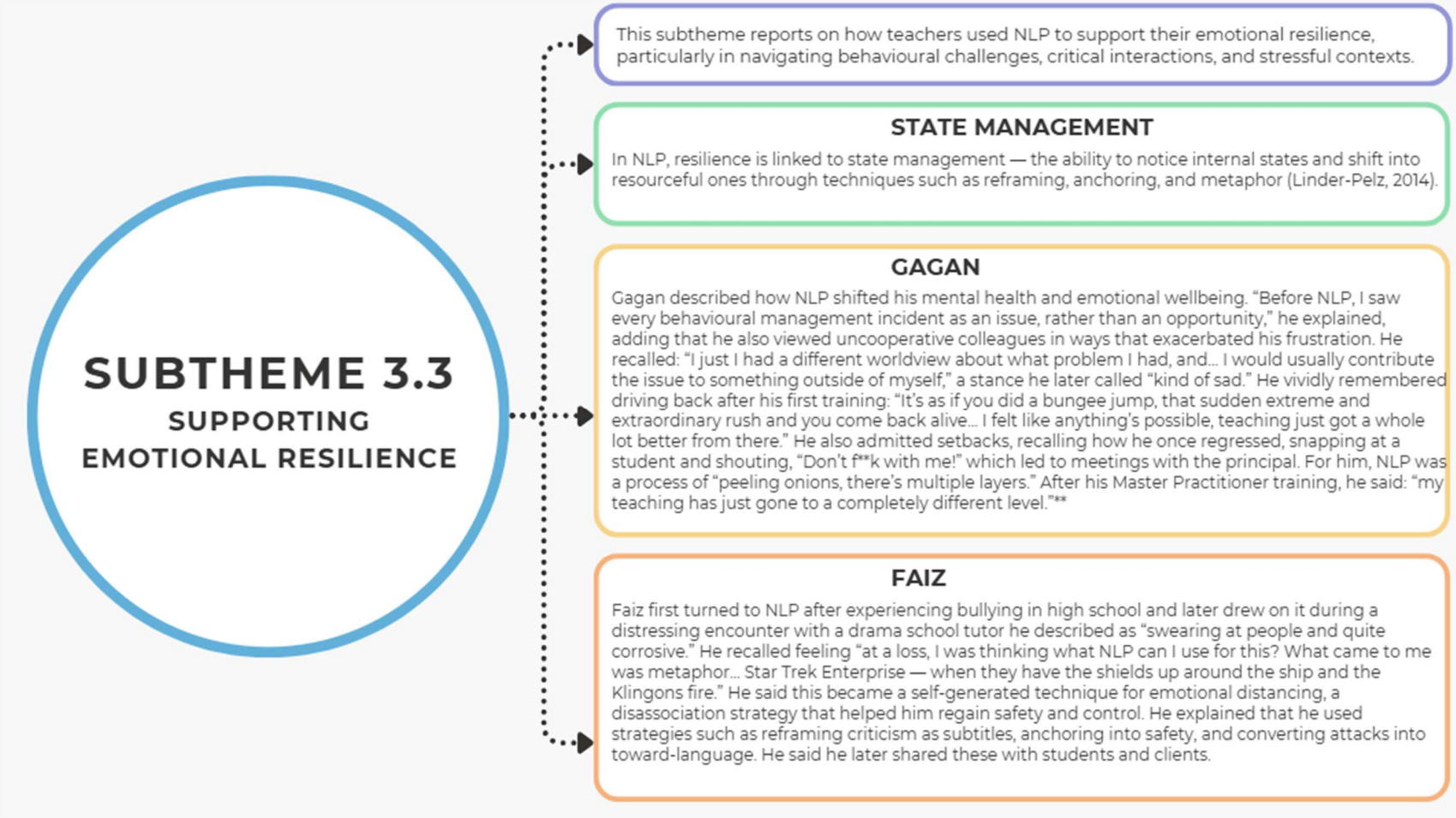
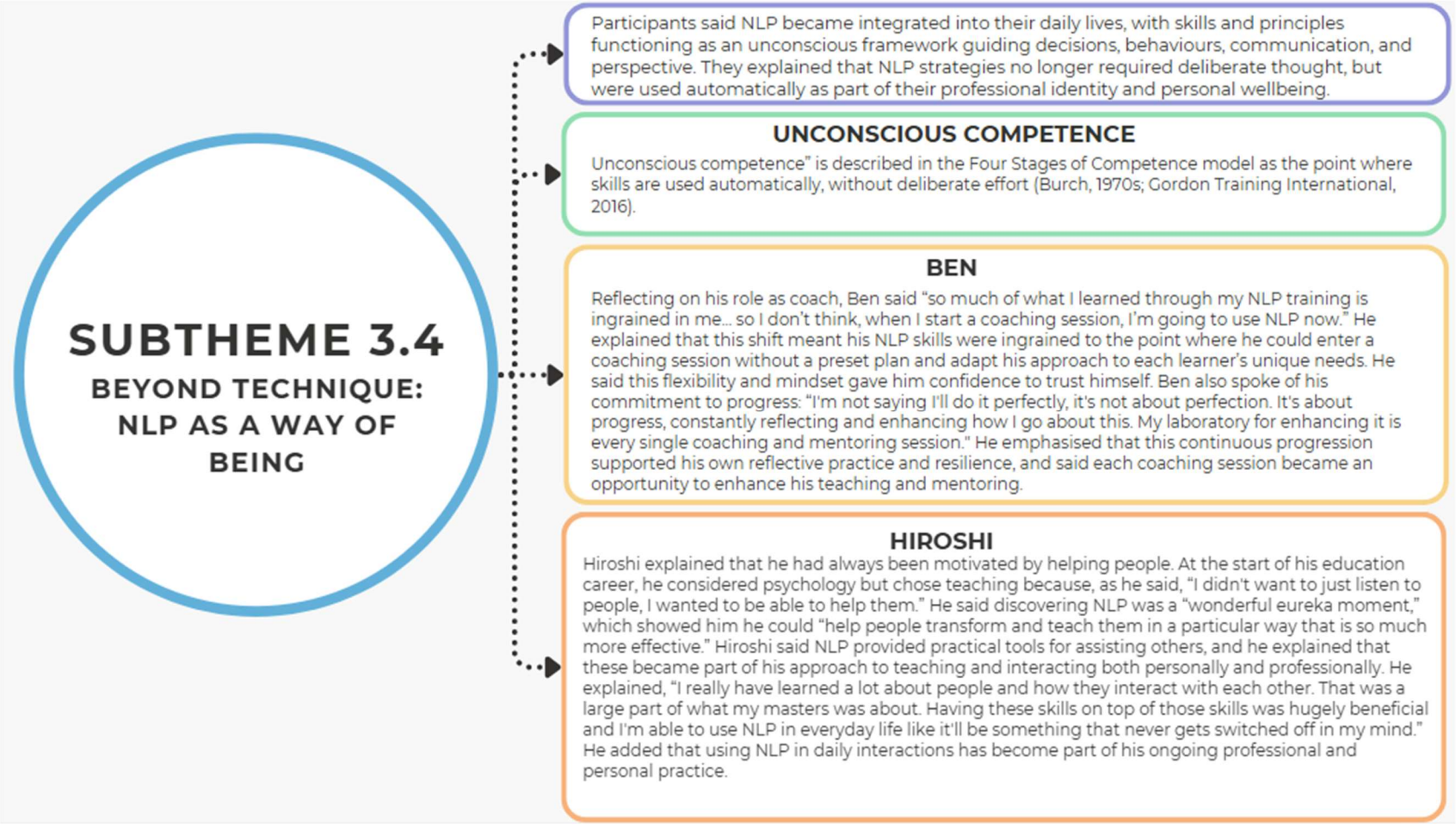


Figure 22

Beyond Technique: NLP as a way of Being (Author's own)



Theme 3 Conclusion:

Participants reported that NLP influenced professional identity, mindset, and daily practice. They described applying NLP in ways they linked to personal growth, emotional regulation, and engagement with students through intentional and flexible strategies. Accounts indicated that, over time, participants used these tools as part of their everyday thinking, teaching, and relationships. Some participants described moving from conscious use of NLP techniques to applying them more automatically, linking this to classroom practice, resilience, and professional alignment. Participants reported viewing NLP as part of how they experienced their work and professional self. They also linked NLP to sustaining wellbeing, reflective practice, and professional identity over time.

Participants reported a continuum of integration, moving from surface-level application to unconscious competence. This progression is illustrated in Figure 23.

Figure 23

Participant Accounts of NLP Integration (Author's Own)

STAGE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE IN PRACTICE
SURFACE APPLICATION	Teachers trial NLP techniques consciously	Using anchoring before class
CONSCIOUS PRACTICE	Regularly apply techniques with intention	Framing behaviour management as opportunities
UNCONSCIOUS COMPETENCE	NLP becomes part of professional identity	Responding resourcefully without conscious effort

Note. Theme 3 – The Practitioner Transformed: NLP in Self, Mindset, and Method

4.5 Theme 4: Navigating the Challenges of NLP in Education

Participants described challenges when applying NLP in educational contexts. Accounts indicated that, alongside perceived usefulness, participants encountered systemic resistance, reputational stigma, ethical concerns, and cultural limitations. Participants described adapting language, adjusting their professional role, and applying techniques with discretion and integrity.

Sub-theme 4.1 (Figure 24, Figure 25) reports on institutional constraints and the adjustments teachers made to implement NLP within coercive or hierarchical systems. Sub-theme 4.2 (Figure 26) reports on reputational barriers and how participants described reframing NLP through science, credibility, and alignment with professional norms. Sub-theme 4.3 (Figure 27, Figure 28) reports participant perspectives on who may practise NLP, how it is taught, and whose worldviews it serves. These findings present reported opportunities and challenges in applying NLP in education.

Figure 24

Systemic Resistance and the Realities of Implementation (Author's own)

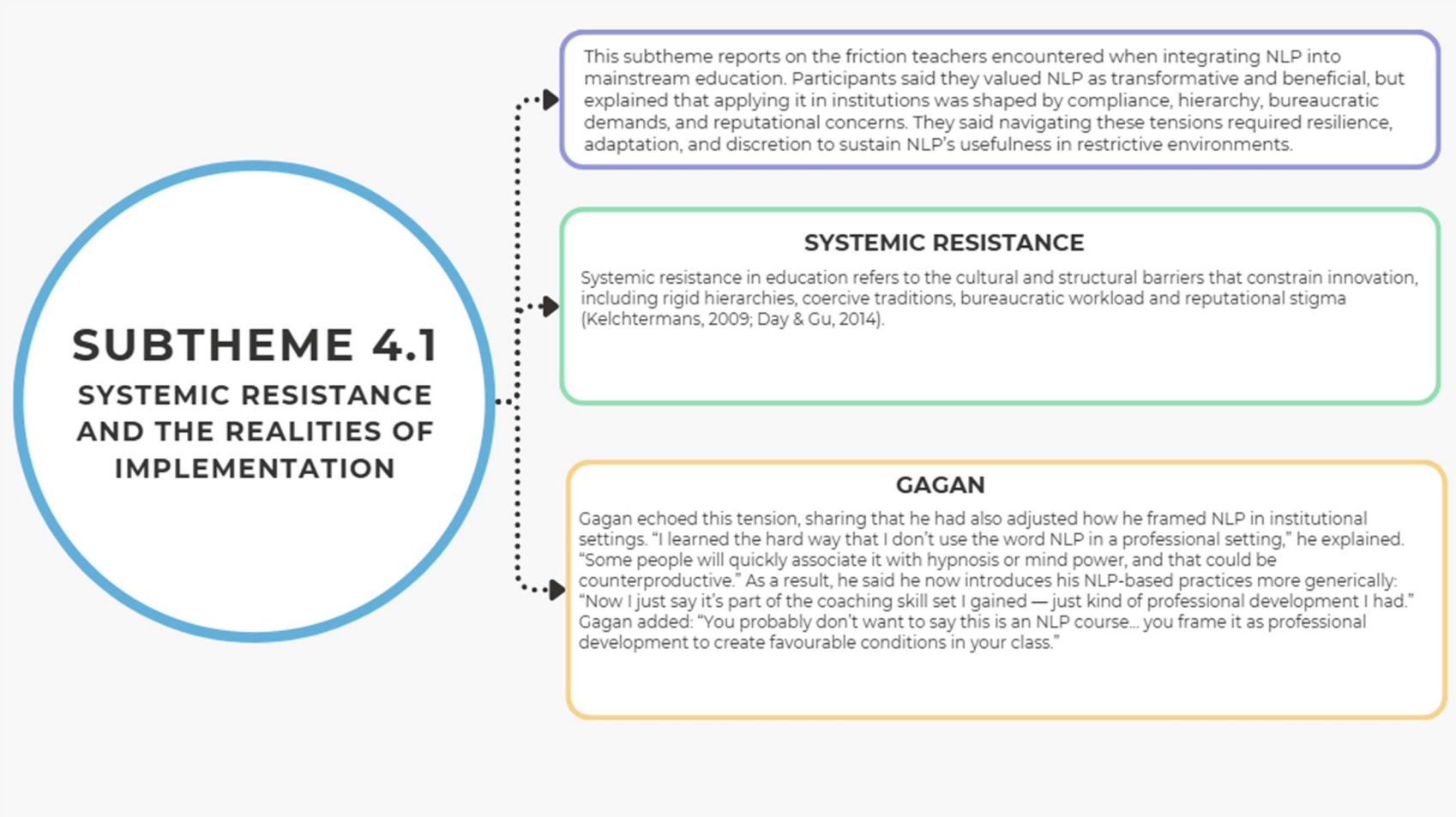


Figure 25

Systemic Resistance and the Realities of Implementation (Author's own)

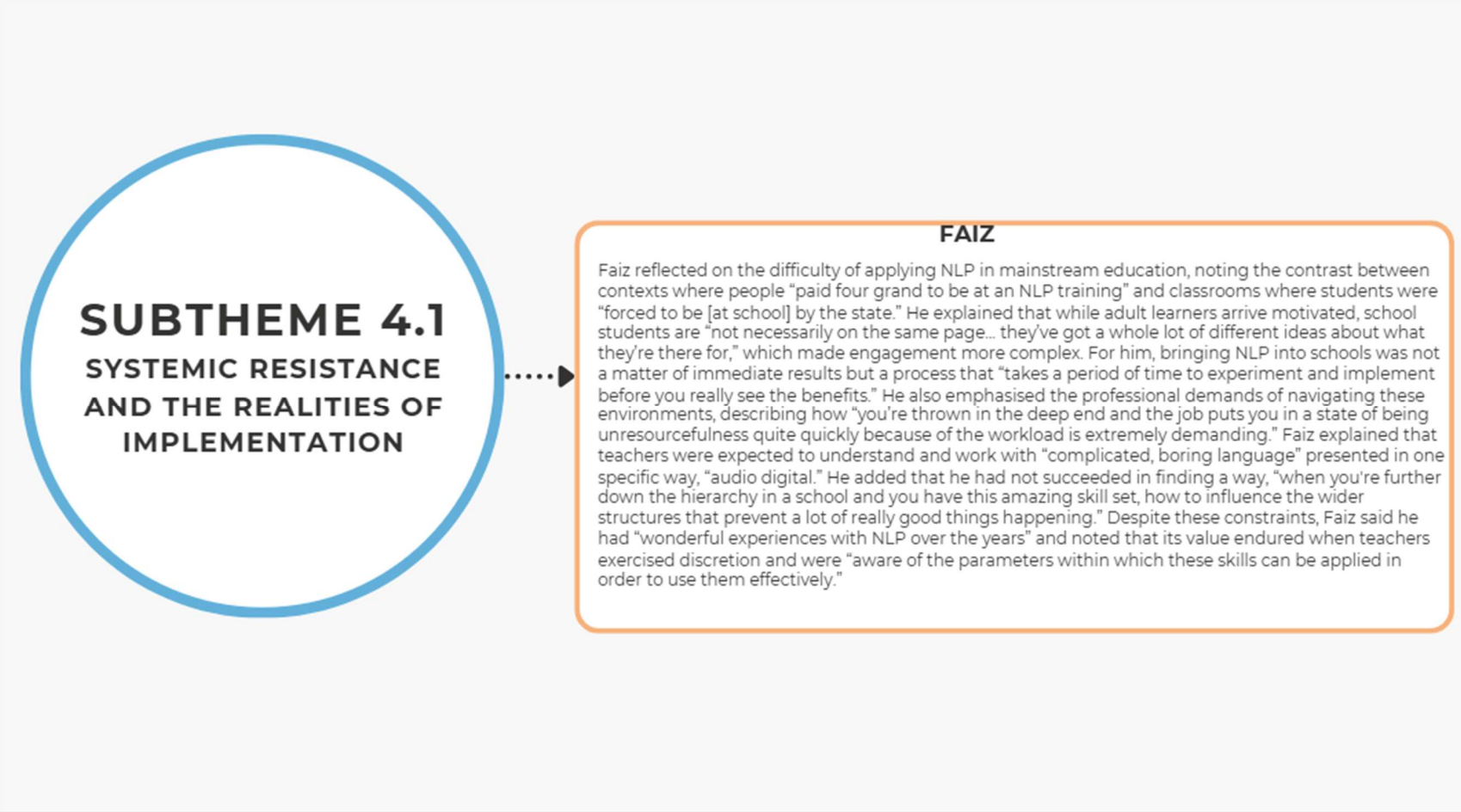


Figure 26

Rebuilding Credibility: NLP's Reputation in the public eye (Author's own)

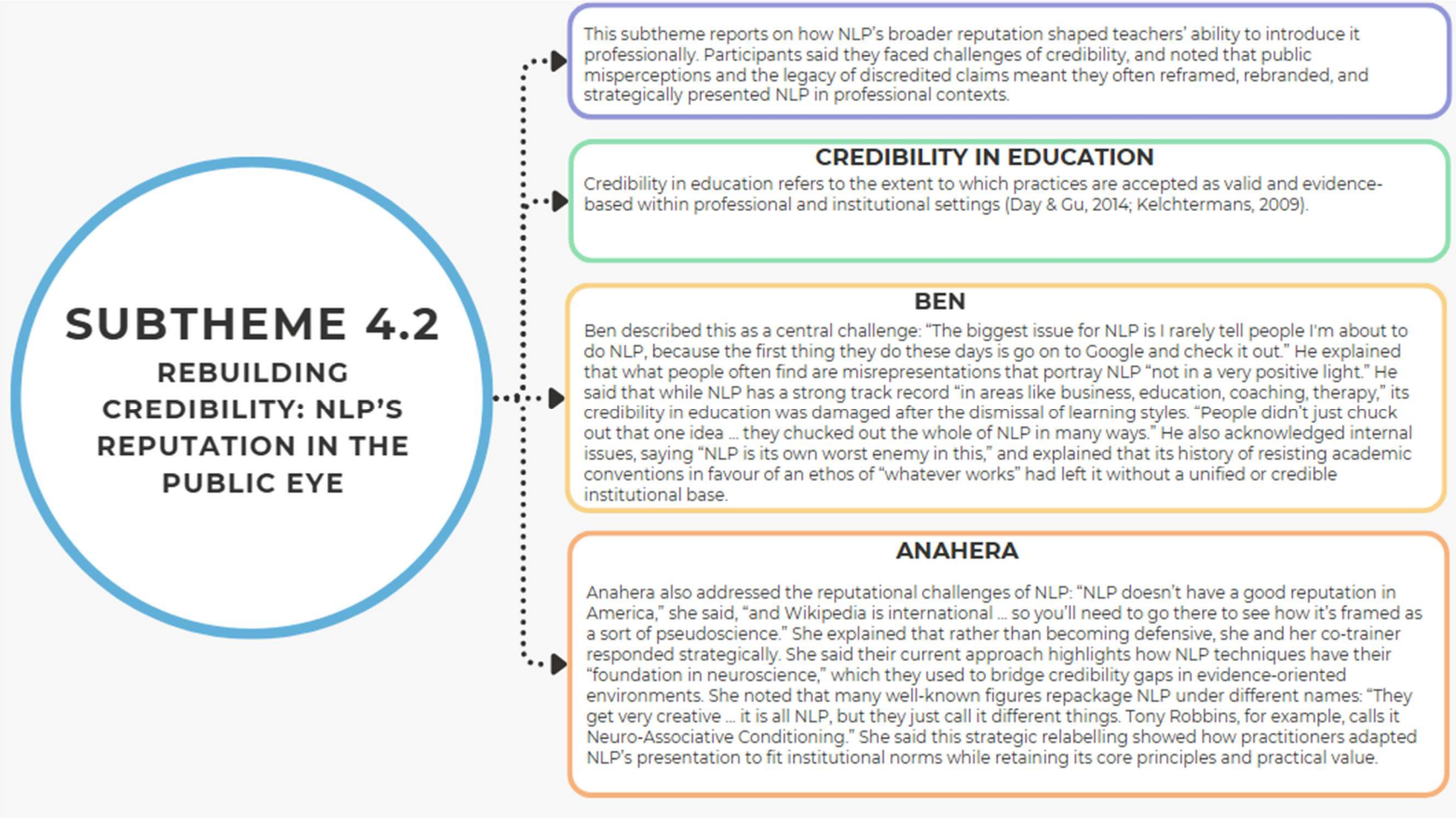


Figure 27

Ethics, Culture and Inclusivity in NLP Practice (Author's own)

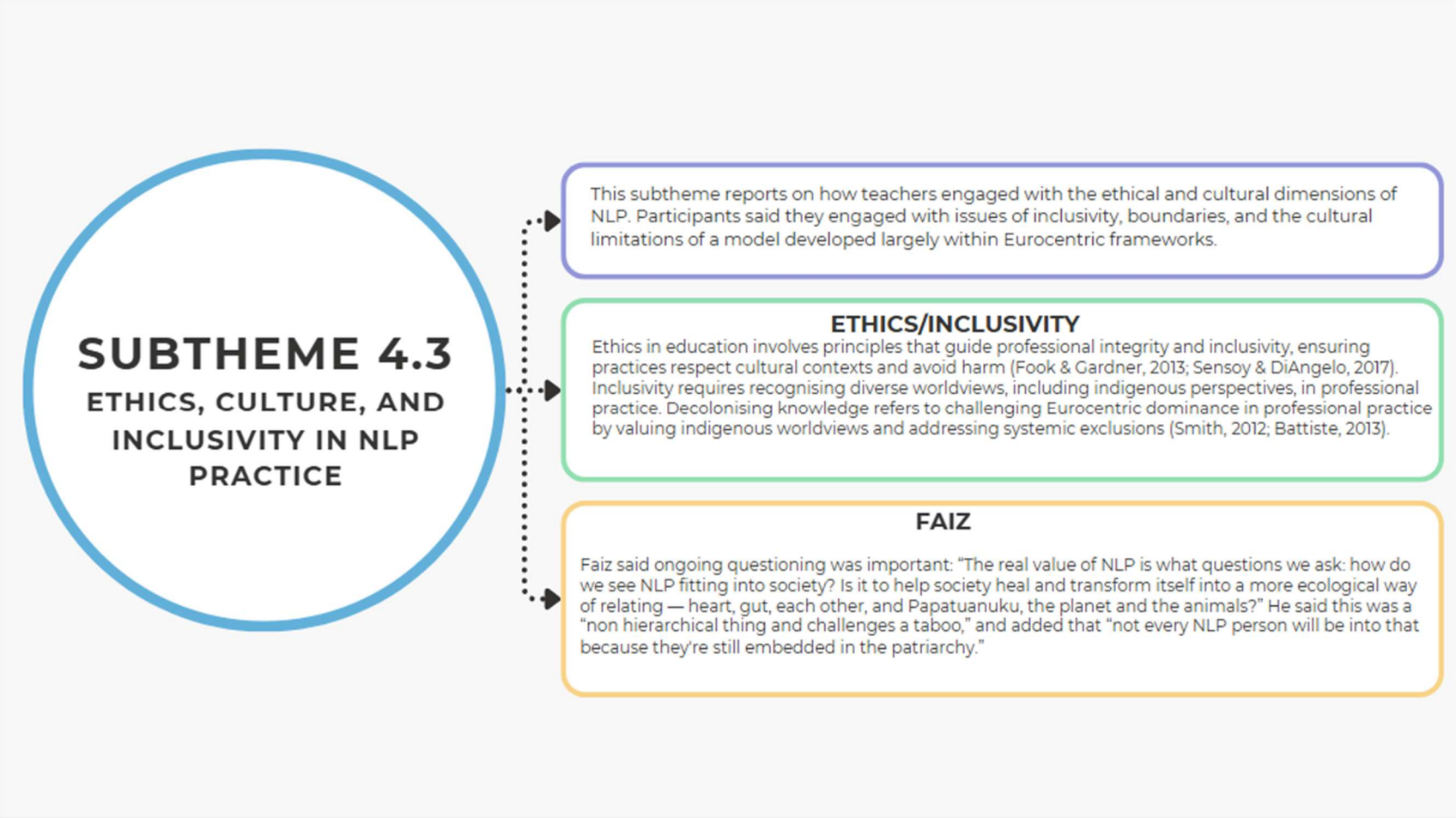
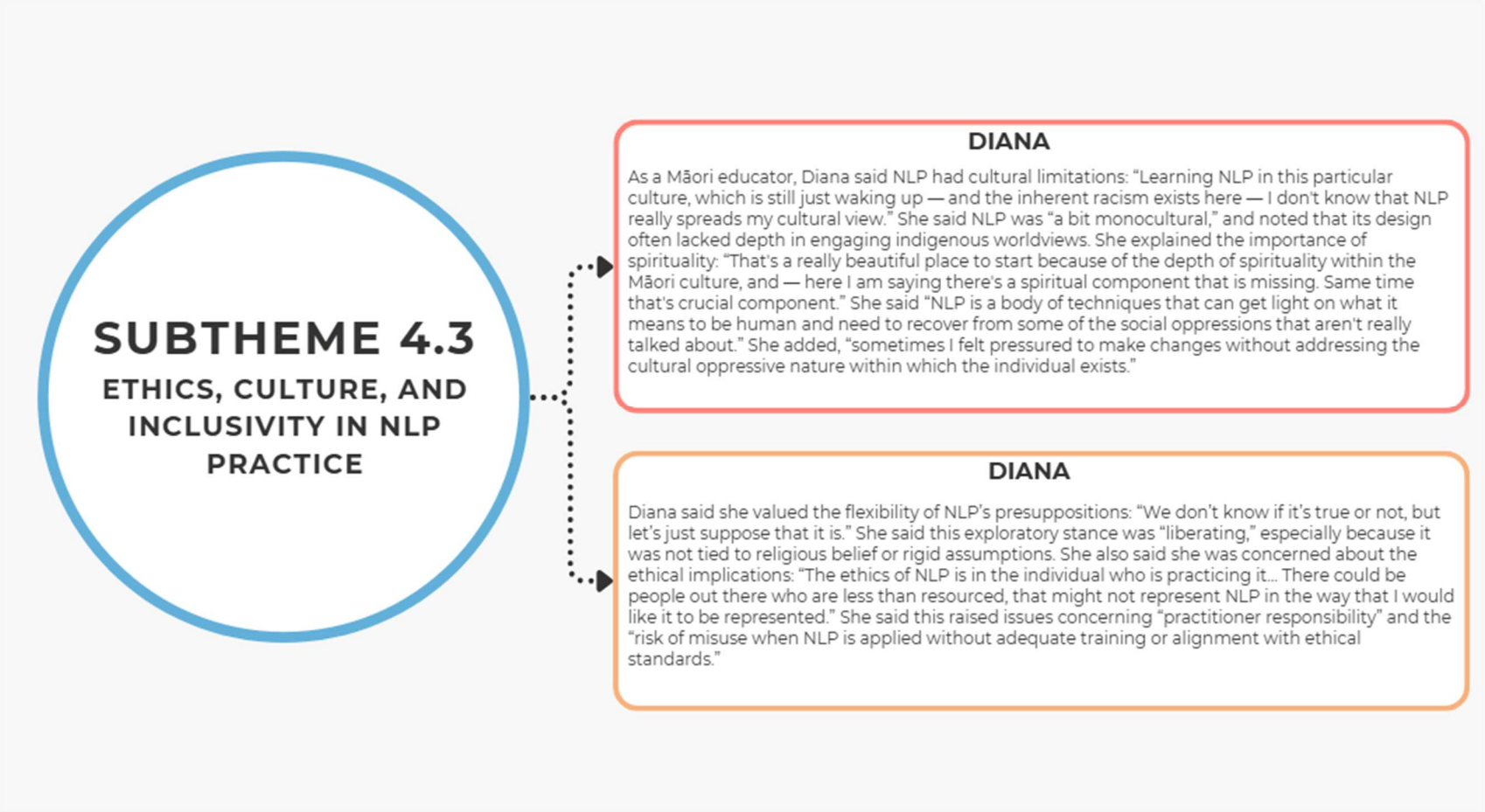


Figure 28

Ethics, Culture and Inclusivity in NLP Practice (Author's own)



Theme 4 Conclusion:

Participants described that applying NLP within education involved tensions. Accounts reported reputational scepticism, systemic rigidity, ethical concerns, and cultural limitations. Participants reported responding to these challenges by adapting their language, aligning NLP with scientific discourse, reframing resistance, and continuing to apply their skills. Participants linked these responses to sustaining resilience and professionalism in unsupportive systems. Participants described that NLP did not remove barriers but was applied to navigate them with integrity.

The range of challenges reported, and the adaptive responses participants described, are summarised in Figure 29, which presents how professionalism was sustained in the face of systemic and reputational pressures.

Figure 29

Challenges and Responses to NLP in Education (Author's Own)

CHALLENGE	TEACHER RESPONSE	IMPLICATION
Systemic rigidity (hierarchical schools, compliance culture)	Adapted language and used discretion	Sustained integrity within constraints
NLP's damaged reputation (e.g., "pseudoscience" stigma)	Reframed/rebranded NLP as "professional development"	Improved reception and credibility
Ethical risk of misuse by under-trained practitioners	Emphasised practitioner responsibility	Highlighted need for standards
Limited cultural inclusivity (perceived monocultural design)	Acknowledged gaps; called for greater responsiveness	Opened space for culturally grounded adaptations

Note. Theme 4 – Navigating the Challenges of NLP in Education

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter report participants' descriptions of NLP influencing professional practice. Participants described NLP not only as a set of techniques but also as connected to changes in practice, personal experience, and approaches to sustaining wellbeing. Participants reported increased clarity, flexibility, confidence, and purpose, which they linked to changes in their internal responses.

Accounts indicated that participants used NLP to align with values, regulate emotional states, improve communication, and sustain motivation in complex contexts. Participants described linking NLP with a sense of identity, resilience, and responsibility. Participants also reported continuing to use NLP when facing reputational stigma or institutional barriers, describing ways they adapted language, reframed resistance, and integrated their skills while maintaining ethics and effectiveness.

NLP was described as embedded in practice in ways linked to both teaching and personal experience, and participants connected these accounts with sustaining wellbeing as part of their professional practice. The following chapter presents these findings in relation to existing literature and considers implications for teacher education, school culture, and professional development.

Chapter 5 - Weaving Insight into Practice: Integrating Findings with Literature and Reflexive Learning

5.1 Introduction

This chapter interprets the findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to existing literature and considers their implications for teacher education, school culture, and professional development. While the findings offered a thematic snapshot of lived experience, they represent just a moment in time.

The purpose of this chapter is to connect the reported themes with wider discourse, considering their meaning in the professional contexts teachers navigate. The guiding question remains: How can neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) support teacher wellbeing as a mechanism for navigating stress, burnout, and emotional demands in education?

Four key thematic insights emerged from the research: the role of emotional regulation and state management, the importance of teacher identity and values alignment, the embedded use of NLP tools in practice, and the influence of motivation, purpose, and agency.

To balance depth with clarity, I have presented a streamlined Discussion chapter that foregrounds the most significant analytic insights. Word limits and readability guided this decision. The full, extended discussions for each subtheme are included in Appendix N, ensuring the main text remains a focused synthesis while preserving analytic integrity. This structure offers accessibility in the chapter and rigour through the appendix, where the complete interpretive accounts remain available.

5.2 Making Meaning: Interpreting NLP's Impact on Teacher Wellbeing

This section presents interpretations of the key findings outlined in Chapter 4. Each theme is revisited to explore its implications for teacher wellbeing and the use of NLP in educational contexts. Interpretations are structured to align with the subthemes from Chapter 4 to maintain continuity.

Each subtheme is presented with a summary of reported findings, followed by interpretive commentary informed by relevant literature and practitioner reflection. The reflective component connects findings to lived experience and highlights shifts in practitioner identity, values, and mindset. The overall structure supports clarity while situating each theme in relation to theory and practice.

5.3 Theme 1: Advancing Pedagogical Practice and Wellbeing through NLP

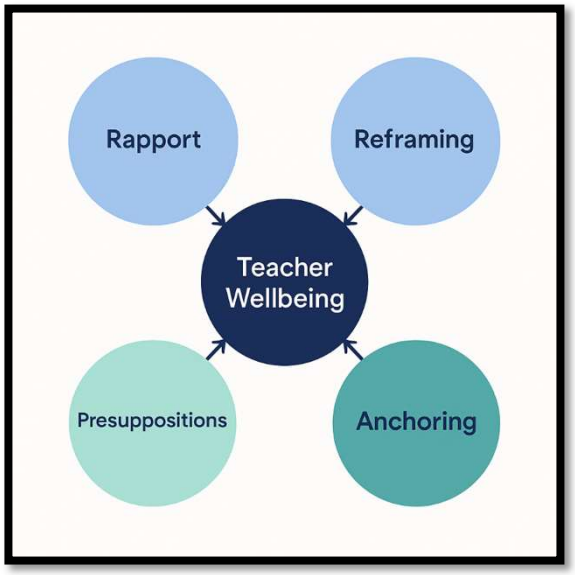
This theme examines how NLP practices enhanced pedagogy and teacher wellbeing in interconnected ways. In particular, it considers how strategies such as rapport, outcomes, language awareness, and modelling functioned not only as classroom techniques but as anchors of resilience and identity. The discussion situates these practices within wider scholarship on teacher identity, resilience, and adaptive professionalism.

Subtheme 1.1 Building Teacher Wellbeing Through Relational and State-Based NLP Tools

Teachers described anchoring, rapport, and reframing as lifelines for sustaining presence under pressure. I realised their power lay not in sophistication but immediacy, tools that steadied me internally while preserving classroom relationships. Research affirms the value of short-cycle regulation for wellbeing (Gross, 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) and for sustaining teacher identity through responsive connection (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). NLP operationalises this through practical state-shifting strategies (Hargreaves, 2001). Yet a paradox remains: these lifelines protect wellbeing but risk masking systemic dysfunction (Day & Gu, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2009). Individual resilience is vital but cannot substitute for systemic change.

Figure 30

Integrated NLP strategies for sustaining teacher wellbeing (Author's own)



Subtheme 1.2 – Clarifying Purpose to Enhance Motivation and Reduce Stress

Teachers described how well-formed outcomes clarified direction, from lesson focus to values alignment. I recognised clarity as more than a planning tool; it was a way of reclaiming authorship when demands threatened to derail me. Clarity offered a psychological foothold, reducing stress and cognitive load (Gross, 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), and a pedagogical compass linking intentional design to identity (Hattie, 2009; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Yet policy churn and workload revealed its fragility (Day & Gu, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2009). As NLP reminds us (Dilts, 1998; Bolstad, 2003), clarity endures only when outcomes remain values congruent.

Subtheme 1.3 – Strengthening Confidence through Language Awareness

Listening to how teachers used language to uncover inner landscapes and challenge limiting narratives made me realise that confidence is not simply taught but re-voiced through dialogue.

I came to see that so much of classroom dialogue is inherited, students re-voicing the language and assumptions they have absorbed, and that NLP awareness gave me the means to notice whose voices were echoed, whose were silenced, and how to disrupt those

patterns. As a central mechanism for organising and achieving social interaction (Austin, 1962; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), language shapes how both teachers and students construct meaning.

Learning the Meta Model and becoming aware of my own internal dialogue, as well as that of my students, revealed the unconscious patterns driving thought and behaviour. This awareness gave me the ability to disrupt those patterns. When students repeated limiting narratives, I found myself asking, *"Whose voice is that? Whose ideas are you re-voicing?"* and, crucially, whose voice is being privileged in this exchange, and whose is being marginalised (Chawla & Atay, 2018).

This connects with broader critiques of how everyday classroom language can reinforce hierarchies if left unexamined. Freire (1970) argued that educational language is never neutral: it either sustains existing power structures or helps to challenge them. For me, this clarified that working with NLP's Meta Model was not only about individual pattern disruption, but also about questioning how the words used in schools, by teachers, curricula, and institutions: shape whose voices are amplified and whose are minimised.

With NLP, I had tools to redirect attention, challenge unhelpful frames, and release what was not serving students. In these moments, teaching and transformation intersected, not only through strategy, but through language, mindset, and meaning making in real time. This layering of individual awareness with systemic critique mirrors contemporary scholarship highlighting how language practices in schools mediate both identity and wellbeing (Bolstad, 2011; Wake, Leach, & Jackson, 2013)

Language awareness highlighted how confidence is reshaped through dialogue; the next subtheme shifts focus to modelling, where excellence is embodied and enacted in practice.

Subtheme 1.4 – Professional Growth through Modelling Excellence

Modelling emerged not as mimicry but as transformation: teachers internalised tacit strategies until excellence was rebuilt from within. For me, this shifted identity, I was no longer copying moves but becoming the kind of teacher who could act with clarity and care. Bandura (1977) framed modelling as observational learning, while Loughran (2002) showed its impact depends on making practice visible. NLP sharpened this through eliciting expert strategies (Dilts, 1994), though it raised questions about whose excellence is privileged. Ultimately, modelling links skill and identity (Day & Gu, 2010), sustaining wellbeing by expanding professional repertoire under pressure.

Theme 1 Synthesis:

Across these four subthemes, a pattern emerges: wellbeing and professional identity are sustained not through isolated techniques but through practices that reconfigure how teachers see themselves in relation to students and their work. The common thread is transformation from the inside out: teachers were not merely adopting tools but reconstructing meaning, identity, and resilience through practice. This raises critical questions of voice and legitimacy, reminding us that professional growth is always shaped by culture, power, and context. Taken together, Theme 1 shows that NLP-based strategies support teacher wellbeing by anchoring stability, clarifying direction, and cultivating adaptive identity practices.

5.4 Theme 2: Sustaining the Self: NLP and the Inner Work of Teaching

Theme 2 explores how teachers sustain themselves internally, highlighting values, emotional regulation, personal responsibility, and resilience as interwoven capacities. These strategies were described less as isolated techniques and more as anchors of identity and wellbeing, enabling teachers to continue showing up under pressure. The following subthemes interrogate these dynamics, tracing how values, regulation, responsibility, and resilience each contribute to sustaining the self in education.

Subtheme 2.1 – Activating Teaching Identity through Personal Values

Participants described how aligning professional practice with personal values deepened their sense of agency and sustained motivation, reinforcing identity as teachers who could navigate challenges with integrity. They spoke of wellbeing as reconnecting with joy in the profession, regaining purpose, and experiencing trust and confidence in themselves. Ben's comment, *"who you are is how you educate"*, captured the sense that values were not abstract ideals but lived anchors shaping everyday choices.

Listening to these accounts, I became aware that in my early career I measured myself against external standards, performing a role defined by others. I was, in many ways, a tick in someone else's box. NLP training shifted this orientation: I began to notice how my values showed up in my choices, in how I related to students and how I held my ground in

spaces that could easily consume me. This marked a move from performance to authenticity: teaching became less about doing the job and more about inhabiting alignment with what mattered most to me.

When teachers clarify their values, they strengthen wellbeing through coherence and authenticity, but this clarity can also be disruptive. In psychology, values alignment is linked to autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Yet in education systems built on compliance and performativity, teachers with strong identity may find themselves resisting institutional norms. What sustains wellbeing at a personal level may simultaneously sharpen awareness of systemic misalignment, leaving teachers to navigate the paradox of resilience through resistance. NLP adds weight here because its tools for eliciting values hierarchies and checking ecological fit not only help sustain practice but also equip teachers to recognise when their authentic identity cannot be reconciled with institutional demands. In this way, NLP functions as both a protective practice and a catalyst for questioning the structures in which teaching identities are shaped.

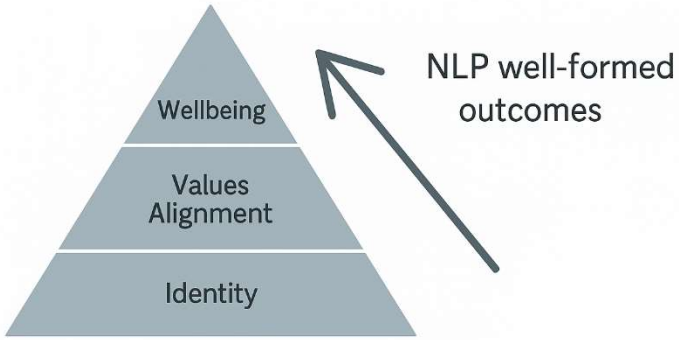
Research supports this dual function. Teacher identity is described as an ongoing negotiation between personal and professional dimensions (Beijaard et al., 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Values alignment contributes to motivation and resilience, while misalignment increases the risk of burnout and attrition (Day & Gu, 2010; Lin et al., 2022). Kelchtermans (2009) underscores the moral dimension of teaching, arguing that when values are undermined teachers experience profound vulnerability. NLP adds an applied dimension to this literature, offering strategies for clarifying and enacting values in practice (Dilts, 1998; Linder-Pelz, 2014).

Overall, values functioned as a stabilising anchor, enabling teachers to sustain their professional identity in the face of complexity. By clarifying and living their values, supported through NLP tools, participants transformed identity from something externally defined into a resource for resilience and wellbeing.

If values offered teachers an anchor for authenticity, the next subtheme turns to how they managed the shifting emotional currents that accompany sustaining that integrity in complex contexts.

Figure 31

Values alignment and identity coherence in sustaining teacher wellbeing (Author's own)



Subtheme 2.2 – Cultivating Emotional Regulation and Self-Management in Complex Contexts

Emotional regulation surfaced as layered: for some teachers it meant recovering from crisis, for others resisting hierarchy, and for others restoring daily confidence. What struck me was how NLP gave me an inner compass, a way to steady myself when things went sideways. Techniques like reframing and anchoring disrupted spirals and restored agency (Dilts, 1998; Bolstad, 2011). Yet regulation is never neutral: Gross (2015) links it to adaptive functioning, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) to wellbeing, while Hochschild (1983) and Kelchtermans (2017) caution it can mask systemic strain. Regulation sustains resilience, but it also risks normalising unsustainable conditions.

Subtheme 2.3 – Empowering Agency through Personal Responsibility

Agency emerged as enacted responsibility: teachers described steering choices intentionally rather than being swept along. For me, NLP's stance of being "at cause" reframed responsibility as authorship, not blame, yet I wrestled with the question of rest and imperfection. Literature frames this paradox: Sartre (1943/1993) saw freedom and responsibility as inseparable; Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) stress agency as

relational and constrained; Day and Gu (2010) and Beltman et al. (2011) link identity to resilience. NLP tools such as reframing deepen this shift (Linder-Pelz, 2014). Responsibility empowers, yet risks exhaustion if co-opted systemically, making resilience essential.

Subtheme 2.4 – Navigating Challenge: Growth, Disillusionment, and the Edges of Resilience

Resilience surfaced in the findings as both resource and risk: for some, a well of growth, for others, a point of disillusionment where even long-standing endurance frayed. In my own experience, resilience has sometimes felt like holding water in cupped hands, stabilising for a moment yet ultimately leaking away when systemic dysfunction persisted. NLP gave me tools to steady myself, but I recognised the fragility of this work when broader recognition and alignment were absent. This underscored that wellbeing cannot be endlessly self-generated when the environment erodes purpose.

Teacher accounts reflected this paradox. Some described NLP strategies such as reframing and anchoring as supports for sustaining motivation and recovering more effectively from daily pressures, consistent with Gross's (2015) model of emotion regulation and positive psychology's framing of resilience as a dynamic process (Seligman, 2011; Beltman et al., 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Yet others acknowledged the limits: as Esmurelda's reflection illustrated, resilience could not undo systemic barriers. This echoes research showing that sustained misalignment between teachers' values and institutional contexts drives disillusionment and attrition (Kelchtermans, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

The extension here is that resilience cannot be understood apart from recognition. Teachers' wellbeing depends not only on their coping strategies but also on the extent to which their professional labour is acknowledged and valued (Honneth, 1995; Day & Gu, 2010). When systems fail to provide recognition, through policy, leadership, or support, individual strategies, however effective, become fragile. This raises an ethical tension: resilience discourse can empower, yet it also risks compliance by celebrating endurance while masking dysfunction (Santoro, 2018; Beltman, 2020). NLP's emphasis on agency can thus be double-edged: a resource for authorship and perspective (Dilts, 1990; Andreas & Faulkner, 1994), but also a potential amplifier of self-blame when change proves impossible.

Cultural framings sharpen this critique. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori educators often situate resilience relationally, within whānau and community (Bishop, 2019). Against this, NLP's Eurocentric focus on the individual "map of the world" risks replicating colonising

tendencies unless critically adapted. Acknowledging resilience as relational and culturally embedded aligns with scholarship framing it not as a fixed trait but as a socially mediated process (Mansfield et al., 2016; Ungar, 2012).

Resilience emerges as both a strength and a strain, sustaining perspective in the moment yet fragile when systemic recognition is absent. For teacher identity and wellbeing, the implication is clear: resilience must be re-imagined not as infinite endurance but as the capacity to adapt without self-erasure, supported not only by individual strategies like NLP but also by institutional recognition and structural care.

This paradox highlights that wellbeing must be viewed not only as individual practice but also as relational and systemic responsibility.

Theme 2 Synthesis: Sustaining the Self through NLP and Inner Work

Sustaining the self as a teacher involves more than isolated strategies, it is a layered process of aligning values, regulating emotions, exercising agency, and navigating resilience in complex environments. NLP practices offered practical entry points into this work, but their effectiveness depended on how they intersected with teachers' identities, values, and systemic conditions. The synthesis is that sustaining the self is both deeply personal and unavoidably political: NLP techniques can help teachers claim authorship over their professional lives, but without recognition and supportive structures such strategies risk becoming fragile. For teacher identity and wellbeing, the insight is clear, professional sustainability requires practices that cultivate inner steadiness while also demanding systemic conditions that affirm and uphold teachers' work.

5.5 Theme 3: The Practitioner Transformed – NLP in Self, Mindset, and Method

Theme 3 captures a profound shift: participants described not merely learning NLP techniques, but embodying them as part of their identity, mindset, and professional presence. This shift blurred the line between personal and professional growth, signalling transformation at the level of identity rather than just skill.

Subtheme 3.1 – Transforming Identity Through NLP

Participants described how NLP reshaped their sense of self as teachers, shifting from applying techniques to embodying them as part of their professional identity. What began as conscious strategies gradually became unconscious ways of perceiving, deciding, and being in the classroom. This transformation went beyond professional development in a narrow sense, instead becoming a matter of coherence and authorship, teachers spoke of feeling more integrated, authentic, and aligned in their practice.

From where I stand, the shift was never just about applying an NLP technique. It was about becoming a teacher who sees differently, thinks differently, and interrupts old unconscious patterns in real time. For me, that was when NLP ceased to be a toolkit and became a worldview. It reshaped not only my practice but the way I made sense of myself, showing how identity is rewritten whenever the lens shifts and the world that is seen changes too. In that process, I've rewritten internal narratives, interrupted inherited patterns, and opened up entirely new possibilities for identity and wellbeing.

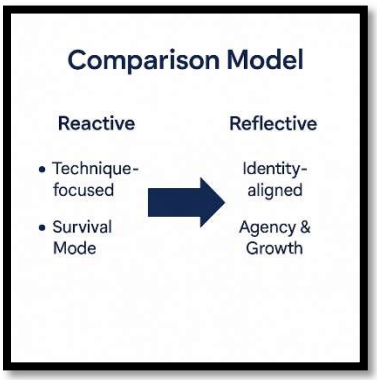
This shift illustrates how NLP operates not only at the level of skills but at the level of identity, aligning with research that frames teacher identity as dynamic, relational, and continuously reconstructed through reflection and practice (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Rewriting internal narratives, choosing which stories to interrupt and which to strengthen, highlights how language, power, and identity are tightly interwoven (Freire, 1970; Chawla & Atay, 2018). NLP's tools, such as the Meta Model, provide practical ways to surface and disrupt limiting scripts, enabling teachers to author new professional narratives that feel coherent and aligned. In this way, NLP becomes not just a set of pedagogical strategies but a means of identity work, allowing teachers to reconcile inherited narratives with chosen values and purposes.

The implications for wellbeing are significant. Research shows that identity coherence, the sense of living and teaching in alignment with one's core values, is central to teacher resilience and sustainability in the profession (Day & Gu, 2010; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). By re-voicing limiting narratives and embodying new ones, teachers were not only better equipped to support students but also to sustain themselves professionally. Identity, then, emerges as both a site of vulnerability and a source of strength, with NLP offering tools for authorship that restore coherence and agency.

In this way, identity transformation is not an incidental outcome of NLP practice but its deepest contribution: enabling teachers to move from performing strategies to becoming resourceful, coherent professionals. This foundation provides a natural bridge to the next theme, where transformation is expressed not only in identity but also in mindset and presence.

Figure 32

Practitioner transformation through NLP, from reactive practice to reflective identity (Author's own)



Subtheme 3.2 – Applying NLP for Reflective and Responsive Pedagogy

Teachers described NLP as deepening reflection from technical evaluation to transformative questioning of underlying beliefs. I recognised my own perfectionism as a hidden script shaping stress until NLP gave me choice to reframe it. This aligns with Mezirow's (1991) account of transformative learning and identity research highlighting the inseparability of personal and professional selves (Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Tools like reframing and anchoring supported state regulation that students could feel, fostering trust (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Reflection became identity work: making tacit knowledge visible (Loughran, 2002) and aligning who I am with how I teach

Subtheme 3.3 – Supporting Emotional Resilience Through NLP

Teachers described resilience as curating beliefs, reframing challenges, and shifting states to sustain motivation under pressure. For me, resilience was not the absence of strain but the spaciousness to move through it, NLP gave me maps to re-author inherited narratives. This reflects resilience as both identity practice (Day & Gu, 2014; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011) and psychological strategy (Gross, 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Yet resilience discourses risk masking systemic dysfunction (Hochschild, 2012; Kelchtermans, 2009). NLP-supported resilience is therefore multi-layered: psychological capacity, identity authorship, and political act, sustaining wellbeing while challenging unsustainable systems.

Subtheme 3.4 Beyond Technique: NLP as a Way of Being

Teachers described NLP shifting from applied strategies to a way of being that shaped thought, language, and presence. I recognised this in my own practice: repeated use reorganised perception itself, echoing Grinder and Bostic's (2001) account of unconscious competence and Eraut's (2000) notion of embodied learning. Practices like anchoring and reframing ceased to be tools and instead informed stance, aligning with Schön's (1983) reflective practitioner and the Dreyfus model of intuitive expertise. At the identity level, embodied NLP sustained coherence between values and practice (Day & Gu, 2010; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), supporting wellbeing through authentic professional presence.

Theme 3 Synthesis:

Across these subthemes, a progression is evident, NLP moved from a set of strategies to an integrated part of teachers' professional selves, shaping identity, reflective practice, resilience, and presence. Reflexive accounts highlighted how this integration disrupted inherited narratives, surfaced unconscious patterns such as perfectionism, and opened space for more responsive, sustainable teaching practices. Interrogating these findings with identity theory (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), resilience literature (Day & Gu, 2010), and embodied learning (Eraut, 2000), NLP's contribution can be seen less as a technique and more as a worldview, a way of being that anchors wellbeing and sustains the professional self.

5.6 Theme 4: Navigating the Challenges of NLP in Education

While participants consistently described NLP as transformative, systemic, reputational, ethical, and cultural barriers shaped its use in education. Teachers applied NLP with care, but their experiences highlight that professional practice cannot be disentangled from context. The challenge lies not in whether NLP "works," but in how it is positioned, adapted, and sustained within education's complex ecologies.

Subtheme 4.1 – Systemic Resistance and the Realities of Implementation

Teachers reported that barriers to NLP were systemic rather than personal: rigid hierarchies, compliance cultures, and NLP's contested reputation forced strategies to be reframed for legitimacy. I've done the same, re-labelling NLP through neuroscience or communication theory, a tactic that reveals adaptability but also exposes whose knowledge counts. Research contrasts adaptive expertise with technical compliance (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986; Timperley, 2013), yet systems resisted flexibility. This reflects epistemic politics where codified knowledge dominates (Bernstein, 2000). As Kelchtermans (2009) and Day & Gu (2010) show, wellbeing requires recognition; when sustaining tools are delegitimised, resilience risks becoming unsustainable labour.

Figure 33

Challenges and adaptive responses in applying NLP within education (Author's own)

Challenge	Risk	Practitioner Adaptation
Credibility	Dismissal	Rebranding
Cultural Fit	Misuse	Ethical framing
Systemic Rigidity	Misalignment	Cultural integration

Subtheme 4.2 Rebuilding Credibility: NLP's Reputation in the Public Eye

Credibility was less about NLP's effects than its reputation: teachers described stigma, skepticism, and associations with commercialised self-help as barriers to use. Many sidestepped dismissal by presenting NLP through the language of coaching or social-emotional learning. I've felt this tension too, superficial online certifications contrasted with rigorous international training show why its image is fragile, reminding me credibility must be continually earned. Reputation reflects boundary-work: disciplines police legitimacy (Becher & Trowler, 2001), and NLP's hybridity leaves it contested (Craft, 2001; Tosey & Mathison, 2009). Teachers' credibility work becomes identity work (Mockler, 2011), negotiated through trust (Gergen, 2009).

Subtheme 4.3 Ethics, Culture, and Inclusivity in NLP Practice

Participants described NLP as both empowering and risky: its flexibility supports curiosity, but outcomes depend on practitioner integrity and training. They noted cultural blind spots, pointing to NLP's Western, monocultural roots and gaps in systemic awareness.

These critiques highlighted the need to re-situate NLP within inclusive, ethical, and relational frames that honour diverse worldviews and collective wellbeing.

Emerging in the 1970s, NLP reflects the cultural assumptions of its time, shaped largely by white male perspectives and thus carrying traces of colonisation and patriarchy (Tosey & Mathison, 2009; Witkowski, 2010; Macfarlane, 2004; Bishop, 2011). Participants' concerns align with broader critiques of Eurocentric methodologies and the need to decolonise knowledge practices (Smith, 2012; Chawla & Atay, 2018), as well as analyses of colonised mental frameworks (Ngũgĩ, 1986; Fanon, 1963).

This context matters in education, where participants highlighted both the liberating possibilities of NLP and the risks of reinforcing exclusionary practices if applied uncritically. NLP's non-dogmatic stance ("let's just suppose") felt liberating because it is provisional rather than doctrinal, yet this openness also means NLP can be adapted in ways that distort its purpose or clash with cultural values.

My reflexive stance is interpretive: NLP has been one of the few professional frameworks that felt flexible enough to accommodate both my cultural identity and my ethical commitments. Its presuppositions invite curiosity rather than closure.
Research underscores this duality. Coaching research calls for ethical frameworks when adapting psychological methods (Grant, 2016), while bicultural and decolonising perspectives (Macfarlane, 2004; Bishop, 2011) caution against practices that ignore indigenous values. Teachers cannot bracket out who they are: identity and culture shape how they teach, learn, and respond to pressure (Day & Gu, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2009). The challenge is not adaptation itself but adapting inclusively.
There were also reflections on cultural fit, particularly from our Māori educator who questioned whether NLP's origins and frameworks sufficiently addressed indigenous perspectives or systemic inequities. This reflects wider critiques of Eurocentric methodologies (Smith, 2012; Bishop, 2011) and highlights the importance of reflexivity in decolonising knowledge practices (Chawla & Atay, 2018), while also aligning with Tosey and Mathison's (2009) recognition of NLP's culturally situated nature. This critique also resonated with my experience of apartheid-era South Africa and the legacies of colonisation in Aotearoa.

Diana raised the way NLP can be seen as monocultural when looking through the lens of its underlying assumptions as a field (Smith, 2012). While NLP is grounded in a model of the "individual map of the world," this framing is culturally situated and can be read as Eurocentric in its assumptions of selfhood and change (Tosey & Mathison, 2010). From a

Māori perspective, individual mapping may be less meaningful than collective understandings based on whānau, whakapapa, and relational identity (Bishop, 2012). This highlights a need to consider how NLP strategies might be adapted or critiqued in relation to indigenous and collective worldviews and underscores the importance of engaging with studies that interrogate NLP's cross-cultural application (Smith, 2012; Bishop, 2012).

Reflecting on these tensions, I position NLP and tikanga Māori as principle-informed, relationally oriented frameworks with resonances, not equivalences (Tosey & Mathison, 2009; Macfarlane, 2004; Bishop, 2011).

Figure 34 and Figure 35 illustrates how selected tikanga values align with key NLP assumptions and practices.

Figure 34

Tikanga Māori Values and NLP Resonance (Author's Own)

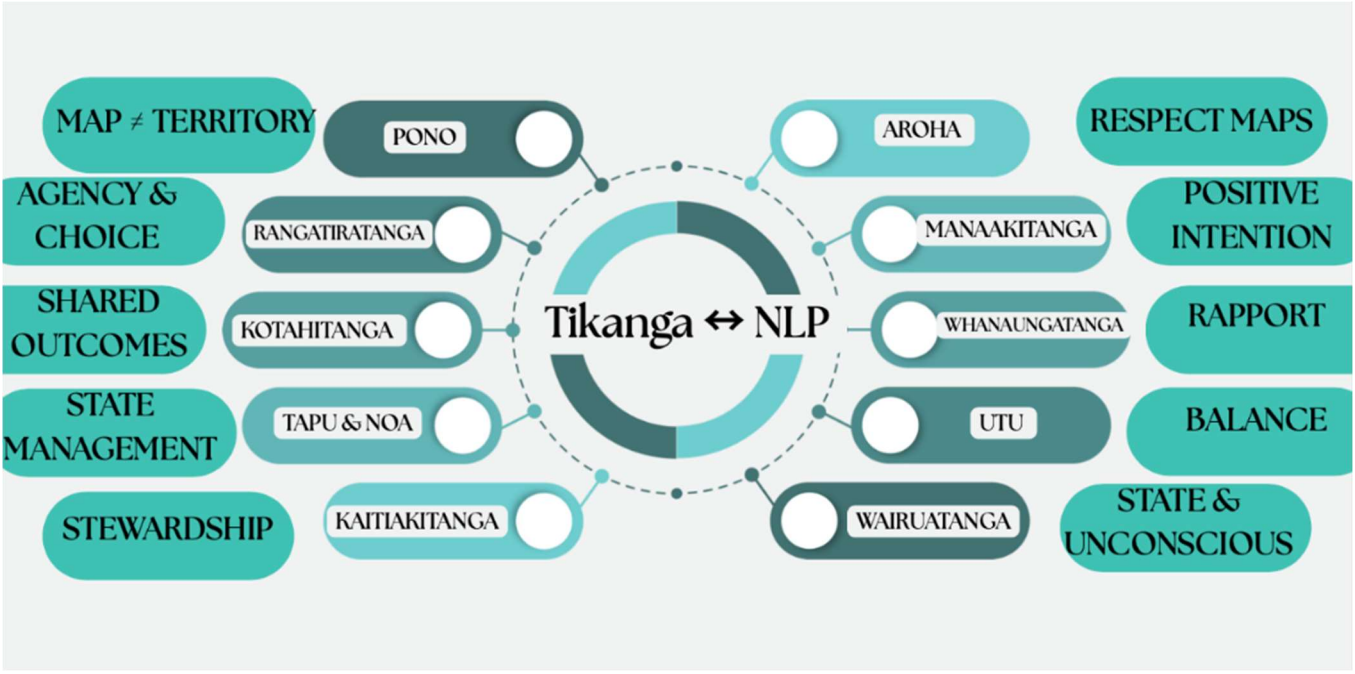


Figure 35

Alignment of Tikanga Māori Values and NLP Presuppositions (Author's Own)

Tikanga Value	NLP Presuppositions / Practices	Alignment / Explanation
Aroha (love, compassion, empathy, heart-centred practice)	Respect each other's map of the world; Every behaviour has a positive intention; People are not their behaviours; Rapport-building; Anchoring positive states	Aroha is about empathy and compassion. NLP aligns by honouring others' perspectives, separating person from behaviour, presupposing positive intent, and fostering relational safety through rapport and anchoring caring states.
Manaakitanga (care, generosity, uplifting others)	Rapport-building; Respect each other's map of the world; People respond better to choice than no choice	Manaakitanga uplifts and respects others. NLP resonates through relational care (rapport), dignity in acknowledging perspectives, and empowering people by expanding choices.
Whanaungatanga (relationships, kinship, interdependence)	Rapport-building; The meaning of communication is the response you get; Modelling excellence; Systemic flexibility	Whanaungatanga strengthens kinship and belonging. NLP parallels this by emphasising relational responsibility, co-creating meaning, learning through modelling, and adapting flexibly within systems.
Utu (reciprocity, restoring balance)	Reframing; Anchoring; Ecology check	Utu restores balance in relationships. NLP techniques like reframing restore perspective, anchoring restores resourceful states, and ecology checks ensure wider harmony in outcomes.
Wairuatanga (spirituality, unseen dimensions)	State is the foundation of all behaviour; Unconscious processes direct behaviour; Anchoring/state work	Wairuatanga acknowledges the unseen dimensions of life. NLP similarly works with states and unconscious processes, recognising invisible but powerful influences on wellbeing.
Kaitiakitanga (guardianship, stewardship, responsibility)	Ecology check; I am at cause; Modelling excellence	Kaitiakitanga is stewardship and protection. NLP aligns through ecological awareness of impact, personal responsibility (*cause* frame), and modelling as a way of transmitting excellence and safeguarding knowledge.
Tapu & Noa (sacred/profane balance)	Anchoring/state management; Behaviour and change are contextual; Ecology principle	Tapu/noa regulate balance between sacred and ordinary. NLP mirrors this by contextualising behaviour, using state management to restore balance, and applying ecology to keep boundaries safe.
Kotahitanga (unity, collective purpose)	Well-formed outcomes; Rapport-building in groups; Systemic flexibility	Kotahitanga is about unity and collective goals. NLP aligns through shared outcome-setting, group rapport that builds cohesion, and systemic flexibility that supports collective focus.
Rangatiratanga (leadership, self-determination)	I am at cause; Well-formed outcomes; Anchoring confidence; Everyone has the resources they need	Rangatiratanga affirms leadership and agency. NLP reflects this through presuppositions of cause and resources, outcome clarity, and anchoring confidence to embody self-determined authority.
Pono (truth, integrity, honesty)	The map is not the territory; Meta-model questioning; Congruence	Pono values integrity and truth. NLP aligns by acknowledging limits of perspective (*map ≠ territory*), using meta-model questioning to clarify truth, and insisting on congruence between words, actions, and values.

NLP presuppositions function as orienting assumptions for communication and change, while tikanga principles serve as guiding values for relational and collective life. Although they arise from different cultural origins, both emphasise that practice must be grounded in values rather than only in outcomes. Particular tikanga values, such as manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, utu, wairuatanga, and kaitiakitanga, resonate with NLP presuppositions when applied relationally in education. This alignment is not about equivalence but about identifying meaningful points of connection that expand how NLP can be interpreted in Aotearoa.

These alignments highlight that NLP can be interpreted through values-based connections with tikanga Māori, creating opportunities for more culturally resonant practice. Extended examples appear in Appendix M. In Aotearoa, values such as manaakitanga (care) and whanaungatanga (relational connection) offer culturally resonant anchors that can reshape NLP into a living practice aligned with wellbeing and community. Framed this way, NLP moves beyond imported technique toward a culturally responsive, ethically grounded way of sustaining teachers in complex contexts.

Overall, participants' reflections made clear that NLP's value in education depends not only on its techniques but on how it is ethically applied and culturally adapted. When aligned with responsibility, inclusivity, and collective wellbeing, NLP moves beyond strategy to become a practice capable of supporting transformation.

Theme 4 Synthesis

Together, these subthemes show that NLP in education is entangled with systemic, reputational, and cultural conditions. Teachers described both adaptation and resistance: they navigated institutional rigidity, rebranded NLP for credibility, and interrogated its ethical and cultural fit. For professional practice, the implication is clear, NLP cannot be treated as a neutral technique. Its sustainability lies in responsible adaptation, cultural responsiveness, and systemic advocacy. Only when these conditions are present can NLP's potential to sustain teacher identity and wellbeing be fully realised.

5.7 Chapter 5 Discussion Conclusion:

Across the four themes, this chapter has traced how NLP functions in education not merely as a set of tools but as a catalyst for reshaping identity, wellbeing, and professional practice. The value of NLP lies less in technique than in how those techniques are integrated into the

teacher's self, situated within cultural and systemic contexts, and sustained through ethical practice.

Theme 1 showed that practices such as rapport, outcomes, language awareness, and modelling became sites for reconstructing meaning and resilience, while raising critical questions about whose voices and practices are legitimised. Theme 2 illustrated how sustaining the self is a layered process: aligning values, regulating emotions, exercising agency, and negotiating resilience within complex environments. NLP offered practical entry points into this work, but effectiveness depends on its intersection with identity and systemic conditions. Sustainability is both personal and political, without recognition and supportive structures, strategies risk fragility even when they offer steadiness.

Theme 3 traced a progression from conscious skill use to embodied identity transformation. Teachers described NLP not simply as applied technique but as a worldview that altered how they saw themselves and their work. Literature on identity and embodied learning reinforced that what is at stake is not only competence but coherence, the practitioner transformed is better able to sustain presence, agency, and wellbeing.

Theme 4 confronted the realities that shape whether such transformation can flourish, highlighting systemic resistance, reputational stigma, and cultural blind spots. NLP's promise is therefore contingent: it can resource teachers' wellbeing and agency, but only when embedded in culturally responsive, ethically grounded practice and supported by systemic recognition.

Overall, NLP emerges as a dynamic interplay of identity, wellbeing, and systemic positioning that provides pathways to sustain authenticity, coherence, and agency. Yet its transformative potential remains bounded by questions of legitimacy, culture, and institutional support. Professional practice thus carries both opportunity and responsibility: to apply NLP not as isolated strategy but as an evolving framework of practice that is reflexive, inclusive, and ethically aligned. The promise of NLP in education lies in its capacity to be lived as a way of being, while the challenge is to ensure that such practice is recognised, resourced, and adapted to diverse cultural and systemic realities.

Chapter 6 Critical Reflective Commentary – Living the Framework of Practice

6.1 The Framework at a Glance: A Practice Model for Sustainable Teaching

This professional framework emerged from a deeply reflective and inquiry-based process, shaped by personal practice, participant experience, and the tools of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). Rather than offering a fixed model, it presents an evolving approach to sustainable teaching practice, one that acknowledges the emotional, relational, and cognitive demands of education and provides practitioners with tools to stay resourced and intentional within it. The framework integrates three key dimensions: core principles, internal foundations, and practical strategies. These components support educators to align values, regulate emotional states, and engage with their work in ways that foster both wellbeing and professional growth.

Figure 36

Professional Framework of Practice for Sustainable Teaching (Author's Own)

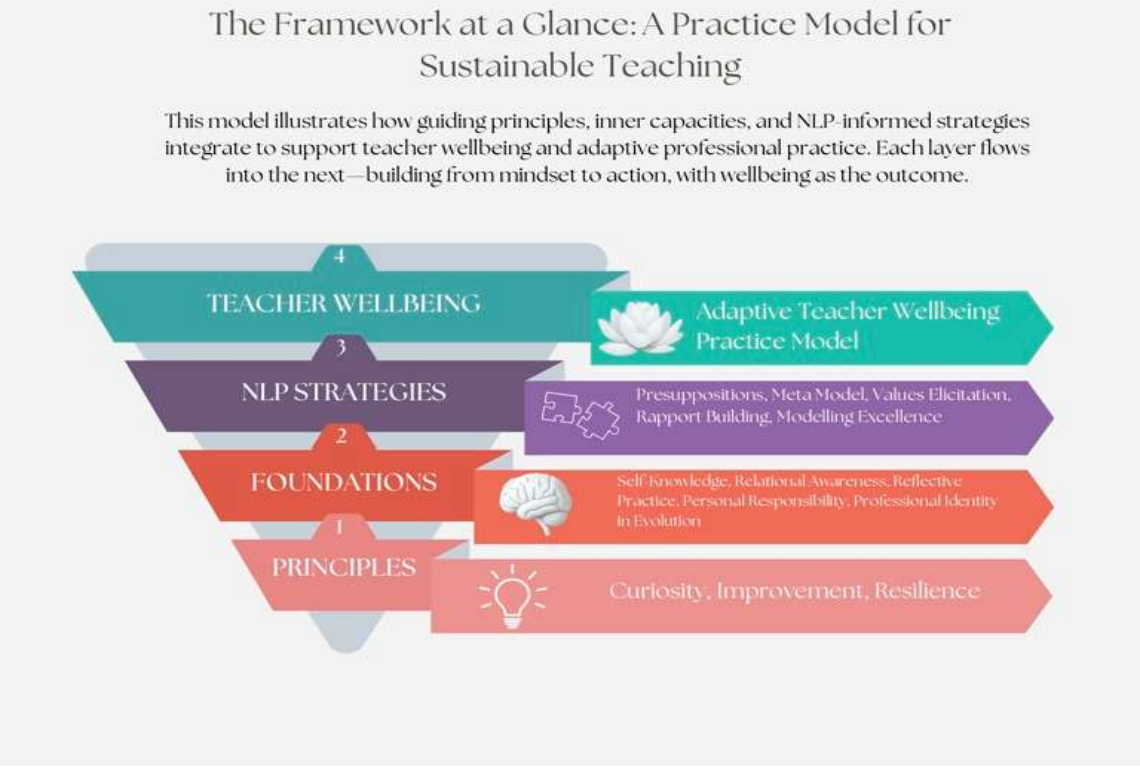


Figure 36 explains each layer of the model is intentionally ordered beginning with the mindset and values that guide professional identity, followed by the foundational capacities that enable integration, and concluding with the strategies that activate change in real time.

At the centre of the model are three guiding principles: Curiosity, Continuous Improvement, and Emotional Resilience. These principles operate as my internal compass, or "North Star," supporting clarity and coherence in how I show up as a practitioner. Each principle is grounded in a core NLP presupposition, offering not only a value statement but also a practical mindset for engaging with complexity. For example, Curiosity aligns with the presupposition that "the map is not the territory," reminding educators to remain open to alternative perspectives and interrupt automatic assumptions. Continuous Improvement is supported by the frame that "there is no failure, only feedback," inviting reflective, adaptive responses in moments of challenge. Emotional Resilience draws from the idea that "the person with the most flexibility controls the system," encouraging educators to maintain agency and resourcefulness even in high-pressure or emotionally charged environments.

These principles are summarised below in Figure 37:

Figure 37

Principles, NLP Presuppositions, and Rationales (Author's own)

Principle	Aligned NLP Presupposition	Rationale
Curiosity	The map is not the territory	Encourages openness to diverse perspectives and reduces assumption, which supports reflection.
Continuous Improvement	There is no failure, only feedback	Supports iterative growth, reduces fear of error, and enhances resilience through adaptive learning.
Emotional Resilience	The person with the most flexibility controls the system	Reinforces emotional self-regulation and adaptability in relational and systemic environments.

These principles are supported by a set of internal foundations that emerged through both my own reflexive inquiry and participant experiences. These include:

- Self-Knowledge – the capacity to notice internal states, patterns, and beliefs.
- Relational Awareness – sensitivity to verbal, non-verbal, and energetic cues in others.
- Reflective Practice – the use of real-time and retrospective reflection to guide action (Schön, 1983).
- Personal Responsibility – recognising agency in emotional regulation, choice, and mindset.
- Professional Identity – a dynamic, evolving self-concept shaped by purpose and alignment (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

These foundational capacities are what enable the principles to move from aspiration into embodied action. They allow educators to notice their internal responses, calibrate to the needs of others, and make decisions aligned with purpose rather than pressure. They also reflect the findings of this research, in which participants described increased self-awareness, greater emotional resilience, and a shift from reactive to intentional practice through the application of NLP-informed tools.

To activate and sustain these principles and foundations in practice, the framework draws on five core NLP strategies, each chosen for its relevance to educator wellbeing, classroom presence, and professional growth:

- Presuppositions – Working beliefs that act as perceptual filters to reframe meaning and expand choice (Tosey & Mathison, 2009).
- Meta Model (Language Awareness) – A tool for identifying limiting language patterns and generating precision in internal dialogue and communication (O'Connor & Seymour, 1990).
- Values Elicitation – A structured approach to surfacing and aligning core motivations, supporting integrity-based decision-making.
- Rapport Building – The intentional calibration of verbal and non-verbal cues to create connection and psychological safety (Tickle-Degnen & Rosenthal, 1990).
- Modelling – A process of identifying, decoding, and integrating the patterns behind effective practice in others (Dilts, 1998).

Each of these strategies supports the integration of the model into real-world contexts. Presuppositions reframe perception and enable emotional regulation. The Meta Model

interrupts limiting language and increases communication clarity. Values Elicitation provides a compass for decision-making, while Rapport Building and Modelling reinforce connection, adaptation, and professional growth. When applied with awareness, these strategies serve as the mechanisms through which principles and foundations are enacted.

Importantly, this framework is not intended as a universal prescription. It was developed in my own unique educational setting and reflects the integration of NLP into my personal and professional identity. The model emerged through an autoethnographic process of critical reflection and was informed by a social constructivist approach, in which meaning was co-constructed through dialogue with research participants.

While grounded in education, its principles, foundations, and strategies are intentionally adaptable. They may offer value in any relational, service-oriented, or high-stakes professional context. As one participant aptly said, “Who you are is how you educate.” In this way, the framework supports practitioners not just in what they do, but in who they become.
The full version of this professional framework, including expanded explanations, participant insights, and detailed strategy applications, is provided in the Appendix M.

6.2 Positionality: Unpacking the Extended Deficit Brown Tax

For most of my life, I saw the world through the lens of my story; I just did not yet call it positionality. Positionality, I have come to realise, is the undercurrent beneath every decision, every reaction, every interpretation. It is the “me” behind the label. It is the sum of my backstory, identity, ancestry, and internalised worldview, all of which shape how I show up professionally, personally, and academically.

As one of my participants Ben once said, “who you are is how you teach” and I now understand that to teach (or lead, or support others) with integrity, I must first be willing to truly see myself. This reflection is about that seeing. It is an attempt to give language to the unconscious lens I had been using all along. Before this inquiry, I had not realised how deeply those lenses were coloured by inherited narratives, ancestral absence, cultural complexity, and personal privilege and how much of my ‘self’ had been shaped in the shadows of things I could not name. Now, I hold a more complete picture of my self-concept; flawed, nuanced, earned. What follows is not a polished identity statement, but a living reflection: a tracing of how I became the practitioner I am, and how this Master’s journey helped me reclaim, repattern, and reimagine that becoming.

Segment 1: Origin and Inheritance

I was born in 1985, five years before apartheid officially ended in South Africa. I did not know that until recently. Like most things in my early life, its presence was felt more than explained, absorbed through atmosphere rather than fact. Even after its formal end, apartheid's residue lived on in our streets, in our expectations, and in what we believed was available to us. I was raised as "coloured", a racial classification specific to South Africa that did not just describe how we looked but defined where we belonged. Or did not belong. Religion wove through that identity just as tightly. We were church people. Respectable. Structured. God was not just a belief; he was inherited. Passed down alongside trauma, obedience, and the rules for how to live right. Even my grandfather, who drank, would rise on Sunday morning and make his way to church. Faith was not a question. It was the framework. The language. The law. And embedded within it was the message that women should be good. Modest. Selfless. Quiet.

In our house, we did not talk about mental health. We did not name trauma. But we lived inside it. We ate trauma for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It shaped what we chose, what we avoided, and what we called normal. There was love but it was wrapped in fear. In silence. In survival. My mother was born in 1956. She wanted to become a healer, maybe a doctor but that dream was too large for the world she lived in. The path that opened to her was teaching. Respectable. Contained. She took it, not out of calling, but because it was one of the few options a brown woman could claim in a world where she was operating from a deficit of cultural and financial capital like living in permanent overdraft. That choice shaped her life and mine.

And yet she broke cycles too. She became formally qualified. She moved us to Aotearoa. She interrupted patterns of violence that had been passed down like scripture. Her life was shaped by limitation, but also by courage. I carry both. Still, I am something different. I am the first woman in my family line born into a window of real choice. I did not have to marry out of necessity. I did not have to have children because it was expected. I could travel. I could study. I could say no. I did not always know how, but I could. I belong to one of the first generations of women raised in the wake of feminism, in a time where survival was not the only goal. But the echoes of survival still followed me. The instructions for how to shrink, how to serve, how to disappear; they were still there, embedded in the language of care. I was not taught boundaries. I was not taught that my voice mattered. I was not taught to name what I needed. But I was given a question that would come back to me years later, unspoken, but persistent: What if it did not have to be like this? What if I was allowed to want more?

Segment 2: The Tax We Carried

Trauma was the currency we paid to be alive in our family line. That is how it felt. Not an event, but a background hum, something expected, absorbed, and internalised. No one called it trauma. But it showed up in our reactions, in our coping, in our inability to rest. We lived with our shoulders up, our stomachs clenched. That was just life. And when you are raised like that, you do not question it. You inherit it.

It was not until I began this Master's journey that I started to see the weight I was carrying, not just personally, but generationally. The Review of Learning gave me something I had not expected: a full-length mirror. Not of my achievements, but of the patterns beneath them. It showed me who I was in each job and why I left. It helped me trace the thread that ran through every role I had taken, every pivot I had made. I did not just see work; I saw the way I had been working. What I tolerated. What I pushed through. What I thought was normal. For someone who had spent nearly two decades in self-development, I was shocked by how much I had not seen.

This process helped me find the 'me' behind the professional; the unconscious strategies I had been running, the quiet rules I had internalised. It was the first time I had seen the whole picture of what I was carrying. I did not have a name for this weight at first. But the more I reflected, the clearer it became this was a kind of inherited debt. A deficit that was not just economic; it was emotional, psychological, cultural. A tax. A burden passed down through generations who were never allowed to think beyond survival. I now call it the Extended Deficit Brown Tax. And it does not just show up in burnout or exhaustion; it is the permanent overdraft we were born into. We were not building from scratch; we were digging out from under.

We were never given the privilege of space to think beyond; that was reserved for lighter skin only. We were not handed new models of the world through extended study or generational wealth. We were expected to feed our families and provide a warm place to sleep. We were work horses trained for service and survival. And those expectations came coded as love, loyalty, and duty but also as limitation. They were hardwired into how we saw the world: what people like "us" could do, who we could become, what was probable, what was permissible. It was embedded in how our women showed up, how I showed up, how we acted, reacted, performed, and stayed small.

Burnout was not recognised as a signal, it was expected. We were unconsciously incompetent. We did not know what we did not know. So, we passed it down, like we were supposed to. To make sense of it, I began self-coaching, intensely, relentlessly. Not in some formalised framework, but in the trenches of real life. I was working, studying, teaching, surviving and in the middle of that, I was asking myself better questions. I was catching old narratives in the act. Do not shine too bright. Don't be too much. That is not for people like us. These were not random thoughts. They were inheritance. Handed down with love, shaped by fear, and never interrogated.

I was however, learning to interrogate them. What would it mean to stop paying that tax? What would it mean to want more, and not apologise for it? What if thriving did not mean betraying where I came from but fulfilling what they could not? This was more than reflection, it was reconstruction. Each time I caught an old belief or pattern in the act, I was reshaping how I saw myself. I was not just learning skills. I was learning how to live differently. That is what Illeris (2014) describes as transformative learning, the kind that reshapes identity, not just behaviour. This was not just theory. This was survival giving way to authorship, a reclaiming of identity through conscious pattern interruption.

Segment 3: Identity, Inheritance, and Transformational Self-Knowledge

For most of my life, I had no real understanding of where I came from. I had a label, "coloured", and a lineage that felt fractured. Culture was not something we lived; it was something we lost. Our family did not speak of heritage or language or belonging not because we did not care, but because we did not know. Even joy had its limits built around survival, shaped by absence, and stripped of story. No one spoke of what we had endured to remain.

In 2020, I took a DNA test, mostly out of curiosity. The results stunned me,13 distinct ancestral lines. A later update expanded this to 21. My blood carries the imprint of Africa, Europe, and Asia, the stories of peoples and places I was never taught to claim. Nearly 40% of my DNA traces back to Central and East Africa, deep, resilient, ancestral roots that predate colonisation. My European lineage is broad: Dutch, Portuguese, English, French, Germanic, Danish, Breton, Spanish, South Italian, Scottish, and Welsh. And threaded through it all is an Asian inheritance, South Asian, Bengali, Southeast Asian, Chinese, Central Asian, and Filipino, fragments of histories moved by trade, slavery, war, and survival.

What struck me most was not just the scale; it was the silence. This is not just mixed heritage. Its global ancestry reduced into an institutional label designed to control. "Coloured" was never a culture. It was a category, a way to flatten a vast and complex lineage into something governable. Apartheid did not just strip people of rights, it stripped them of names, roots, belonging. And the cruel thing is it worked. For years, I internalised the idea that my identity was marginal, undefined. That I was a mixture without meaning. But this data reframed everything. It showed me what apartheid had narrowed into a label; I could now unpack as legacy. I carry the bloodlines of empires, resistance, and exile but no one ever told me their names.

The schooling I received never once mentioned Maasai, Portuguese, or Breton ancestry. My nation taught me to answer to "coloured," but gave me no map for what that meant. I was born into a family line where religious duty replaced cultural memory, and where God was constant, but heritage was unnamed. Seeing those results did not solve the grief rather it gave it form. For the first time, I understood the enormity of what had been taken, what had been hidden, and what I might begin to reclaim.

In many ways, this inquiry process mirrored that same truth: that I have always been more than I was told I was. That my identity is not a product of rebellion, but of realisation. That the limits handed to me by systems, by silence, and by history are not the measure of my worth. Before I ever discovered the language of NLP, I had already begun decoding who I was. And now, I am reading it with clarity.

Segment 4: Power, Silence, and the Cost of Obedience

I did not come into this Master's expecting ease. But I did not expect to be undone by the very system meant to support me. My academic mentor, a white male, led me down a path that had nothing to do with finishing a thesis efficiently. I followed him because that is what we are trained to do: trust the people in power. No one told me I had any say. No one told me I could challenge direction. When it all collapsed and I still had not finished, my facilitator asked, "At which point does the student take responsibility?" But I want to ask: at which point was I ever told I had power? When exactly were we supposed to unpack the weight of a lifetime spent never speaking up to white men? Where was the page in the handbook that gave me permission to say, "This is my Masters, and I'll do it my way"? Because the book I have is stuck on millennia of colonisation.

He was removed because of how far he had led me astray. But even then, there was no repair. No one checked if I was okay. No one acknowledged what had happened. I was left

carrying the weight of everything that had come undone because of his “guidance.” And I carried that weight every single day, knowing what it had already cost me; all the nights I could have rested, all the moments I could have lived for myself. I was working four days a week, teaching over 200 students in the first two days alone, then running private music lessons in the evenings and on Saturdays. I was navigating a beautiful new relationship that I wanted to invest in. “Time for me” became a fairytale. This thesis nearly broke me mentally.

If it were not for the foundation NLP gave me, the tools to reframe, to anchor, to persist I honestly do not know if this thesis would have ever seen the light of day. That is the difference it made. That is what it looks like in action. What this experience taught me is how institutional silence operates. How easily harm is absorbed into systems that rely on student compliance. It reminded me of what Yosso (2005) frames as the cultural capital that marginalised students bring and how quickly it is devalued in white-dominant systems. I no longer assume that titles come with integrity. I now ask more questions, set clearer expectations, and create space for others to do the same. I do not use silence as a strategy anymore and I will not replicate what was done to me. This was not a side plot; it was a mirror. It reflected every layer of the extended deficit brown tax I have been trying to name. And that learning will follow me into every space I lead, from now on.

Segment 5: Lessons in Self-Authorship: Reclaiming Identity through Inquiry

This master's did not just ask what I had learned rather it challenged me to understand how I had learned, and who I had become through that learning. Before this journey, I did not fully grasp that workplaces were not just sites of service but also sites of transformation. I thought learning happened in classrooms, courses, or personal development books not in the corridors of my career trajectory. But through the Review of Learning, I was asked to re-examine my career not just for what I had done, but for who I was becoming in the doing. That alone shifted my lens.

It did not stop there. If I could learn in workspaces, then I could learn in life spaces too. And so, I began asking: Who is the me that is learning? How did I get here? What values guided me then? What stories shaped those values? The further I followed that trail, the more I saw I had not simply acquired skills over time, I had constructed meaning through every challenge, failure, and moment of insight. And those constructions were never in isolation. They were social. Cultural. Historical. Inherited.

This lens now informs how I show up as a practitioner. I no longer lead from task alone; I lead from context. I ask what shaped the challenges I see, not just how to fix them. I understand my learners and colleagues not in isolation, but as meaning-makers too. That shift, rooted in social constructivism, is the most important learning I will carry forward: not that I acquired skills, but that I learned to question the stories beneath them. This is not just a story about a master's degree. It is a story about consciousness, about seeing how systems shape us, and how, with enough awareness, we can begin to reshape them too.
The Master of Professional Practice handed me the mirror. I did the work to look in it. And I now walk with a deeper awareness of who I am, what shaped me, and how I will use that knowledge to shape the spaces I lead.

Segment 6: The Freedom I Claimed

This Master's helped me name patterns I had not yet seen. It revealed deeper truths about who I am, where I come from, and how tightly those things shape who I am allowed to be within systemic constraints. It showed me how much of my identity had been shaped in response to structures, not choice. It cemented a broader truth that the world is not done with the long shadows of apartheid, or the long reach of labels I never asked for as a woman racialised as "coloured" and shaped by apartheid's legacy.

This was not a breakthrough; it was a naming. It helped me see the parts of myself I had not realised were still shaping my choices. Unspoken identities. Outdated patterns. Old narratives still humming beneath the surface. It did not hand me a new self rather it gave language to the one I had spent years trying to uncover. By the time I arrived here, I had already spent nearly two decades in personal development. I had coached myself through heartbreak, burnout, inherited trauma, and professional disillusionment. NLP had long been part of my toolkit, not just as a technique, but as a worldview. What shifted during this thesis was not how I used NLP, it was my conviction that it belonged: in education, in identity work, and in deep transformation. I also shifted in knowing myself in a way I never had before.

This programme clarified my future direction. I no longer want to remain in traditional classrooms; I want to work in the personal development space, where real change happens. To me, personal growth is professional growth. And I want to offer others what I never had: tools to rewrite inherited limits, to stay well, and to lead with awareness.
This drive is not abstract. I saw what teaching did to my grandmother. To my mother. To my sister. I watched education, this industry that promises uplift, consume the women I loved. I am not here to repeat that pattern. I am here to interrupt it.

This is not rebellion. It is responsibility. I am the first woman in my family line born into a generation with access to choice about career, family, and identity. I do not wear those choices as a badge. I honour them as a responsibility. I know what they cost the women before me. And I know what they make possible for the women who will come next.
I feel drawn to work with people across cultural, racial, and religious contexts not because I see us as the same, but because I understand how different we are. I carry those differences in my own blood. What draws me in is the shared desire to unpack what shapes our behaviour: to name the invisible scripts, to trace the inherited meaning-making that shapes how we see and how we act. Whether it is the Extended Deficit Brown Tax or the wider deficit trauma carried across identities, I want to support others to name what is shaping them and choose differently if they want to.

My leadership is no longer performative. it is iterative and alive. It is shaped by what I know and what I am still uncovering. I will lead through reflective practice, and I will integrate new learning through NLP, through research, through lived encounter so I can serve better. That freedom, for me, means no longer performing a version of professionalism shaped by compliance. It means guiding others from a place of integrity while continuing to expand my own. This chapter of learning may be complete, but the real story begins here. This is the foundation I will continue to build from: in practice, in purpose, and in full possession of myself.

6.3 Integration into Professional Identity

This framework has not only shaped my professional practice, it has reshaped my professional identity. Before developing this NLP-based model, I often operated without a fully integrated view of myself as a practitioner. I understood the individual components of my role, classroom management, lesson delivery, student engagement, but I had not yet formed a cohesive understanding of how those pieces connected, or how my own mindset shaped them. I measured success through external validation and followed inherited norms without question.

Developing this framework shifted me from performing to aligning. The concepts and tools of NLP especially values elicitation, presuppositions, and language awareness offered a lens for exploring the beliefs and assumptions I had unconsciously inherited. One pivotal moment occurred during an early values elicitation exercise, when I realised that I had been making professional choices without clear awareness of what actually mattered to me. From that point on, I began designing my practice from the inside out. I no longer relied on

reactive strategies or default scripts; I started asking: does this choice align with my core values? Does it support wellbeing, mine and others? That shift from reactivity to intentionality marked the beginning of a profound transformation.

My teaching practice changed first. I became more present, less attached to rigid plans, and more willing to trust my intuition in the classroom. I stopped equating structure with safety and instead learned to regulate myself through presence and language. For instance, I began entering new classrooms not with a script, but with calibrated openness using rapport and sensory acuity to guide the tone. Students responded differently too. By stepping into their world rather than demanding they meet me in mine, I created conditions for trust and learning, even in short-term relief contexts.

Relief teaching, in particular, became a proving ground for this transformation. In unfamiliar environments with high variability, I used NLP strategies to anchor myself, establish immediate rapport, and uphold clear energetic boundaries. Rather than bracing for behaviour, I approached each room as a chance to model presence and adaptability. This framework helped me stay grounded, even when external systems were chaotic or unsupported.

Much of this work has also been shaped by how I experience the education system not just as a teacher, but as a brown woman within a predominantly Pākehā-centred structure. One of the most confronting lessons early in my career was learning that professional value can be conditional, often determined by hierarchy, not humanity. Moments where I felt dismissed or expendable, particularly by school leaders, forced me to recognise how power and positionality operate beneath the surface. Those experiences did not just change how I work; they changed how I protect my wellbeing, advocate for myself, and define what professional integrity means in practice.

The research process itself also deepened my identity shift. During analysis, I had a moment of realisation while listening to Esmeralda describe how she had studied exam anxiety for her master's investing years of effort only to be told that her findings were not of interest. That moment stayed with me. It lifted me out of the micro-level of my own practice and gave me a bird’s eye view of the systemic structures that either allow or deny the application of meaningful tools like NLP. Her story gave me perspective: we do not just work within systems, we are shaped and sometimes stifled by them. And yet, as practitioners, we also hold the power to interrupt that.

Esmeralda's experience helped me understand that my framework was not just about practice, it was about contribution. It was not only for me; it could become a resource for others navigating the same tensions. It was in this synthesis, hearing participants echo what I had lived, naming what I had not yet seen, that I stepped into authorship. I was not just applying tools anymore; I was naming patterns, articulating tensions, and mapping meaning. This led to a quiet but significant shift: I no longer see myself as simply a practitioner. I now understand myself as a thought and practice leader not in a positional sense, but in how I contribute. That includes contributing to academic discourse around NLP, teacher wellbeing, and identity formation.

As I outlined earlier, my aim is not to promote NLP as a label but to work with what proves useful in practice; here that stance underpins how I now see myself contributing as a thought and practice leader. As this framework continues to evolve, so too will my professional self. But what remains constant is the foundation it offers, a way to show up with presence, to teach with integrity, and to contribute meaningfully to the professional lives of others. That is who I am becoming, and that is what this work makes possible.

6.4 Limitations and Ethical Commitments

This framework is intentionally grounded in my diverse experiences as an educator, including relief teaching, fixed term and part-time contracts, specialist subject teaching, and ongoing roles in music and drama education. I have worked across a range of school settings from forward-thinking primary environments to special character schools, high schools, and private institutions often stepping into varied roles that span classroom instruction, creative facilitation, and performance coaching. These experiences offer a broad yet agile vantage point, shaped by shifting contexts rather than long-term immersion. While this lens enables clarity, adaptability, and pattern recognition across multiple systems, it may not fully capture the deep relational and systemic dynamics that emerge from year-long classroom consistency.

This is a conscious professional choice, aligned with my values and personal learning pathway. As such, my model reflects both the affordances and the limitations of this uniquely mobile perspective. This is not a prescriptive training model nor a universally replicable method rather, it is a living framework that will evolve alongside my practice. In time, it may serve as a foundation for future NLP-based teacher training initiatives. Nonetheless, the principles embedded within it, drawn from high-integrity NLP training aligned with IANLP standards, hold relevance well beyond my own experience.

IANLP's ethical pillars of congruence, autonomy, and ecology serve as foundational touchstones, reminding practitioners to act in ways that support internal alignment, preserve personal agency, and consider systemic impacts. Provided that NLP tools are applied through rigorous training and ethical clarity, this model can be generative across a wide range of educational settings. As Diana insightfully pointed out, the cultural applicability of NLP particularly in relation to Māori worldviews deserves closer scrutiny. As with all forms of modelling, outcomes depend not only on the framework itself, but on the fidelity and intentionality with which it is applied. The deeper point is not whether this framework works universally, but whether it is used with awareness, consent, and care. In this sense, its success lies not only in its structure, but in the practitioner's integrity.

I do not feel compelled to defend NLP as a label. I am grounded in its outcomes, in how it has reshaped my professional presence and personal alignment. Rather than promote or protect its name, I focus on what works. And by "what works," I mean what supports meaningful, ethical, and contextually respectful change. I am not interested in converting sceptics. If individuals are curious, I will speak to its value openly. But my efforts are rooted in lived experience, not persuasion. I see myself as a practitioner of change, not a defender of brand. And where resistance arises, I remember: the map is not the territory. Others may hold differing perspectives on NLP, and that is valid. Respect does not require agreement.

Ethically, this orientation demands a deep commitment to safety and consent. I was trained in an environment where integrity was not a side note, but a core standard, where the principle of "being hired" was non-negotiable. This means obtaining more than verbal consent: it requires attunement. Is the person ready to think differently, to reflect, to change? Do they feel safe enough to engage? These questions guide my application of NLP in classrooms, coaching, and conversations. Techniques like reframing, anchoring, or perceptual shifting carry significant power and when applied without invitation or in the wrong context, they can erode psychological safety. I have witnessed moments where these tools were used inappropriately or intrusively, and the effect was immediate: resistance, discomfort, and relational breakdown. Such experiences reinforced my view that NLP, like any powerful modality, is ethically neutral, its impact shaped by the values and intentions of the practitioner.

This awareness is echoed by participants like Diana and Gagan. Gagan offered a useful analogy: "Is a gun good or evil? Is money? It depends on whose hands it is in." Tools are not inherently ethical or unethical, it is the mindset, training, and awareness of the user that defines their effect. For this reason, I see ethical responsibility as extending beyond visible practice. It is not performative. It is congruence. What I do behind closed doors matters.

How I hold space, listen, challenge, and support others matters. Practicing ethically means using NLP not to influence others for convenience, but to strengthen their agency and autonomy. It means always building safety and first and allowing others to guide their own transformation. My role is to model integrity, not mastery, to walk alongside others with clarity, humility, and care, holding space for ethical growth in ourselves and in the systems we touch.

6.5 Conclusion: A Framework in Evolution

This framework is not a static product, but a living model, one that will continue to evolve alongside my growth as a practitioner, coach, and educator. It does not claim universal applicability or present itself as a definitive training manual. Instead, it offers a reflective, values-led synthesis of NLP strategies that have meaningfully shaped my professional identity and pedagogical approach.

Grounded in my context, it provides a foundation for future teacher development initiatives that centre wellbeing, ethical practice, and reflective engagement. However, its relevance must be reassessed over time and across cultural, institutional, and relational contexts. As Diana rightly noted, NLP's cultural adaptability, particularly within Māori worldviews, remains a space of necessary inquiry. Future iterations of this model will continue to explore such tensions, ensuring that its strategies honour the diverse settings in which they may be applied.

In sharing this framework, I do not position myself as the final authority. Rather, I see this work as a contribution to a broader, evolving conversation, one that invites dialogue, challenge, and collaboration. My intention is not to prescribe, but to participate. To offer what I have learned so far, while remaining open to what is yet to come. In that spirit, this framework will continue to develop as I do, shaped by new insights, new relationships, and a continued commitment to ethical, context-responsive practice.

Chapter 7 Dissemination, Recommendations and Conclusion

7.1 Dissemination and Practitioner Engagement

While this inquiry was not formally designed as an intervention study, opportunities for early dissemination arose organically throughout the research process. As I shared emerging insights with teachers across various school contexts, a pattern became clear: the NLP-based framework deeply resonated with educators, often filling a gap they had long sensed but been unable to articulate. These moments of informal dissemination offered not only validation of the framework's relevance but also invitations to continue developing it as a resource for broader teacher development.

One teacher, a long-time classroom practitioner, expressed: "This is more valuable than most of the professional development I have done in all my teaching years. What could be more important than understanding yourself and the world around you in this way, especially in our role that demands so much from us?" Another remarked: "Imagine this knowledge was integrated and woven into every teacher's profession. It could change the very narrative many of us struggle with, whether it is about ourselves, our classrooms, or the system we find ourselves in."

These reflections mirror what another teacher described as the missing conversation: "You're the first person I've heard talking about a teacher-centric viewpoint. I totally agree, if we focus on teachers, students will benefit as a by-product." These insights affirm a key premise of the framework that when educators are equipped to regulate their state, map their inner world, and communicate with intention, they are more resourced to support the complex needs of students.

In addition to these conversations, I had the opportunity to share strategies like anchoring, reframing, and state awareness with individual teachers in context. One beginner teacher reflected after applying anchoring: "Yesterday was the first day I thought, this is how it should be every day." Another commented that the presuppositions helped her recognise the powerful stories teachers and students carry and how these shape relationships in subtle but profound ways.

Across these encounters, what emerged was not just agreement, but a call to action: "When your work is complete, come back and run a PD here. We are always searching for ways to

better ourselves, and we need this in our school." These moments point to the wider potential for dissemination through targeted professional development workshops. Schools already searching for ways to support teacher wellbeing and emotional resilience may find value in context-responsive versions of this framework. While further refinement and formal piloting are still required, these early responses suggest the work is not only timely but wanted and that teachers are ready for tools that prioritise internal alignment, sustainable practice, and a new language of professional presence.

7.2 Recommendations: Embedding Core Life Skills into Education

The next stage of this work must prioritise integration and scale. This study focused on NLP-informed strategies to support teacher wellbeing, but the implications stretch far beyond the classroom. The findings reveal a need to embed core life skills including communication, identity awareness, state management, and reflective thinking into the heart of education. If we want societal change, we must begin in the only system that every citizen passes through the education system.

Schools are uniquely positioned as the one institutional pathway every citizen shares. They sit at a strategic segway point, producing future citizens who go on to shape all other sectors from healthcare to justice to governance. If we embed core life skills in this stage, we shape every human that comes through the system. This ripple effect cannot be overstated: the classroom is not only a site for academic learning, but for foundational development of human capacity. Therefore, wellbeing must be treated as a "must-have," not a "nice-to-have."

The most impactful next step would be a larger-scale research study, across broader teaching contexts including early childhood, secondary, tertiary, alternative education, and learning design. This would deepen insight into how NLP-informed tools support educator wellbeing across environments. Over time, the findings could be cross-referenced with existing wellbeing data to build a robust, academically sound model, one that identifies both strengths and barriers NLP-trained educators face. This is a vital investment, not just in education, but in the long-term health of society.

Wellbeing itself must be redefined. It is not self-care as luxury; it is emotional regulation as survival. The absence of emotional education has tangible consequences: addiction, violence, burnout, suicide, crime. These are not abstract outcomes. They reflect unmet needs that begin in childhood and are rarely resolved. We can no longer expect emotion literacy to come from the home, many parents themselves never had access to these tools.

Intergenerational trauma, colonisation, and systemic inequity compound this absence. We cannot assume emotional regulation is being passed down when many caregivers remain unconsciously incompetent, still paying the "Extended Deficit Brown Tax."

This generation has unprecedented access to psychological resources, but that access is often limited to the cognitively privileged, those who are aware that something is missing and seek to change. That privilege should not determine a child's emotional future. The school system is our best lever for equitable distribution of core wellbeing tools. And the key to this transformation is not only student-focused, it begins with the teacher. A teacher who knows how to regulate, reflect, and communicate effectively will model these skills across decades of learners. One regulated teacher can impact hundreds of students across a career.

In this way, the findings of this study should inform governmental policy, structural PD systems, and Ministry of Education priorities. NLP-informed wellbeing tools should be integrated into accredited, standardised training aligned with international governing bodies such as IANLP. Such tools can be delivered through funded PD, embedded in teacher training institutions, and paired with ongoing coaching support. The Ministry has the power to unlock the potential of this work and the obligation to respond to the systemic burnout it has helped create.

Finally, this work is not limited to education. Every industry demands communication, learning, and wellbeing. The ability to "transfer knowledge", to take an idea, break it down, and deliver it meaningfully, is universal. This work provides the emotional and cognitive scaffolding that enables learning itself. Whether in nursing, social work, policy, or parenting, these tools apply. If we start with schools, we shift the baseline for every other system.

This thesis offers a blueprint, not a prescription, but a provocation. It demonstrates how NLP-informed tools can shift teacher identity, disrupt burnout patterns, and foster capacities that ripple outward from the classroom to society. The next phase is not only about expanding the research but about embedding it meaningfully. As educators, policymakers, and communities ask how to rebuild after crisis and burnout, this work responds with both urgency and hope. It is time to fund, trial, and implement approaches that honour the emotional architecture of learning because when teachers thrive, the system changes from within.

This is not a metaphor; it is a practical truth. Teachers are not just implementers of policy; they are daily decision-makers, emotional regulators, community builders, and culture carriers. Their wellbeing shapes the relational climate of every classroom and, by extension, the development of every student. Investing in teacher wellbeing is not a luxury, it is a systems strategy. When we embed tools that strengthen emotional resilience, language precision, reflective thinking, and behavioural flexibility in the people at the front line of education, we do not just support teachers, we future-proof the society they influence. Change begins in the one place that touches every citizen: the classroom. And it begins with the one person who leads it, the teacher.

7.3 Conclusion: Where Change Begins

This thesis began as an exploration of how NLP-informed strategies could support teacher wellbeing but what emerged was something broader. It became clear that this was not just a study of teacher stress, but a deeper inquiry into human capacity. It became a deeper inquiry into how we equip educators with the internal tools to lead, reflect, connect, and sustain themselves in a system that often forgets their humanity.

The findings demonstrate that NLP offers more than isolated techniques, it provides a cohesive infrastructure for reflective, emotionally intelligent practice. Teachers who used these tools reported increased behavioural flexibility, greater perspective-taking, stronger rapport, and a sense of agency in high-pressure contexts. The impact was not only professional, but deeply personal. When educators develop core life skills like emotional regulation, language precision, and self-awareness, the ripple effect is exponential. A single regulated teacher can influence generations of students. A staffroom that centres wellbeing creates a learning culture of safety and resilience. A system that invests in emotional literacy produces citizens who know how to listen, reflect, and lead.

Through qualitative inquiry, autoethnographic reflection, and thematic analysis of NLP-trained educators' experiences, this study has demonstrated the transformative potential of practitioner-led, reflective models of professional development. Education is the only institutional pathway that touches every citizen. If we embed these capacities at the level of the teacher, we do not just improve the profession, we shift the baseline of society. This research offers one possible blueprint for how that transformation might begin.

Schools are the great convergence point of society, a funnel through which every race, religion, culture, and background must pass. No other institution gathers us all so early, for so long, and in such formative years. What flows through that funnel shapes the future. And

at the centre of that flow are teachers, the architects of meaning, the gatekeepers of opportunity, the ones who decide whether a young mind feels seen or silenced, empowered or diminished. What students carry out with them depends deeply on what they receive while they are inside. Teachers do not simply deliver curriculum; they model humanity. They plant the seeds that become self-belief, emotional regulation, and relational skill or, in their absence, confusion, shutdown, and shame. Perhaps we have underestimated just how foundational this role is.

This study repositions NLP not just as a toolkit for individual change, but as a scalable mechanism for systemic transformation. If we want a better society, we must start with the architects who shape it from the very beginning. Because when teachers thrive, the system changes from within. This is where change begins.

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Appendix A: Review of Learning – Course 1

This appendix has been redacted for privacy in the public OPRES repository version.

Appendix B: Learning Agreement – Course 2

This appendix has been redacted for privacy in the public OPRES repository version.

Appendix C: KTO Consultation

This appendix has been redacted for privacy in the public OPRES repository version.

Appendix D: Ethics Approval

Date: 21.11.2022

c/- College of Work Based Learning
Otago Polytechnic
Private Bag 1910
Dunedin 9054

Tēnā koe Alexis

Re: Application for Ethics Consent from College of Work Based Learning (Capable NZ)
Reference Number: 144
Title of Application: "What is the positive impact of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) skills and strategies in the professional practice of teachers in Education?"

Thank you for your application for ethics approval for this research project and your careful responses to our recommendations. The review panel has considered your revised application and your responses to questions and issues raised. We are pleased to inform you that we are satisfied with the revisions made and confirm ethics approval for the project.

We wish you well with your research.

All correspondence regarding this application should include the reference number assigned.

This protocol covers the following researchers: [researcher and co-researchers if applicable].
Project approval is valid for three (3) years from date of letter, and only while the researcher is undertaking their programme of study at Otago Polytechnic, if applicable.

Nāku noa, nā,

[redacted]

Name. Prof. Jo Kirkwood
pp. College of Work Based Learning Ethicist
College of Work Based Learning / Capable NZ
Otago Polytechnic

Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Title of project:

"What is the positive impact of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) skills and strategies in the professional practice of teachers in Education?"

General introduction

My name is Alexis Williams and this research project is part of a Master of Professional Practice I am studying through Capable NZ, Otago Polytechnic Ltd. My intention with this document is to provide information about my research so that you can make an informed decision about whether to participate.

Aim of research project

A key aim of this research project is to explore how Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) skills and strategies positively impact the professional practice of teachers trained in NLP.

PARTICIPATION

What type of participants are being sought?

I want to interview qualified teachers who

- have an NLP practitioner or master practitioner certification through an international governing body such as INLPTA, ABNLP, IANLP, IN.
- Have been practicing as a teacher for at least 2 years
- Teachers who currently teach within the primary or secondary sector

How will potential participants be identified and accessed?

I will access my own personal NLP channels to find teachers and ask if they would like to be part of my research. I am looking for teachers who have completed a Practitioner level certification or Master Practitioner level certification. I shall send an individualised email to people who I know, following with a snowballing recruitment process. To achieve this, I will ask you if you know of anyone who would be suitable for my research. You do not have to provide a name if you choose not to.

What will participation involve?

Should you agree to take part in this project you will be asked to take part in an interview of approximately 1 hour, with the researcher at a time and place convenient to both. Either face to face at a cafe or online via zoom, whichever is most suitable.

How will confidentiality and/or anonymity be protected?

- Confidentiality will be maintained. Any information that could identify you or your place of work will be removed.
- Pseudonyms will be used rather than your real name.
- You will be reminded verbally at the beginning of the interview not to disclose student information. If you do avertedly disclose student information I will deidentify the transcript or remove the text.

Can you change your mind and withdraw from the project?
You can decline to participate without any disadvantage to yourself. If you choose to participate, you can stop participating in the project at any time, before the data is anonymised and analysed, without giving reasons for your withdrawal. The date for this is three weeks following the interview.

You can also withdraw any information that has already been supplied until the stage agreed on the consent form. You can refuse to answer any question and ask for any recording to be turned off at any stage.

DATA COLLECTION

What data or information will be collected and how will it be used?

My intention is to find out what specific NLP tool or strategy was found useful for educators within their practice. This information will be synthetized with literature to inform my master's thesis and create a model from the insights gained.

Results of this project may be published but any data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant without prior consent.

Participants can request a summary of the research results within a year of the finalization of the thesis.

Data storage

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only the researcher and project supervisors will have access to it. The data will be stored on the researcher's password protected drive to which only they have access to. Any hard copies of data will be stored in a locked cupboard which only the researcher has access to. At the end of the project any personal information or any raw data on which the results are based will be destroyed. All other data will be stored on the Otago Polytechnic research data repository. It will be disposed of after seven (7) years, by the organisational management system according to Institutional policy and the relevant storage acts.

CONTACT

If you have any questions about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact

Alexis Williams
Researcher
[redacted]

Samuel Mann
Supervisor
Capable NZ
Otago Polytechnic
Samuel.Mann@op.ac.nz

This project is carried out under the auspices of the Otago Polytechnic Research Ethics Committee Category B Delegated Authority: Please contact the College of Work Based Learning for further information (CWBL@op.ac.nz)

Appendix F: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form:

Project Title:

"What is the positive impact of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) skills and strategies in the professional practice of teachers in Education?"

I have read the information sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage during this research.
I know that:

- My participation in the project is entirely voluntary and I am free to refuse to answer any particular question.
- I am free to stop participating at any time.
- I cannot withdraw any information I have supplied up to **three weeks following the interview.**
- At the end of the project any personal information or any raw data on which the results are based will be destroyed. All other data will be stored on the Otago Polytechnic research data repository. It will be disposed of after seven (7) years, by the organisational management system according to Institutional policy and the relevant storage acts.
- The results of the project may be published or used at a presentation in an academic conference, but my anonymity / confidentiality will be preserved.
- I can request a copy of the research findings.
- I understand that my identity will be confidential, and I will not be named.

Additional information given or conditions agreed to

_____
_____
_____

I agree to take part in this project under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

…… (Signature of participant)
…… (Date)
…… (Signature of researcher)
…… (Date)

This project is carried out under the auspices of the Otago Polytechnic Research Ethics Committee Category B Delegated Authority: Please contact the College of Work Based Learning for further information (CWBL@op.ac.nz)

Appendix G: Participant Email Invitation

Email Invitation –Participant

Tēnā koutou katoa

My name is Alexis Williams, and I am currently undertaking a practice inquiry as part of my Master of Professional Practice, through Capable NZ, Otago Polytechnic Ltd. My professional focus is on the intersection of teaching and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), with a particular emphasis on teacher wellbeing.

My practice inquiry is exploring the positive impact of NLP skills and strategies in the professional practice of teachers. My aim is to gain an understanding of how NLP-trained teachers perceive and experience the use of NLP in education. As a teacher trained in NLP to Practitioner or Master Practitioner level, your knowledge and experience are of great value to my study.

I am cordially inviting you to participate in my research, which will involve a confidential 60-minute interview. This conversation will provide an opportunity to share your insights on the effectiveness of NLP in your practice. Please see the attached information sheet for further details on my research and what your participation would involve.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [redacted]
If you are happy to proceed with the interview, I would be delighted to arrange a time that suits you.

Ngā mihi nui
Alexis Williams

Appendix H: CV Alexis Williams

This appendix has been redacted for privacy in the public OPRES repository version.

Appendix I: Learning Outcomes Mapping Table

This appendix has been redacted for privacy in the public OPRES repository version.

Appendix J: Chapter 2 Literature Review - Vignettes 4 and 5

Vignette 4: Discipline as Dialogue: Learning Through Risk and Reflection

Soft skills like conflict resolution, self-awareness, and emotional regulation are foundational for student growth, academically and personally. These competencies underpin not only classroom success but long-term resilience and adaptability in life (Elias et al., 1997).
Yet in traditional schooling, these capacities are often overlooked or undervalued. Despite widespread acknowledgment of their importance, these skills are rarely integrated into formal curriculum structures in a way that prioritizes lived, embodied learning (CASEL, 2023).
This vignette centres on an external trainer's work with a group of students frequently labelled as disruptive, those who often struggle to meet behavioural expectations. What I witnessed during this session was not a lesson in control, but a masterclass in social-emotional learning, relational authority, and behavioural modelling.
I have observed this trainer across multiple schools and year levels, and in every context, his methods were consistent, effective, and systemically embedded. One school in particular adopted his language and structure at a whole-school level, reinforcing his strategies across staff, classrooms, and school culture. This integration included shared vocabulary ("Get your body in the group") and professional development for teachers, ensuring that students received aligned messaging regardless of who they were working with. This whole-school embedding mirrors the kind of systems-level congruence advocated in NLP-informed organisational change models (Tosey & Mathison, 2009).
Though not framed explicitly as NLP, the trainer's methods, including reframing, anchoring, and language-based redirection, mirror key NLP principles. This story explores how real-time experiential learning, behavioural modelling, and emotionally intelligent language use can enhance student engagement and support positive classroom dynamics.
Experiential learning was at the heart of this session, not just as a pedagogical tool, but as a whole-person framework. Experiential learning models argue that real change comes through lived experience, active reflection, and behaviourally embedded feedback loops (Kolb, 2023). When learners are given space to physically move, emotionally respond, and socially negotiate, as they were in this group, learning becomes internalised, personal, and powerful. The session reflected what research confirms: when soft skills are taught through

hands-on, relationally rich contexts, engagement rises and behavioural issues decrease (Noor et al., 2022).
For me as an observer, this session reframed what ‘discipline’ and ‘learning’ could look like, not as reward and punishment, but as guided experimentation in real-time. The language used (“Dante, think about me,” “Get your body in the group”) became shared vocabulary, anchors of emotional awareness and social presence. These weren’t empty slogans. They were invitations to participate differently.
This story, then, is not about behavioural compliance. It’s about giving students the tools to become emotionally literate, socially aware, and neurologically safe. It left me with a question I have carried since: What if classrooms were built around this kind of learning from the very beginning, for all students, not just those who misbehave?

The gym smelled like sweat and new sneakers. A frisbee clattered across the floor, and the music blared, a signal to dodge, throw, weave. When the music froze, so did the game, and that is when the real lessons began.

I have observed this trainer multiple times before in different school settings. The focus of what I’ve seen so far on the importance of students developing social skills is that it is a skill that is missing for a lot of students. Typically, students who lack social skills are at the end of the classroom behavioural spectrum. However, these soft skills are a cross between the education we get from our home life and the education we gain from the school community. The core skills I feel are important and largely overlooked are dependent on the educational bridge between home and school, which implies that parents would have some knowledge of social skills, conflict resolution skills or communication skills. I know from my experience that I didn't know that I didn't know how to effectively communicate until I went through training. Neither did my parents. It was outside the scope of our knowledge. Within the stages of competence, this is the learning level referred to as being unconsciously incompetent.

As explained by Burch (1970), there is a deficit in understanding or knowledge of something and the individual is not necessarily aware of it. The skill's usefulness may be denied by them. Before moving on to the next stage, an individual must realise their own incompetence and the value of the new skill.
In this incident, the trainer had a conversation before the activity, revisiting strategies that are available in a game that looked like dodgeball but with soft frisbees instead of a ball. The point of the game is to get the other team out. High risk is closest to the other team. Moderate risk is a little further back, and low risk is right at the back of the court. The

trainer uses a game to teach social and critical thinking skills to students. When the music is playing the game is on, and when the music freezes it is learning time.
"Here on the court, life compressed itself into a simple dance between risk and recovery, decision and consequence."

I remembered the first time I stood in front of a class alone. Thirty students looking at me, waiting. I wasn't prepared for the weight of their attention. Every decision felt magnified, a risk, a test, a chance to lose them or reach them. No textbook had trained me for that moment. Just like these students now, I was learning how to navigate pressure, uncertainty, and the invisible rules of a community I was still figuring out.
The freezing music became its own kind of language, a call to reflection in the middle of the chaos. The music freezes, and the trainer says, "If you are taking high risks in the community all the time you are going to crash and burn. What does that actually mean? You cannot be successful unless you take a risk. Visit high risk for good reason and low risk to recover and repair." He draws on life examples of driving a car and what high risk looks like and asks the students what is likely to happen if he stays in high risk. He draws on real life and equates the game to real life.

One boy sat against the gym wall, frisbee in his lap, blinking back tears he did not want anyone to see. Around him, the game carried on, laughter, shouts, sneakers squeaking on polished wood. But in that quiet, crumpled moment, I realized: growth doesn't always look like triumph. Sometimes it looks like heartbreak.
The game is back on and the music freezes often; the trainer points out learning opportunities in real time. This time when the music freezes he draws the student's attention to someone who stays in a high-risk zone. Saying that he loves the feeling, the rush. He asks, "Is that feeling controlling you or are you controlling it?" The student answers, "It's controlling me." The trainer continues, "You're hypnotizing yourself, Mr Risk Taker, it's not going to serve you, you're going to crash and burn." He goes on to point out, based on which section of the court the students are on, what the value and risk of being in each zone is. "You're in charge of your brain," he points out a student who is changing strategy. He talks to students about where they are in the game winning/losing and what strategy they need at this point.

Students are tasked with having agency; the trainer utilizes games as a way of highlighting social skills and very efficiently weaves the power of linguistics into his teachings. Students are highly responsive and enjoy this form of learning. I have observed a challenge of the accepted perceptions of students based on their maps of the world. The limited thinking patterns are highlighted eloquently through the use of what happens from moment to

moment within the games the trainer has specifically chosen to bring students' attention to at any given moment. "Maybe emotional resilience is not a byproduct of education. Maybe it is the education."

These learnings focus on living life in low, moderate, and high risk within the game (related to where students are positioned in the game), however, Trainer X correlates these learnings to life and integrates social skills necessary for successful interaction in the real world. Five elements of social skills as stated by Gresham, Sugai, and Horner (2001): (a) peer relational skills, (b) self-management skills, (c) academic skills, (d) compliance skills, and (e) assertion skills. "Watching the students shift strategies mid-game, hesitating, recalculating, laughing, made the theory come alive before my eyes."
Social competence is defined by them as "the degree to which students are able to establish and maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships, gain peer acceptance, establish and maintain friendships, and terminate negative or pernicious interpersonal relationships" (p. 331).

He challenges students' models of their behavioural patterns and sparks an interest in behavioural flexibility. This can be confrontational and quite provocative in the way that he becomes a mirror and shines a light on the unconscious systems students are working with. To efficiently solve problems in the social setting it's necessary to be able to understand your own and other's feelings, discerning and conveying those feelings. These soft skills are components of emotional and social learning (Zins, et al., 1998, p. 19).
I have had my perspective shifted in the way that I found the manner in which the trainer does what he does to be quite confrontational. Seeing some students crying throughout sessions. I am beginning to wonder if there is more to this "tough love" approach. Allowing students to be presented with their own maps of the world can be confrontational in nature. "Real learning often arrives disguised as discomfort."

I do believe core life skills such as social life skills are essential to learning and should be taught in the school system. Hair, Jager, and Garrett (2002) noted that adolescents with a firm understanding of social skills specifically in relation to conflict resolution, emotional intimacy, prosocial behaviours, intimacy, self-control and behaviour regulation are more likely to fit in with peers, to develop friendships, perform better academically, maintain interest in school, be viewed as efficient problem solvers and cultivate stronger relationships with parents and peers (p. 3).

I am curious as to how students feel about the experiences they have in their time with this trainer. They all seem to love it. On return sessions with Trainer X, they are highly

engaged. I am made aware of my desire to console crying children, perhaps that is hard-wired into all females more so than males. Bolstad (2004) states in his book Transforming Communication that problem ownership is about allowing people to solve their own problems. Being affected by an incident and having the resilience to shift your behaviour and your emotions are fundamental to solving your own problems, which in turn become core skills.

"Being affected by an incident is inevitable. But developing the resilience to shift your behaviour and your emotions is what builds real inner strength." Part of that resilience is forged not by removing discomfort, but by letting students face it, work through it, and emerge stronger. Being consoled in the way that comes naturally to humans may not allow the students to take the lessons and apply them to future events which then become new synapses in the brain.
I would consider utilizing linguistics more within my practice. Moment-to-moment learning opportunities within the classroom as a social setting or community are learning opportunities not only for the student/s involved but all students in the room. “To be effective and worthwhile, social-skills training must result in skills that (a) are socially relevant in the individual’s life (social validity), (b) are used in a variety of situations (generalization), and (c) are maintained over time (treatment adherence)” (Hansen, Nangle, & Meyer, 1998).

In my opinion, linguistics isn’t just about language, it’s about crafting the internal strategies that drive motivation, connection, and agency. In understanding linguistics there is a fundamental shift in communication with students and enabling students to understand their communication with themselves and those around them. This in turn has the transfer skills of rapport building and experiences with approaches for building rapport and influencing others. Linguistics has an internal frame; when we understand linguistics, we then understand our internal communication and get to examine our thinking systems/patterns and we then are able to engage in behavioural flexibility.

Without emotional and relational grounding, academic success becomes a house built without a foundation, fragile, temporary, easily toppled. These social skills relate to neurological levels in the way that if there is a deficit in this area of learning then academic learning is already positioned in a disadvantage frame. These are not always thought of as important and yet without these as the foundation of our lives we cannot continue up the scale to self-learning and growth.

In the end, what this trainer taught was not just dodgeball strategies or classroom compliance. He taught the students, and me, that the real curriculum is the map we build inside ourselves and the choice to change it. In the quiet between games, it became clear: the real skill was not winning. It was learning how to change the story you are living, to realise, often in the smallest invisible moments, that a different choice is possible.

Reflection Application:

Trainer X's approach made one thing undeniable: students rise, or shrink, to the expectations we hold of them. In this setting, they were not treated as "problems" to fix but as capable humans learning to regulate in real time. The language was bold, even jarring at times, "Tell your face what you're feeling," "You're hypnotising yourself",but always in service of calling the student back to themselves. It was a kind of disruptive empathy.
This forced me to examine how often our assumptions about "difficult" students become self-fulfilling. NLP reminds us that the map is not the territory (Bandler & Grinder, 1975). What a student presents, the outburst, the shutdown, is not who they are. It is a behaviour shaped by a system, by internal states, by past experiences, and by what's being modelled around them. Trainer X didn't just manage behaviour, he re-mapped identity.

I found myself reflecting on my own unconscious expectations. There are moments when I, too, have walked into classrooms already braced for battle, interpreting student resistance as defiance rather than distress. NLP's principle of behavioural flexibility (Dilts, 1998) came alive in that gymnasium. Trainer X modelled how to adapt communication, energy, and state, not for control, but for connection. He didn't demand change; he invited it, provoked it, reflected it. It was the first time I saw social-emotional and metacognitive skills taught like this, not in worksheets, not in bullet points, but embedded inside real-time action. The body was involved. The emotions were activated. And the learning stuck.
Research supports this: social-emotional learning is most impactful when embedded experientially, especially for students with behavioural challenges (Zins et al., 2004; Durlak et al., 2011).

At the heart of this method is language. NLP posits that language shapes thought, and thought shapes outcomes (O'Connor & Seymour, 1990). Trainer X's words weren't arbitrary. They were precise, repeated, rhythmical. Anchors. "You're in charge of your brain", a seed planted with every freeze-frame moment. I've begun to see how moment-to-moment linguistic choices can teach self-awareness, not just instructions.
It also shifted how I view "discipline." Discipline, in its original form, meant "to teach." Somewhere along the way, we substituted it with control. But this was discipline as

dialogue, a partnership between regulation and reflection. Hansen, Nangle & Meyer (1998) argue that meaningful social skill development must be contextually relevant, generalisable, and sustained. Trainer X delivered all three, not as a program, but as presence.

As an NLP practitioner and teacher, this vignette affirmed something deep: the true curriculum is not just what we teach, but how we relate, to students, to language, and to our own nervous systems. The work is internal, first. NLP gave me tools, yes. But more than that, it gave me spaciousness, to see beneath behaviour, to intervene at the level of belief, and to choose responses rather than repeat reactions.

In closing, this vignette underscores that emotional literacy and social skills are not peripheral to education but its foundation. Trainer X's approach showed how learning environments can be re-shaped through language, relational presence, and experiential risk-taking. For me as a practitioner, it was a reminder that discipline becomes most powerful not when it controls behaviour, but when it teaches agency, resilience, and choice.

Vignette 5: A Culture You Can Feel

Some schools have it, and most don't. The "it" is hard to define, but unmistakable when felt, a shared sense of purpose, warmth, and relational safety that infuses everything from student interactions to staffroom energy. In my work as a relief teacher, I encounter many functional schools, but very few that stand out as exceptional. The difference, to borrow a phrase from Neuro-Linguistic Programming, lies in *the difference that makes the difference* (Dilts, Grinder, Bandler, & DeLozier, 1980, p. xii), the subtle but potent behaviours that separate adequacy from excellence.

Every now and then, I come across a school that feels different across the board. There's a sense of unity among staff and students. There's trust. There's emotional spaciousness. As Jerald (2006) suggests, a positive school climate isn't simply the absence of conflict or disruption, but the presence of shared norms and values that guide collective behaviour. In these schools, students are responsive, staff are connected, and the atmosphere feels calm and focused. Leadership is key. A principal who is emotionally congruent and actively models care can influence the entire tone of the school. Stolp (1994) observed that the beliefs and behaviours of school leaders set a standard that staff unconsciously follow, both through what is explicitly celebrated and what is passively tolerated. Heckman (1993) builds on this, noting that school culture lives not in mission statements, but in the shared, lived experiences of principals, teachers, and students alike. This vignette tells the story of one such school, one where that shared culture wasn't aspirational. It was alive, embodied, and quietly transformational.

I first met the principal outside the school gates. He was there, as he is every morning, greeting every student with a fist bump. The tone was set before I'd even walked through the doors: cheerful chatter, kids laughing, staff moving with calm efficiency. He welcomed me warmly and introduced himself, taking time to ask about my teaching and why I was at the school that day. This kind of presence isn't typical, most principals are busy with administration, not at the gate building culture with their presence. But here, that wasn't an exception. It was the norm.

We spoke about my master's research, Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) in education with a focus on teacher wellbeing. He told me he had also completed a master's in education and was genuinely interested in how NLP could support staff and students. That curiosity stayed with me. It wasn't performative, he was reflective, engaged, and eager to learn. He had his finger on the pulse, not of spreadsheets and Ministry reports, but of his people. He modelled what it means to be tuned in, not to compliance and directives, but to state, rapport, and response.

On that first day, I had a neurodivergent student in my class, a child known to react strongly to unfamiliar teachers. But the day unfolded calmly. I had made sure to tune into

his cues, lean into flexibility, and connect through his interests. My brother is neurodivergent, so I understand that what these students often crave most is belonging, to be seen and understood. Instead of demanding compliance, I asked what mattered more: the task, or the relationship? I asked his classmates what worked for him, what helped. They were proud to help me help him. Later that day, the principal checked in, having heard about how well things had gone. In all my years of relieving, I've rarely had a principal follow up like that, it told me this school was different.
That act, checking in, already set this school apart. Another day, while I was relieving again, he stopped by to deliver a birthday card to a student. It featured a Bitmoji of himself, personalised and celebratory. As he handed it over, the student's face lit up, not just surprised, but seen. He does this for every child. I have even seen this principal standing in the pouring rain directing cars, just to ease traffic at the end of the day. The parents see him every morning and afternoon, and what kind of message does that send?

It tells staff and students that leadership is about service, not status. It tells whānau that their children's safety and smooth transitions matter. And it shows everyone that this is a school where culture is lived, not laminated. It might sound small, but these are anchors, consistent emotional cues tied to a leader's presence. In NLP, anchoring helps associate emotional states with repeated stimuli (Dilts, 1998). Here, students weren't just being greeted; they were being seen, they were being remembered. In a system where it's easy to feel like a number, being acknowledged on your birthday makes you feel valued.
His leadership extended beyond students. After I spilled food on my jacket while serving lunch at a cultural event, he quietly took it and cleaned it for me. Later, he ensured I knew there was shared morning tea and asked how students had been responding to me during breaks. I wasn't an outsider; I was part of the day. As a relief teacher, that's extremely rare. I've walked into dozens of schools where I felt invisible. But here, I was immediately part of the fabric.

We spoke throughout my visits, about pedagogy, about what makes schools feel alive. He once told me, "We treat these children as if they were our own." That stuck with me. It echoed a powerful NLP presupposition: the meaning of communication is the response you get (Bandler & Grinder, 1979). His communication was more than verbal; it was structural, embedded in every policy and personal interaction. Congruence, when language, values, and behaviour align, was visible in everything he did. He also told me, with quiet pride, that for the first time in nine years, he had a full staff he wouldn't trade a single person out of. That kind of alignment doesn't happen by accident. Research supports this: schools with strong cultures, built on participation, vision, and coherence, have higher teacher motivation and retention (Cheng, 1993; Peterson & Deal, 2002). Another reliever told me

she'd inquired about applying for a full-time role. The response? No one had left in over six years.

It's no surprise. The staffroom was filled with laughter and shared energy. Teachers were happy, helpful, and present. The culture did not just make students thrive; it nourished the staff too. As Schein (2010) reminds us, leaders shape culture not by declaring it, but by modelling it consistently. In NLP terms, this is excellence through modelling, the foundation of sustainable behavioural change (O'Connor & Seymour, 1990).
This principal did not micromanage. He created the conditions for others to self-manage. He often said something to the effect of, "If you can't give me three good reasons to do that paperwork, then maybe it doesn't need doing." That is not apathy, that's clarity. He did not over-identify with problems like underfunding or Ministry directives. He held space, what NLP might call perceptual flexibility, for the system without becoming consumed by it (Hall, 1995). And through that clarity, he led a culture of permission, trust, and values-led teaching.
I've never felt like I wanted to join a school, but this space, these people, they were on a mission. You could sense it. It was woven through every single interaction. It was the first school that ever made me feel like I could find a real, family-like community. That feeling, the sense of belonging, is, in my experience, a direct outcome of congruent leadership and intentional school culture. As a relief teacher, I've learned to expect little more than polite professionalism. But here, the experience was transformational. Not because of one big initiative, but because of countless, consistent micro-moments that communicated culture through action. Each moment was a message. Each message, a model.

Reflection Application

The emotional tone I experienced in this school was one of energised ease. It felt like I could breathe, held by a culture where leadership was congruent, systems were functioning, and everyone from students to staff operated with joy. This was not a place where teachers survived the week; it was one where they thrived. When a school is built on trust, openness, and genuine care, the emotional state of those within it shifts. I had a clear sense that if something challenging were to occur, I would not be alone. That emotional foundation set the stage for the quality of teaching I could offer. As Ryan and Deci (2000) affirm, environments that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness facilitate optimal functioning.

The congruence I observed, from values to actions, anchored a sense of belonging. As a practitioner, it reminded me of how vital it is to create environments where staff and students feel safe to fail, safe to express, and safe to grow. The principal's approach modelled this in both philosophy and practice. He held space for dialogue and reflection, always curious, always engaged. This allowed me to bring more of myself into the space, more openly than I ever had in a school environment. It was the result of a leader who modelled psychological safety, someone who invited real dialogue, not just performance. Leadership like this fosters what Edmondson (1999) calls a "learning culture": one where candour, risk-taking, and honest feedback are encouraged without fear of judgment or failure.

His perceptual flexibility (Hall, 1995) allowed him to hold multiple system perspectives without becoming reactive. This kind of calm leadership creates a permission-based culture, one where people feel free to think, feel, and speak without fear of retribution. I've rarely seen this in action. But it echoed a presupposition from NLP: "the meaning of your communication is the response you get" (Bandler & Grinder, 1979). Here, the leader's communication was clear not because of what he said, but because of the consistency between his language, his actions, and the results they created.
It reminded me of the power of anchoring (Dilts, 1998): every morning fist bump, every birthday card, every staffroom laugh was a cue reinforcing a shared emotional culture. Anchors like these, built into the fabric of a school, create predictability and emotional safety. In NLP, anchoring helps associate emotional states with repeated stimuli, and in this school, those emotional cues weren't random. They were cultivated.

As I reflected further, what struck me most was the systems-level harmony. This school did not thrive because one person was excellent. It thrived because the system was. Systems thinking invites us to notice not just individuals, but the interdependence between them. The principal's background in higher education mirrored my own, and I suspect he too drew on Senge's (1990) view: that "systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes." As Senge argued, systems flourish when leaders understand how parts relate to the whole, and how to trace the interconnections between policy, pedagogy, and wellbeing. I had stepped into a living ecosystem, one that had been cultivated intentionally over time.
This vignette reminded me that NLP isn't just a set of techniques. It's a philosophy of communication, leadership, and human systems. It encourages us to model excellence, to align internally before we act externally, and to remain curious about what works. That curiosity has become a key part of my practitioner identity. And the biggest insight here? Individual development isn't enough. If we want to change outcomes in education, we have

to shift culture. NLP offers the tools for both. Its application to education must consider the whole: not just the individual teacher, but the environment they operate within.
As someone researching NLP in education, I couldn't help but notice that everything here aligned, the modelling, the values, the leadership. Some schools have it, and this one absolutely did.

The culture here was not described, it was modelled. Repeated, reinforced, and unmistakably lived. I did not need to be told this school valued care and connection; it was evident in every interaction. You could see it in the morning fist bumps, hear it in the laughter in the staffroom, and trace it in the tone of the classrooms. The difference that makes the difference is not a strategy; it is a culture we embody when no one is watching. Where leadership is lived, not laminated, values are not just written on the wall, they are breathed in, passed on, and quietly echoed in every interaction. This is not wellbeing as policy. It is the air everyone breathes. In spaces like these, culture does not have to be explained, you feel it. You become it. And it stays with you, long after the last bell of the day has rung.

Appendix K: Chapter 4 - Participant Background Summaries

Ben, a seasoned NLP Master Trainer with 15 years in tertiary education, initially felt his career lacked direction, describing himself as a "gun for hire." His NLP training shifted his perspective, helping him align his roles with his values and gain clarity on his professional identity. “Through my training in NLP,” Ben says, “I began to understand more about me and what I stand for and like.” This newfound self-awareness allowed him to integrate coaching and mentoring in a way that resonated with his core values and to focus on systemic change rather than quick fixes. Despite challenges in NLP’s reputation, Ben believes in its transformative power, suggesting that immersion in NLP could significantly enhance educational practices. His experience reflects how NLP can deeply impact personal and professional development, aligning with the broader theme of integrating NLP into teaching practices.

Since becoming a Master Practitioner of NLP in 2015, Hiroshi has transformed his teaching approach from a fact-based, academic model to one that deeply connects with learners. Reflecting on his earlier teaching style, he notes, “Before NLP, I think I was more of a regurgitating teacher... trying to get things across in a very academic way.” NLP has enabled him to tailor his methods to individual students, emphasizing rapport building and personalized learning, as he explains: “It is essential that this system finds its place within education... I can build rapport and hold the attention of the learner more.” Hiroshi’s enthusiasm for integrating diverse learning streams into the curriculum demonstrates how NLP has made teaching more enjoyable and effective, emphasizing that NLP’s daily use helps him be a better communicator and conflict resolver. His experience underscores the potential of NLP to enhance educational practices and learner engagement, aligning with the broader thesis theme of NLP’s impact on teaching.

In 2002, Gagan’s approach to teaching was unintentional and reactive, seeing classroom challenges as problems rather than opportunities. This changed dramatically in 2005 after his first NLP training, which provided him with a sense of freedom and a new perspective. “I still remember that sense of freedom... It’s like bungee jumping, that sudden extreme feeling,” he recalls. NLP taught Gagan to view every challenge as an opportunity and to adopt a broader perspective in his interactions. Despite initial setbacks, such as an outburst that landed him in the principal’s office, further NLP training deepened his understanding and allowed him to model successful teaching methods. “NLP fits in perfectly,” he asserts, seeing education as a form of programming. This integration made Gagan more

compassionate and empathetic, transforming his teaching practice and personal interactions. He now approaches teaching with a focus on growth and connection, making NLP an integral part of his professional development.

Faiz's journey with NLP began in 1996 and has significantly influenced his teaching and coaching career. Initially excited by the mind's potential for change, Faiz noted the importance of effective trainers and the challenge of integrating NLP within rigid educational structures. He describes NLP as a toolkit requiring careful selection and adaptation, acknowledging the steep learning curve involved. Reflecting on his diverse teaching roles, including ESOL and secondary education, Faiz emphasizes the demanding nature of teaching and the lack of practical resources in teacher training. His personal experience with NLP, stemming from his own encounters with bullying, led him to focus on psychological resilience for students. Faiz critiques traditional hierarchical structures and advocates for a more humane and ecological approach to NLP. He remains committed to questioning NLP's assumptions and adapting its use to address emotional well-being and ethical practices in education.

Esmurelda, a former high school science teacher with over 22 years of experience and a master's in education, has been a proponent of NLP since the 1980s. Her initial engagement with NLP came from a transformative workshop with Stephanie Burns, which inspired her to integrate NLP techniques into her teaching. Esmurelda effectively used NLP to overcome performance anxiety and enhance student engagement, employing techniques like time-lining, reframing, and metamodeling to foster positive academic environments. Despite her dedication, she faced challenges such as student disengagement and burnout, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to her retirement from teaching. Now, as an artist, Esmurelda continues to use NLP to help others manage anxiety and tension. Her journey illustrates NLP's potential to support educators and students in achieving resilience and transformation both academically and personally.

Diana's extensive 24-year career as a private music and drama teacher, combined with her expertise in NLP, showcases the profound impact of integrating NLP into education. Diana describes NLP as "such an integrated part of how and who I am now," illustrating how deeply it influences her teaching methods and mindset. She employs techniques such as drawing out students' internal experiences through metaphor and Clean Language, which helps them articulate their feelings and connect with their learning on a deeper level. Diana's approach of shifting students from problem states to outcome states and her emphasis on curiosity and adaptability reflect NLP's transformative potential in education. Her use of NLP not only enhances student engagement but also demonstrates its broad

applicability across various fields, reinforcing its value in supporting both educational practices and personal development.

Anahera's journey with NLP, spanning over two decades as a Trainer and Coach, highlights its profound impact on personal and professional growth. Reflecting on her initial experience, she shares, “I had quite a synchronistic experience of working with NLP as a client,” which led her to embrace it fully. Anahera notes, “The main difference was that throughout the practitioner course, I realized I could be quite effective at helping people achieve the level of changes that I experienced.” She underscores the importance of client agency, stating, “I want to make it very, very clear that I did not feel that I was making these changes for them. I felt that I am sharing certain strategies and holding space for them, but they are making the changes.” Anahera recounts a significant experience where she used NLP to resolve a workplace conflict and secure a promotion: “When faced with a warning letter, I used NLP techniques to shift my perception of the situation and initiate a productive dialogue.” She views NLP as a “structured way of working with external challenges” and emphasizes its role in fostering self-efficacy. Anahera’s work with children is marked by their receptiveness to NLP, as she observes, “Working with children is often easier because they are more receptive and less encumbered by complex theories.” She also recognizes the need for different approaches with adults, noting, “The effectiveness of NLP tools can depend on the individual.” Her teaching methods involve “eliciting states of curiosity and excitement in learners,” and she advises connecting NLP training to teachers' “existing passions and interests” to enhance relevance and engagement. Anahera’s commitment to NLP reflects her dedication to empowering individuals through understanding and practical application.

Carina, a tertiary lecturer and academic tutor with over 20 years’ experience, has been a Master Practitioner of NLP since 2001. She describes NLP as having “totally transformed my understanding and how I worked with clients, how I started delivering my teaching, [and] helped me transform my own depression,” noting that it created a crucial shift in perspective: “It wasn’t offering hope, but it was eliciting a curiosity, what if that idea, this hopelessness wasn’t true?” This spirit of curiosity shaped her teaching practice, as she recalls, “I started to set my lectures up in a way to start to elicit that curiosity. And I ended up getting given the most boring papers because I could engage students.” By embedding intentional storytelling and metaphors such as *ko wai ahau: who am I?* Carina encouraged her students to connect more deeply with themselves and their learning. Despite expressing uncertainty about the future of tertiary education and the impact of artificial intelligence, she continues to champion curiosity as a guiding principle: “Curious minds learn, if we can elicit curiosity, it’s easy to learn, it’s fun to learn.” Carina’s journey

highlights how NLP can foster resilience, creativity, and student engagement, reinforcing its transformative potential in both personal and professional domains of education.

Appendix L: Tikanga Māori Values and Resonance with NLP

Tikanga Māori is a living, adaptive framework of values and practices that guide relationships, responsibilities, and wellbeing. These principles differ across iwi, hapū, and whānau, and are not an exhaustive or fixed set (Mead, 2003). They function as orienting values that shape conduct, much as NLP is structured around presuppositions, foundationally these are assumptions that guide communication, learning, and change (Bandler & Grinder, 1979; Dilts, 1998). While the two systems emerge from distinct epistemologies, both are anchored in the idea that practice must be principled, values-based, and directed toward sustaining balance and relational integrity.

One of the most frequently cited tikanga values is aroha, often translated as love, but encompassing compassion, empathy, and a heart-centred way of being. Aroha is not sentimental but is enacted through care, courage, and commitment to others' wellbeing (Mead, 2003). In my teaching practice, working in a "heart-centred space" reflected aroha in action. NLP also resonates here, with presuppositions such as "people are not their behaviours" and tools for empathetic state calibration supporting compassionate engagement (Bandler & Grinder, 1979). Aroha is thus visible in both cultural frames as a foundation for ethical practice.

Closely connected is manaakitanga, the ethic of generosity and care that uplifts the mana of others. Manaakitanga requires honouring people through respect, hospitality, and relational safety (Mead, 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2006). In NLP, this is mirrored through rapport-building and presuppositions of respect, such as recognising that every behaviour carries a positive intention. These assumptions create conditions for relational trust (Tosey & Mathison, 2010), aligning NLP with manaakitanga's call to enhance rather than diminish others.

Whanaungatanga, another central value, emphasises kinship, interdependence, and collective belonging. It highlights the responsibility of each person to maintain relational bonds within the group (Mead, 2003; Macfarlane et al., 2007). NLP's focus on rapport, relational language patterns, and modelling effective practice reflects whanaungatanga in action: both are concerned with creating shared meaning and strengthening connection. In classrooms, this alignment is especially important as it underscores teaching as an act of relational reciprocity rather than one-way instruction (Andreas & Faulkner, 1994; Bolstad, 2011).

Utu refers to reciprocity and the restoration of balance when relationships or harmony are disrupted (Mead, 2003). My own practice of offering koha-based training is an example of utu enacted through research and professional development, weaving cultural values with IANLP requirements of service. NLP processes such as reframing and goal setting also serve to restore alignment by shifting perspective, reducing conflict, and balancing outcomes (O'Connor & Lages, 2004; Dilts, 1998; Hall, 1996). Both traditions therefore frame practice as cyclical and responsive, requiring balance to be continually renewed.

Wairuatanga, the recognition of spiritual and non-material dimensions of life, is fundamental to tikanga Māori (Marsden, 2003). It acknowledges unseen forces that shape wellbeing and experience. While NLP does not explicitly reference spirituality, its focus on unconscious processes, internal states, and energy reflects a similar recognition that invisible dimensions profoundly influence human behaviour (Dilts, Grinder, Bandler & DeLozier, 1980; Hall, 1996). This suggests a parallel orientation to wairuatanga, albeit articulated through different cultural language.

Similarly, kaitiakitanga embodies guardianship, responsibility, and stewardship for people, knowledge, and resources (Mead, 2003; Marsden, 2003). In my role as a teacher-practitioner, NLP became a tool for kaitiakitanga, allowing me to safeguard student wellbeing, foster resilience, and transmit knowledge in ways that upheld care and responsibility. NLP's modelling tradition, which involves observing, protecting, and extending excellence, resonates with stewardship as a form of knowledge guardianship (Grinder & Bostic St. Clair, 2001).

Other principles provide further depth to the dialogue between tikanga and NLP. Tapu and noa, for example, regulate balance between the sacred and the ordinary, ensuring both protection and accessibility (Mead, 2003; Shirres, 1997). NLP state management parallels this, as anchoring resourceful states enables teachers and students to re-establish balance after moments of stress or intensity. Kotahitanga, the ethic of unity and collective purpose, also finds resonance in NLP outcome-setting processes, which often focus groups on shared goals and alignment (Durie, 1998).

Rangatiratanga, or leadership and self-determination, similarly aligns with NLP's emphasis on agency and resourceful self-leadership; in this study, teachers often described reclaiming professional authority and clarity, which reflects rangatiratanga in practice (Mead, 2003; Durie, 1998; Dilts, 1998). Finally, pono, or truth and integrity, finds a parallel

in the NLP presupposition that “the map is not the territory,” which requires humility and honesty in acknowledging the limits of one’s perspective (Bandler & Grinder, 1975).

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that while tikanga Māori and NLP arise from distinct worldviews, both are grounded in orienting principles that guide practice: tikanga through values, and NLP through presuppositions. In my experience, NLP practices often resonated with and at times embodied values such as aroha, manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, utu, wairuatanga, kaitiakitanga, tapu/noa, kotahitanga, rangatiratanga, and pono. This does not suggest equivalence, but highlights point of connection that extend the cultural relevance of NLP in Aotearoa education when practiced relationally and reflexively (Mead, 2003; Marsden, 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Tosey & Mathison, 2010).

Table X: Alignment of Tikanga Māori Values and NLP Presuppositions

Tikanga Value	NLP Presuppositions / Practices	Alignment / Explanation
Aroha (love, compassion, empathy, heart-centred practice)	Respect each other's map of the world; Every behaviour has a positive intention; People are not their behaviours; Rapport-building; Anchoring positive states	Aroha is about empathy and compassion. NLP aligns by honouring others' perspectives, separating person from behaviour, presupposing positive intent, and fostering relational safety through rapport and anchoring caring states.
Manaakitanga (care, generosity, uplifting others)	Rapport-building; Respect each other's map of the world; People respond better to choice than no choice	Manaakitanga uplifts and respects others. NLP resonates through relational care (rapport), dignity in acknowledging perspectives, and empowering people by expanding choices.
Whanaungatanga (relationships, kinship, interdependence)	Rapport-building; The meaning of communication is the response you get;	Whanaungatanga strengthens kinship and belonging. NLP parallels this by emphasising relational responsibility, co-creating meaning, learning through

	Modelling excellence; Systemic flexibility	modelling, and adapting flexibly within systems.
Utu (reciprocity, restoring balance)	Reframing; Anchoring; Ecology check	Utu restores balance in relationships. NLP techniques like reframing restore perspective, anchoring restores resourceful states, and ecology checks ensure wider harmony in outcomes.
Wairuatanga (spirituality, unseen dimensions)	State is the foundation of all behaviour; Unconscious processes direct behaviour; Anchoring/state work	Wairuatanga acknowledges the unseen dimensions of life. NLP similarly works with states and unconscious processes, recognising invisible but powerful influences on wellbeing.
Kaitiakitanga (guardianship, stewardship, responsibility)	Ecology check: I am at cause; Modelling excellence	Kaitiakitanga is stewardship and protection. NLP aligns through ecological awareness of impact, personal responsibility (*cause* frame), and modelling as a way of transmitting excellence and safeguarding knowledge.
Tapu & Noa (sacred/profane balance)	Anchoring/state management; Behaviour and change	Tapu/noa regulate balance between sacred and ordinary. NLP mirrors this by contextualising behaviour, using state

	are contextual; Ecology principle	management to restore balance, and applying ecology to keep boundaries safe.
Kotahitanga (unity, collective purpose)	Well-formed outcomes; Rapport-building in groups; Systemic flexibility	Kotahitanga is about unity and collective goals. NLP aligns through shared outcome-setting, group rapport that builds cohesion, and systemic flexibility that supports collective focus.
Rangatiratanga (leadership, self-determination)	I am at cause; Well-formed outcomes; Anchoring confidence; Everyone has the resources they need	Rangatiratanga affirms leadership and agency. NLP reflects this through presuppositions of cause and resources, outcome clarity, and anchoring confidence to embody self-determined authority.
Pono (truth, integrity, honesty)	The map is not the territory; Meta-model questioning; Congruence	Pono values integrity and truth. NLP aligns by acknowledging limits of perspective (*map ≠ territory*), using meta-model questioning to clarify truth, and insisting on congruence between words, actions, and values.

Aroha (love, compassion, empathy)

- **Respect each other's map of the world** → Aroha means recognising and valuing different perspectives. NLP's presupposition directly supports this by honouring the uniqueness of each person's worldview.
- **Every behaviour has a positive intention** → Aroha sees beyond the surface to empathise with underlying needs. NLP teaches that behaviour, even if unhelpful, stems from an intention that can be respected.
- **People are not their behaviours** → Aroha separates judgement of the person from their actions. NLP mirrors this by teaching that behaviour can change while the person remains worthy of respect.
- **Rapport-building** → Aroha is lived through warmth and connection; NLP rapport techniques create the safety that embodies this value.

Manaakitanga (care, generosity, uplifting others)

- **Rapport-building** → Manaakitanga is about creating spaces where others feel welcome and valued. NLP rapport practices are designed to establish exactly that kind of safety and trust.
- **Respect each other's map of the world** → To uplift others, you first need to understand and respect their perspective. This presupposition directly supports the ethic of care at the heart of manaakitanga.
- **People respond better to choice than no choice** → Manaakitanga uplifts others by expanding possibilities. NLP affirms that offering choice fosters dignity and empowerment.

Whanaungatanga (relationships, kinship, interdependence)

- **Rapport-building** → Whanaungatanga emphasises connection and belonging. Rapport is NLP's cornerstone for building those bonds of trust.
- **The meaning of communication is the response you get** → Whanaungatanga requires attentiveness to how relationships actually feel and function, not just your intent. NLP echoes this by stressing relational responsibility.
- **Modelling excellence** → In whanaungatanga, knowledge is passed through shared practice. NLP modelling supports this by showing how to learn and grow together through observation and replication.
- **The system with the most flexibility has the most influence** → Interdependence thrives on adaptability; NLP's systemic flexibility principle affirms that relationships are strengthened by openness and responsiveness.

Utu (reciprocity, restoring balance)

- **Reframing** → Utu is about restoring harmony when balance is lost. NLP reframing enables people to shift perspective and resolve conflict in ways that re-establish equilibrium.
- **Anchoring** → Utu seeks emotional balance; NLP anchoring restores resourceful states, returning both teacher and student to centredness after disruption.
- **Ecology check** → Utu considers the wider effects of action on relationships. NLP's ecology principle explicitly asks, "What are the consequences of this change for the system?"

Wairuatanga (spirituality, unseen dimensions)

- **State is the foundation of all behaviour** → Wairuatanga recognises unseen influences; NLP affirms that unseen internal states determine outer behaviour.
- **Unconscious processes direct behaviour** → Wairuatanga includes dimensions beyond conscious control; NLP directly acknowledges the unconscious as shaping experience.
- **Anchoring / state work** → Wairuatanga acknowledges felt but unseen forces; NLP anchoring works with emotional and energetic states, embodying this connection.

Kaitiakitanga (guardianship, stewardship, responsibility)

- **Ecology check** → Kaitiakitanga safeguards people, knowledge, and environment. NLP's ecology checks mirrors this by ensuring that change benefits the whole system.
- **I am at cause** → Kaitiakitanga requires responsibility and leadership. NLP's presupposition of personal responsibility aligns with taking active guardianship over outcomes.
- **Modelling excellence** → Kaitiakitanga is about protecting and transmitting knowledge. NLP modelling is a form of stewardship, making tacit skills visible for others.

Tapu & Noa (sacred/profane balance, maintaining safe boundaries)

- **Anchoring / state management** → Tapu and noa regulate movement between sacred and ordinary states. NLP anchoring does this psychologically, helping people return to balance after intensity.
- **Behaviour and change are contextual** → Tapu/noa remind us of some things are appropriate only in certain contexts. NLP echoes this with its principle that behaviour's meaning is context dependent.
- **Ecology principle** → Both tapu/noa and NLP ecology ensure actions restore safety and balance to the system.

Kotahitanga (unity, collective purpose)

- **Well-formed outcomes** → Kotahitanga is about shared goals. NLP well-formed outcomes ensure clarity and alignment, supporting group unity.
- **Rapport-building in groups** → Kotahitanga requires relational cohesion. NLP group rapport builds shared trust and purpose.
- **The system with the most flexibility has the most influence** → Kotahitanga thrives when groups adapt together. NLP affirms that collective adaptability strengthens unity.

Rangatiratanga (leadership, authority, self-determination)

- **I am at cause** → Rangatiratanga asserts agency and self-determination. NLP's presupposition of being "at cause" mirrors this empowerment.
- **Well-formed outcomes** → Rangatiratanga is expressed through clear vision and direction. NLP's goal-setting processes support leaders in clarifying and pursuing their path.
- **Anchoring confidence** → Rangatiratanga requires inner strength; NLP anchoring provides tools for embodying confidence and presence.
- **Everyone has the resources they need** → Rangatiratanga affirms inherent capability. NLP's presupposition that resources already exist within aligns directly.

Pono (truth, integrity, honesty)

- **The map is not the territory** → Pono demands humility and integrity in recognising limits of perception. NLP insists we never confuse our map with reality.
- **Meta-model questioning** → Pono calls for truth-seeking. NLP's meta-model challenges distortions and assumptions, fostering honesty in communication.
- **Congruence** → Pono means alignment of word and deed. NLP teaches congruence as central to effective and ethical practice.

Appendix M: Full Professional Framework of Practice

This appendix contains the complete version of the professional framework outlined in Chapter 6.1. It includes the guiding principles, foundational capacities, and applied strategies that emerged through the integration of NLP-based practice, research insights, and critical reflection. The framework is practitioner-led, non-prescriptive, and designed to support adaptability, self-authorship, and wellbeing in complex professional contexts.

My North Star: Principles That Guide My Professional Identity

At the heart of this framework lies a set of foundational principles, my internal compass, or "North Star", that guides my decisions, actions, and presence as an educator. These principles were not inherited fully formed; they emerged through critical reflection, discomfort, trial and error, and the willingness to reframe. Each one represents a shift in how I relate to myself and others, grounded in the practice of NLP and shaped by the findings of this research. They are not abstract ideals but living, breathing commitments that help orient me when the emotional climate of teaching becomes complex or overwhelming.

The principles that follow, Curiosity, Continuous Improvement, and Emotional Resilience, were chosen because they underpin the NLP strategies that proved most transformational in my own journey and for the participants in this study. Curiosity helps disrupt judgement and reactivity, opening space for exploration. Continuous Improvement reminds me that progress is iterative, and that reflection without movement risks stagnation. Emotional Resilience acknowledges the internal landscape of teaching, its emotional toll, its unseen labour, and affirms the importance of tending to that space with skill and self-compassion. These principles are not intended to be prescriptive for others, but they are essential to how I practice. They form the philosophical bedrock for the strategies and applications that follow. In this way, the framework remains personal, reflective, and adaptive, designed to evolve alongside me, not to remain static

Curiosity

Curiosity represents an ongoing openness to new information, deeper understanding, and expanded perception. It is the mindset that invites exploration rather than judgement, in ourselves, in our students, and in our colleagues. In NLP, this aligns with the presupposition that "the person with the most flexibility controls the system." Curiosity is what enables that flexibility. When I stay curious, I remain in dialogue with my experience rather than locked in assumption. It allows me to explore blind spots, question the rigidity of inherited

patterns, and engage more fully with the present moment. It is a value that cultivates growth in both the practitioner and the people they serve.

Curiosity is a foundational principle in my professional identity, not just a strategy but a way of being that sustains wellbeing and deepens engagement. It begins with the internal refrain: "I might not know, but I wonder…", an invitation to stay open, ask questions, and navigate complex educational moments with presence.

This stance helps me remain reflective rather than reactive. It offers psychological spaciousness in high-pressure environments, enabling responses grounded in intention rather than emotional reactivity. One pivotal experience arose in a toxic school culture, where a principal's subtle undermining of my autonomy began to stir a disproportionate emotional response. Initially, I thought I was reacting to her behaviours, but curiosity led me inward. I realised she had become an avatar for inherited authority structures I had internalised since childhood.

Growing up, my mother, who had survived over three decades of apartheid, often warned me about the dangers of "getting too dark." This wasn't just about complexion; it was a coded fear rooted in racialized systems of power, survival, and assimilation. What I had absorbed from these warnings was that safety and success often meant compliance, staying within the lines, not being too visible, not resisting too loudly. When the principal subtly undermined me, my reaction was not only to her behaviour, but it was also a collision with these deeper, inherited messages. Curiosity helped me unpack how that trauma lived on in me, and how my reaction was not just to the woman in front of me, but to a deeper, inherited fear of powerlessness.

Using NLP's Social Panorama technique, I repositioned her in my internal landscape, moving her from an oppressive, towering presence to a more neutral and distanced figure. While this did not change her behaviour, it transformed my sense of autonomy, allowing me to finish the contract with clarity and stability.

This principle isn't only reactive. In daily teaching, curiosity helps me interpret disengaged student behaviour as a signal, not defiance. It creates space to ask, "What's really going on here?", often leading to more relational, empathetic responses that protect my own wellbeing.

Curiosity became my entry point into this thesis. I was drawn to explore why teacher wellbeing is so often sidelined, why the profession focuses so heavily on student-centredness while neglecting those who hold the classroom together. Brookfield (1995) describes reflective practitioners as those who confront and challenge hidden assumptions. Curiosity makes that challenge not only possible, but sustainable. This reflective posture is central to my framework, aligning with Brookfield's view that deep learning requires us to uncover and question the taken-for-granted dimensions of our practice.

Continuous Improvement

This principle reflects a belief that development is iterative, non-linear, and constantly available. In NLP, the presupposition that "there is no failure, only feedback" serves as the foundation for this orientation. I learned this most powerfully through values elicitation, a practice that revealed how little conscious clarity I had around what truly mattered to me until I intentionally surfaced it. Since then, I've continued to refine my choices, realign my behaviour, and work from a clearer understanding of my own motivations. Continuous improvement is not about perfection; it's about staying in motion, responding to feedback, noticing shifts, and making micro-adjustments that build momentum over time.
Continuous improvement reflects a belief that development is iterative, non-linear, and constantly available. In NLP, the presupposition that "there is no failure, only feedback" serves as the foundation for this orientation. This principle reframes so-called mistakes as essential data in the process of evolution, inviting practitioners to see each experience as an opportunity for learning rather than as evidence of deficiency.

For me, continuous improvement exposes my own model of the world. When I am not consciously looking for it, it remains hidden; but when I deliberately scan for the lens through which I see, I uncover patterns I did not even know I carried. This mirrors the same "growth mindset" (Dweck, 2006) we often teach students, the belief that abilities can be developed through effort and reflection yet applies it to our own professional practice. If we had a framework that deliberately celebrated mistakes as part of growth, we could reframe all our learning experiences as valuable, even the challenging ones.
One of the most powerful demonstrations of continuous improvement in my own practice came through values elicitation, a process that revealed the gap between my stated ideals and my lived behaviours. That gap became a mirror, not a criticism, allowing me to realign my actions with what truly matters. Continuous improvement here meant not only noticing the gap, but acting on it, creating a loop of self-reflection and adjustment that deepened my professional integrity.
This principle became especially vital during the thesis inquiry process itself. I learned to become a researcher and analyst, to approach academic writing with a depth and structure I had never encountered before, and to coach myself through challenges, some expected others not. I became reflective in a new way: consistently scanning for something that stood out, something to question, something to explore more deeply. This yielded insights I would never have accessed without this form of inquiry. Knowing NLP, and then learning about it again through a deepened, research-informed lens, allowed me to synthesise data from multiple points and make cohesive, meaningful sense of it. I also learned to manage my time in ways I had never needed to before, embedding reflective practice as an

ongoing, deliberate act rather than a sporadic response to problems. Some of the learnings that emerged through the process reinforced the value of continuous improvement as an active, lived principle.

In teaching practice, continuous improvement showed up most strongly through a "teaching as inquiry" approach. I found myself continually observing what worked, identifying what didn't, and making deliberate, small changes to improve learning outcomes. This constant cycle of reflection, action, and refinement paralleled the NLP presupposition of feedback as fuel for growth. It also meant I became more comfortable with experimentation, knowing that each iteration, even those that fell flat, was valuable data for future improvement.

By embedding continuous improvement into my framework, I ensure that my practice remains alive, adaptive, and aligned with the core principles that make sustainable teaching possible.

Emotional Resilience

At the heart of my work is the capacity to stay resourceful in the face of challenge. Emotional resilience is what allows a teacher to be present even under pressure, to hold space, to regulate, and to respond with care and clarity. This principle draws on the NLP presupposition that "the map is not the territory." Understanding that every individual operates from their own internal map has fundamentally shifted how I relate to others. It has given me space, softened my reactions, and expanded my empathy. When I hold this presupposition, I do not take behaviour personally, I see it as communication filtered through a unique construct. This makes emotional steadiness possible, and it lays the foundation for relational trust.

One of the most formative tests of this principle came while relief teaching in a highly volatile classroom. A student's sudden verbal outburst could easily have triggered my own defensive reaction but recalling that his map, his internal representation, was not the same as mine created just enough distance for me to choose curiosity over confrontation. That pause shifted the entire exchange: rather than escalating, I was able to validate his frustration, redirect the energy, and maintain the safety of the learning environment.

In my broader teaching practice, emotional resilience enables me to navigate daily stressors without depletion, whether managing conflicting staffroom dynamics, holding boundaries with challenging parents, or adapting lessons on the fly when circumstances change. It sustains my ability to be present and responsive across varied contexts, ensuring that my own wellbeing is protected while also fostering stability for students.

These principles also echo what emerged from my qualitative research. Participants consistently described the importance of maintaining curiosity when facing behavioural challenges, using feedback loops to guide growth, and developing emotional resilience

through tools like anchoring and perceptual reframing. Their insights helped validate these principles as not only personally meaningful, but also widely applicable across professional contexts. This is supported by teacher wellbeing literature, which identifies emotional regulation and adaptability as core protective factors against burnout (Day & Gu, 2014). Together, these principles form the philosophical backbone of my framework. They are the values that shape how I think, relate, and grow as a practitioner. However, they are not standalone. In practice, these principles are brought to life through specific skills, tools that enable the noticing, shifting, and regulation that underpin transformational change. These strategies, explored in Sections 6.3 and 6.4, serve as the mechanisms through which this framework is enacted, deepened, and sustained in real-world professional contexts. Emotional resilience is the anchor that makes this sustainable, ensuring that even in the most pressured moments, I can continue to enact the values that define my practice.

Becoming the Practitioner: Internal Shifts That Shape Identity

This expanded self-awareness now directly informs how I relate to others in my work. Whether in coaching, mentoring, or facilitating learning, I am attuned to the unseen weight others might carry, not just structural disadvantage, but emotional and inherited scripts. I approach learners and colleagues with more empathy, curiosity, and capacity to interrupt deficit thinking, because I've seen how powerfully it has shaped me.

While the core principles of this framework articulate guiding values, their expression relies on deeper internal foundations. These include self-knowledge, relational awareness, personal responsibility, reflective capacity, and an evolving professional identity, each of which is essential for sustaining authentic, adaptive practice. These elements emerged not only through my own NLP training and application but were echoed in the lived experiences of the teachers in this study, who described how NLP enabled them to understand themselves more clearly and engage more intentionally with their professional contexts.

Self-Knowledge

Central to my evolving practice is the capacity to notice and explore unconscious thought patterns, emotional habits, and belief systems. NLP helped me realise that many of my responses, and much of my stress, stemmed from automatic strategies and internal narratives I had never examined. Through tools such as values elicitation and the meta model, I uncovered the structure behind those responses. This gave me the ability to disrupt unhelpful internal loops and shift into more resourceful states. As I made sense of these internal shifts, I experimented with a range of reflective models. Sometimes I drew from Kolb's experiential learning cycle or Gibbs' reflective structure to process key

experiences. At other times, I used the 4MAT model or created hybrid frameworks that better fit my teaching context. This adaptive approach allowed me to stay responsive to the complexity of my journey, and to reflect in ways that supported deeper insight and integration.

Several participants described similar shifts in awareness. Anahera shared: *"If they believe they're not enough… I can speak in a way that presupposes their potential instead."* Her insight reflects the type of linguistic and perceptual sensitivity that arises from deepened self-awareness.

This approach resonates with what Tosey and Mathison (2009) describe as the "epistemological frame" of NLP, where practitioners attend not just to what is said, but how meaning is constructed through pattern and structure. From this perspective, self-knowledge becomes a foundation for both presence and precision.

My reflective practice was not confined to a single medium, it was multi-modal, intuitive, and iterative. Each week, I captured highlights from my teaching experience, not always positive but always revealing. These moments often informed the vignettes and deeper reflections in this thesis. I recorded self-interviews on Otter: sometimes to process emotionally charged events, other times to articulate shifts in my thinking, track growth, or synthesise new insights as they emerged. I also engaged in critical dialogue with my academic mentor and facilitator, which helped me make sense of complex professional moments. When something struck me mid-day, I would jot a note on my phone to return to later. Observing other teachers also triggered reflections that became part of this layered practice. These modes of reflection were not linear or formulaic, they were responsive to the realities of my professional life, and they enabled me to develop a reflexive stance that underpins my evolving identity as a practitioner

Relational Awareness

In parallel with internal awareness, NLP also strengthened my capacity to track and respond to others, emotionally, linguistically, and somatically. Relational awareness in this context is not simply social sensitivity, but the result of trained sensory acuity and precision in interpersonal calibration. As I developed deeper rapport skills, I learned to match and mirror posture, gesture, vocal rhythm, and even subtle shifts in breathing, aligning myself to the other person's internal state in a way that created unconscious trust. I became more attuned to representational systems embedded in language (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) and could adapt my communication to meet the perceptual world of the other person. As my NLP trainer once explained, "rapport matches to the point of pulse", a reminder that congruent connection is often built through nuance, not noise. In teaching and coaching

contexts, this ability to track physiology, energy, and linguistic cues has helped me build presence, de-escalate conflict, and hold space for others while remaining emotionally grounded myself.

Reflective Practice and Personal Responsibility

NLP reframed reflection for me as a dynamic, in-the-moment process rather than something retrospective or evaluative. Techniques like perceptual positions and future pacing allowed me to explore alternative responses to challenging situations before they occurred, giving me greater control over my emotional state and presence. This perspective echoes Schön's (1983) concept of "reflection-in-action," where practitioners adapt and reorient themselves in the midst of uncertainty. What distinguishes NLP is that it provides a structured set of tools to support this adaptive process.

Participants also shared how NLP helped them take greater ownership over their state and choices. Gagan, for instance, spoke about using rapport intentionally as a mechanism for creating emotional safety and connection: *"Often with education what's most important is relationships, building relationships with rapport."* This reflects the shift from instinctive to intentional practice that NLP fosters, a transition I have experienced in my own teaching, coaching, and interpersonal work.

Professional Identity in Evolution

This framework also recognises that professional identity is not fixed, but continuously shaped through self-perception, belief systems, and interaction. NLP enabled me to reflect on the internal structures that shaped how I saw myself as an educator, inherited norms, limiting beliefs, and unexamined narratives, and begin to reconfigure those deliberately. Rather than defaulting to roles I was conditioned into, I could choose how I wanted to show up, and for what purpose. This is consistent with Akkerman & Meijer's (2011) observation that NLP supports educators in strengthening professional identity through coherence, agency, and personal alignment.

These foundational capacities, self-knowledge, relational awareness, responsibility, reflection, and identity, enable the core principles of this framework to move from abstract values into concrete action. In the following section, I outline the practical NLP strategies that operationalise these foundations and support wellbeing-oriented professional practice.

NLP Strategies in Practice

Presuppositions: Rewriting the Frame of Practice

Presuppositions, in NLP, are not assumptions about the external world but working beliefs that guide perception, language, and behaviour. They act as mental filters, shaping how we interpret experience and respond to challenges. These frames do not describe what is objectively true, but what is useful to believe to generate change. For me, engaging deeply with NLP presuppositions fundamentally altered how I show up, not just as a teacher, but as a human being.

One of the most impactful presuppositions I integrated was the idea that "there is no failure, only feedback." Prior to encountering this frame, I often held myself to impossible standards and internalized perceived missteps as evidence that I wasn't good enough. The more I trained in NLP, the more I began to view setbacks differently, as data, not identity. This shift has been liberating. It's allowed me to soften the constant judgement I used to place on myself and instead ask, "What is this moment showing me? What can I adjust?" It has enhanced my wellbeing by reducing self-induced pressure and reinforcing a sense of resilience.

Presuppositions also revealed something I had never consciously considered: the fact that I was moving through life inside a model of the world that I did not intentionally build. Much of it was a default product of childhood conditioning, inherited beliefs, and unquestioned assumptions. The idea that we can reconstruct those models, deliberately and in alignment with who we want to be, was life changing. It reframed my understanding of choice, showing me that the lenses through which I see the world are not fixed. This awareness touches every layer of my life and teaching, making me more intentional, more grounded, and far less driven by unconscious scripts.

What makes presuppositions so powerful is that they do not require the external world to change, only an internal shift. When I hold the belief that people are doing the best they can with the resources they have, or that every person has a unique model of the world worth respecting, I show up more patient, open, and compassionate, not only with others, but with myself. In the context of teacher wellbeing, this creates emotional space and reduces unnecessary tension, helping me to sustain my practice over time.

These insights align closely with the philosophical roots of NLP, which are not about manipulation or technique, but about perception and choice. As Tosey and Mathison (2009) note, presuppositions offer a foundation for exploring ethical, perceptual, and linguistic flexibility, making them uniquely suited to reflective professions like education. For educators, they provide a framework for sustaining hope, holding space, and staying aligned with purpose, all critical to long-term wellbeing.

Language Awareness through the Meta Model

Language awareness is the ongoing practice of observing how the words we use shape both our internal experience and our interactions with others. Using the Meta Model, we learn to identify patterns, such as generalisations ("always," "never"), deletions ("it," "they"), or distortions ("I can't"), that hint at underlying beliefs, emotional biases, or relational filters. By raising awareness of these patterns, we enhance clarity of thought, precision in communication, and our capacity to connect authentically with others.

For me, the breakthrough came when I realised how much of my own internal dialogue was inherited, and how often it was subtly self-defeating. Society often frames talking to yourself as "crazy," but we literally think in words, and those words are not always kind. Most people, myself once included, carry an inner critic they never consciously invited. Before NLP, I had learned affirmations, which began shifting this, but it wasn't until Meta Model training that I could interrogate my self-talk with precision. I started catching the small linguistic patterns, the "should" and "have to", and replacing them with more empowering choices like "I want to" or "I choose to." This was more than semantics; it changed how I felt in my own skin, made me lighter, and gave me back the energy I had been spending on internal conflict.

This awareness extended to my teaching. By listening closely to the language students used, I could identify unhelpful frames they were operating from and respond in ways that reframed their experience. A student saying, "I'm terrible at this" became an opening for me to help them see their progress. These small interventions made a tangible difference in the classroom atmosphere. When my own internal dialogue shifted, I became calmer, more balanced, and more resourceful, and that directly translated into being a better teacher.

This aligns with NLP's foundational claim that language patterns reflect, and shape, core cognitive and emotional structures. The Meta Model equips practitioners to uncover and challenge those patterns, expanding both personal and interpersonal flexibility (O'Connor & Seymour, 1990). In education, this translates into more conscious choice, greater emotional regulation, and a capacity to foster a culture of possibility, all of which contribute to teacher wellbeing.

Values Elicitation: Clarifying What Matters Most

Values elicitation is a core NLP process that brings unconscious motivations to the surface. Rather than listing vague ideals, it identifies the emotional drivers that shape behaviour, decision-making, and alignment, especially under pressure. In an educational context, this practice helps teachers consciously connect their work to their personal sense of purpose.

I first encountered this strategy during NLP practitioner training in 2018. Although I had often heard the term "values," I had never explored what mine were, let alone examined how they influenced my teaching. The elicitation process revealed that I had been navigating life and work without explicit awareness of what mattered most to me. Once surfaced, those values, contribution, growth, and authenticity, became a compass I could return to when external noise or professional demands clouded my clarity.

This awareness was particularly impactful when I was offered a leadership role that promised status but conflicted with my core drivers. Although my first instinct was to accept, I paused and asked: "Does this align with what truly matters to me?" It did not. Choosing to step back was difficult, but I did so without guilt. Clarity on my values gave me the confidence to say no with conviction, not avoidance, and to focus my energy on work that genuinely fuels me.

What makes values elicitation powerful is that it transforms decision-making from reactive to intentional. When my choices are anchored to my values, my energy is channelled into purposeful action instead of being scattered across obligations that do not fit who I am. This shift has reduced burnout, strengthened my sense of professional authenticity, and allowed me to meet challenges with integrity, even in unpredictable relief contexts.

I have seen similar transformations in teachers I work with. When they become conscious of their values, they often reconnect with their original reasons for entering the profession. This reconnection re-energises their practice, enables them to model authenticity for their students, and creates ripple effects across their classrooms. Values alignment becomes both a personal wellbeing strategy and a professional leadership tool, one that can shift classroom culture by demonstrating congruence between what is taught and how it is lived.

As Tosey and Mathison (2009) explain, NLP offers a "generative epistemology" rooted in internal congruence. For me, this means that when I understand my filters, especially beliefs and values, I have greater choice in how I show up, respond, and lead. In high-stakes or emotionally demanding classrooms, this self-awareness preserves not just my wellbeing but my capacity to serve with clarity and consistency.

Rapport Building: Creating Connection Through Calibration

Rapport, in NLP, is the intentional creation of trust and connection through verbal and non-verbal cues. It involves aligning with another person's experience, through body language, tone, and pacing, to create a sense of safety and mutual understanding. In education, rapport is the relational groundwork that allows meaningful learning to take place. Without it, content delivery becomes mechanical. With it, teaching becomes transformational.

In my own teaching practice, rapport building is always the first move, especially when entering an unfamiliar classroom. As a relief teacher, I often have minutes to establish credibility and connection. I consciously match my language, tone, and rhythm to the group in front of me. I take cues from their energy, their humour, their tempo. This calibration is not about mimicry, it's about attunement. By stepping into their world, joking with them, highlighting their strengths, and showing genuine curiosity, I create a space where students feel seen and respected. That small shift in energy often softens resistance and opens the door to engagement.

What makes rapport so powerful is its subtlety. There's no script. It's felt more than it's taught. But its impact is unmistakable. I've had students who were initially guarded or disruptive begin to participate with enthusiasm simply because they sensed I was genuinely interested in who they were, not just what I was teaching. In moments like these, the classroom becomes more than a site of instruction, it becomes a place of trust.

This mattered immensely during emotionally charged days, when students came in carrying stress from home or previous classes. Instead of enforcing control, I would soften my posture, slow my tone, and offer a question that matched their energy: "What kind of day are we having today?" That brief relational pause, offered in rapport, often shifted the tone of the entire lesson.

Participants in my research echoed this importance. Gagan shared, "Often with education what's most important is relationships, building relationships with rapport," affirming its centrality to effective teaching. Hiroshi described using rapport to tailor learning experiences, explaining that "using rapport building to get buy-in" helped him meet students where they were. Both saw rapport as a critical teaching tool, not just a social nicety, but a strategy for emotional safety, flexibility, and engagement.

This relational nuance aligns with research on NLP in education. Dufrene et al. (2019) and Holmes (2020) found that rapport-based techniques support psychological safety and learning receptivity by building trust and reducing resistance. In teacher wellbeing contexts, rapport protects against burnout by grounding teaching in relational purpose. It's not only what we teach that matters, but how we connect while doing it.

Modelling Excellence: Learning from Exemplars

Modelling excellence in NLP is the process of identifying and integrating the underlying strategies, beliefs, and behaviours of people who consistently achieve outstanding results. As Dilts (1998) explains, it is "the process of recreating excellence", not by copying the surface behaviour, but by decoding the essential patterns that produce success. For me, this has always been an active, embodied practice. When I observe someone excelling, whether a colleague, a mentor, or even a student, I consciously break down what they are

doing into its key components: the sequence of their actions, the structure of their communication, the subtle cues they respond to. As O'Connor and McDermott (2001) note, "excellence leaves clues," and my role is to track those clues and adapt them authentically to my own style.

This approach became indispensable in my relief teaching work, where I am often stepping into unfamiliar classrooms, routines, and dynamics. When a teacher is still present at the start of the day, I pay close attention to the tone they use with students, the way they transition between activities, and the signals, verbal or non-verbal, they rely on to maintain flow. Sometimes it is as specific as the pitch of a voice when giving instructions, a particular phrase to regain focus, or a sound cue that signals change. If I have not seen the teacher in action, I ask the students directly, "How does your teacher usually do this?" The enthusiasm and detail with which students answer not only gives me accurate guidance but also creates an early bridge of rapport.

By modelling what is already familiar and effective in that environment, I reduce the friction of transition for both myself and the students. This accelerates my adaptation, maintains classroom continuity, and helps me bypass common behaviour management challenges. It also safeguards my energy, instead of imposing an entirely new structure and meeting resistance, I work within the established framework, adding my own authentic touch. This means I can focus more on connection, learning, and wellbeing rather than control and correction.

Modelling excellence also reinforces my identity as a self-directed learner. I do not wait for formal professional development to improve my practice; I treat every classroom as an opportunity to observe, adapt, and integrate what works. Over time, this approach has deepened my confidence, sharpened my professional agility, and strengthened the resilience that comes from knowing I can enter any learning environment and quickly find my footing. The systemic impact is just as important, when I share these adapted strategies with colleagues, or model them in front of students, the benefits ripple outward, influencing not just my own practice but the culture of the learning space.

Ultimately, modelling excellence turns unconscious competence into conscious, transferable skill. It transforms admiration into action and ensures that what works for one person can be adapted to work for many. In a profession where demands shift daily and adaptability is essential; it remains one of my most valuable tools for sustaining both effectiveness and wellbeing.

NLP Strategies as an Integrated Practice for Wellbeing and Impact

Across these five strategies, presuppositions, language awareness, values elicitation, rapport building, and modelling excellence, a coherent picture emerges: NLP has given me a framework for professional sustainability rooted in self-awareness, intentional communication, and adaptive practice. Each strategy, while distinct, interacts with the others in a reinforcing cycle. Presuppositions reframe my mental landscape, shaping the way I perceive and respond to events. Language awareness sharpens the precision of my communication, both inwardly and outwardly. Values elicitation keeps my decisions aligned with what matters most, protecting my energy from being scattered across misaligned commitments. Rapport building ensures every interaction begins with connection and trust, creating the psychological safety that makes learning possible. Modelling excellence accelerates my learning curve in any environment, allowing me to adapt without losing authenticity.

Taken together, these strategies shift my practice from reactive to intentional. They create a mental and emotional infrastructure that safeguards wellbeing by reducing unnecessary stress, preventing burnout, and anchoring me in purpose. In relief teaching, where uncertainty is the norm, this toolkit enables me to step into unfamiliar contexts with confidence, quickly build credibility, and maintain a steady emotional presence for students. That steadiness has a ripple effect, calming tense classrooms, fostering openness, and modelling self-regulation for learners.

The systemic impact extends beyond my own classrooms. When I share these strategies with colleagues, I see how they invite others to rethink their own default patterns and explore new ways of working. This kind of peer influence is subtle but powerful; it builds a culture where adaptability, empathy, and reflective practice are valued. Over time, that culture supports not only teacher wellbeing but also student engagement, resilience, and trust.

Ultimately, NLP in my professional life is not a set of techniques applied sporadically, but an integrated way of thinking, communicating, and being. It has redefined what it means for me to teach sustainably, not by lowering expectations, but by equipping myself with strategies that make high-quality, high-impact teaching a renewable practice. The result is a career path that feels both sustainable and expansive, where my wellbeing and my effectiveness are no longer in competition, but in alignment.

Appendix N: Full Discussion Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Weaving Insight into Practice: Integrating Findings with Literature and Reflexive Learning

This chapter interprets the findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to existing literature and considers their implications for teacher education, school culture, and professional development. It shifts the focus from what was found to what it means. While the findings in Chapter 4 presented a thematic snapshot of lived experience, they represent just a moment in time, an hour-long conversation, a fragment of a story, a glimpse into an intensely complex professional world.

The purpose of this chapter is to connect the reported themes with wider scholarship, considering their meaning in the professional contexts teachers navigate. The guiding question remains: How can neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) support teacher wellbeing as a mechanism for navigating stress, burnout, and emotional demands in education?

In this chapter, I explore four key thematic insights that emerged from the research: the role of emotional regulation and state management, the importance of teacher identity and values alignment, the embedded use of NLP tools in practice, and the influence of motivation, purpose, and agency. Each of these is interpreted through the central lens of teacher wellbeing, the unifying thread that grounds this inquiry. Drawing from relevant literature and NLP scholarship, this discussion considers how these insights contribute to sustaining and empowering those working within education today.

5.2 Making Meaning: Interpreting NLP's Impact on Teacher Wellbeing

This section presents interpretations of the key findings outlined in Chapter 4. Each theme is revisited to explore its implications for teacher wellbeing and the use of NLP in educational contexts. Interpretations are structured to align with the subthemes from Chapter 4 to maintain continuity.

Each subtheme is presented with a summary of reported findings, followed by interpretive commentary informed by relevant literature and practitioner reflection. The reflective component connects findings to lived experience and highlights shifts in practitioner identity, values, and mindset. The overall structure supports clarity while situating each theme in relation to theory and practice.

5.3 Theme 1: Advancing Pedagogical Practice and Wellbeing through NLP

This theme examines how NLP practices enhanced pedagogy and teacher wellbeing in interconnected ways. The findings showed that strategies such as rapport-building, well-formed outcomes, language awareness, and modelling did more than equip teachers with classroom tools: they supported emotional resilience, clarified purpose, and cultivated professional growth. In this discussion, I interpret these findings against wider educational and psychological literature, exploring how NLP fosters adaptive teaching identities where wellbeing and professional effectiveness become mutually reinforcing.

Subtheme 1.1 Building Teacher Wellbeing Through Relational and State-Based NLP Tools

Participants described techniques such as anchoring, rapport, and reframing as essential supports for maintaining presence under pressure. These methods were used not only for classroom connection but also as strategies to stabilise teachers' own states during moments of stress.
I realised that what mattered was not the sophistication of the tools but their immediacy, teachers used anchoring and reframing less as techniques and more as lifelines that held

them steady in moments of pressure. It became clear to me that immediacy carried both psychological and pedagogical weight: it stabilised teachers internally while also protecting the integrity of their classroom relationships. Yet this reliance on personal lifelines raises a critical question: how sustainable is it to ask teachers to absorb systemic strain through individual strategies? The literature points to the paradox of resilience: tools that help in the moment can both protect wellbeing and conceal deeper organisational issues (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Day & Gu, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2009).

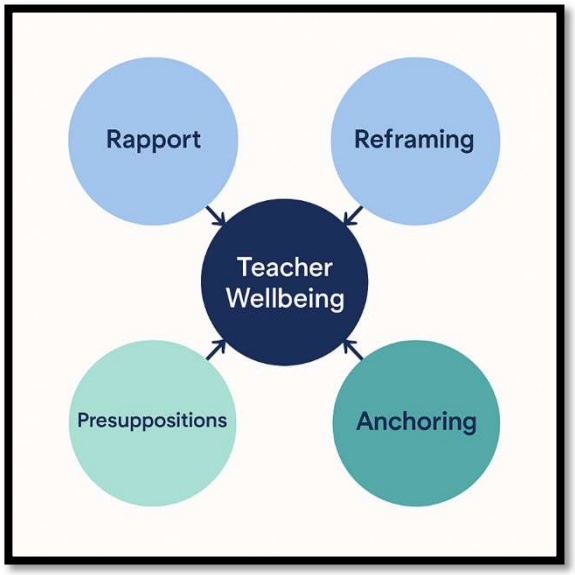
The educational literature reinforces this duality. Emotional regulation research highlights the value of short-cycle interventions for preserving presence in demanding contexts (Gross, 2015), while work on teacher identity shows that professional relationships are sustained through this capacity to recover clarity and responsiveness (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). NLP approaches such as anchoring and reframing give teachers practical methods to enact this regulation in real time, aligning with findings that relational trust and resilience are shaped through moment-by-moment interactions (Hargreaves, 2001). However, critical perspectives caution against viewing resilience solely as an individual resource.

Kelchtermans (2009) argues that when systemic pressures remain unaddressed, coping strategies risk becoming compensatory mechanisms that mask institutional shortcomings. This subtheme demonstrates how NLP tools, while deceptively simple, function as protective lifelines that enable teachers to sustain both their wellbeing and their pedagogical presence. At the same time, it exposes the paradox that teachers' reliance on such strategies may reflect not just professional resourcefulness but also the burden of systemic strain.

If relational and state-based tools offered teachers immediate lifelines, the next subtheme reveals how deeper strategies for emotional regulation and self-management extended that stability beyond the moment.

Figure 38

Integrated NLP strategies for sustaining teacher wellbeing (Author's own)



Subtheme 1.2 – Clarifying Purpose to Enhance Motivation and Reduce Stress

Hearing teachers describe how setting outcomes clarified their direction from finding focus in complex classrooms to restoring alignment with values, I recognised that clarity functioned as more than a planning aid; it was a way of reclaiming agency when demands threatened to pull them off course.

I became aware of a familiar shift: clarity operated less as a planning tool and more as a way of reclaiming authorship over direction in environments that often pull educators off course. At one level, clarity provided a psychological foothold, helping teachers regulate emotion and reduce the cognitive load that contributes to stress (Gross, 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

At another, it acted as a pedagogical compass, giving teachers intentionality in lesson design and coherence in professional identity (Hattie, 2009; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Yet clarity also revealed its limits: when policy churn and workload intensification intruded, even well-formed outcomes could falter as sustaining anchors (Day & Gu, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2009). This points to clarity as a layered construct, both a wellbeing resource and a professional compass, but one that remains vulnerable within systemic

turbulence. This echoes Deci and Ryan's (2000) claim that autonomy is central to motivation and wellbeing: clarity through well-formed outcomes reinforced teachers' sense of authorship, yet, as NLP reminds us, such alignment only endures when goals remain congruent with values and ecological fit (Dilts, 1998; Bolstad, 2003).

If clarity created direction, the next subtheme explores how teachers turned to emotional regulation and self-management strategies to sustain that direction under pressure.

Subtheme 1.3 – Strengthening Confidence through Language Awareness

Listening to how teachers used language to uncover inner landscapes and challenge limiting narratives made me realise that confidence is not simply taught but re-voiced through dialogue.

I came to see that so much of classroom dialogue is inherited, students re-voicing the language and assumptions they have absorbed, and that NLP awareness gave me the means to notice whose voices were echoed, whose were silenced, and how to disrupt those patterns. As a central mechanism for organising and achieving social interaction (Austin, 1962; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), language shapes how both teachers and students construct meaning.

Learning the Meta Model and becoming aware of my own internal dialogue, as well as that of my students, revealed the unconscious patterns driving thought and behaviour. This awareness gave me the ability to disrupt those patterns. When students repeated limiting narratives, I found myself asking, *"Whose voice is that? Whose ideas are you re-voicing?"* and, crucially, whose voice is being privileged in this exchange, and whose is being marginalised (Chawla & Atay, 2018).

This connects with broader critiques of how everyday classroom language can reinforce hierarchies if left unexamined. Freire (1970) argued that educational language is never neutral: it either sustains existing power structures or helps to challenge them. For me, this clarified that working with NLP's Meta Model was not only about individual pattern disruption, but also about questioning how the words used in schools, by teachers, curricula, and institutions, shape whose voices are amplified and whose are minimised.

With NLP, I had tools to redirect attention, challenge unhelpful frames, and release what was not serving students. In these moments, teaching and transformation intersected, not

only through strategy, but through language, mindset, and meaning making in real time. This layering of individual awareness with systemic critique mirrors contemporary scholarship highlighting how language practices in schools mediate both identity and wellbeing (Bolstad, 2011; Wake, Leach, & Jackson, 2013)

Language awareness highlighted how confidence is reshaped through dialogue; the next subtheme shifts focus to modelling, where excellence is embodied and enacted in practice.

Subtheme 1.4 – Professional Growth through Modelling Excellence

Modelling emerged as one of the most powerful practices. At first glance it can look like imitation, but in reality, it is a process of transformation. Teachers were not simply copying the behaviours of skilled practitioners but integrating the tacit strategies behind those behaviours into their own way of being. What I came to recognise was that excellence was not something observed from the outside but rebuilt from within, shifting professional identity so that I could act with greater clarity, choice, and care in the classroom.

Educational research reinforces this distinction. Bandura (1977) positioned modelling as a cornerstone of observational learning, where learners reproduce the actions of others. Later work in teacher education shows that its impact depends on making practice visible and available for reflection, so that it can be internalised as part of a teacher's professional knowing (Loughran, 2002).

NLP sharpened this by offering a structured method to elicit expert strategies and make tacit processes explicit (Dilts, 1994). Yet it also raised a critical question: whose models of "excellence" are made visible, and how might privileging certain exemplars risk narrowing the diversity of what good teaching can look like? By combining NLP with contemporary understandings of teacher professional growth, modelling is reframed as a practice that extends beyond mimicry into the co-construction of resilient professional identities (Day & Gu, 2010; Bolstad, 2011).

What stood out was how this process linked directly to sustaining wellbeing. By transforming external exemplars into lived strategies, modelling enabled teachers to access a wider repertoire of responses under pressure. It was not just about doing what experts do but about becoming the kind of professional who could hold steady and resourceful states in challenging contexts.

In this sense, modelling acts as a bridge between observable practice and professional identity. It connects educational theory about learning through others with the deeper process of identity formation that supports resilience and longevity in teaching (Hattie, 2009; Day & Gu, 2010). The extension here is clear: modelling is not the replication of behaviour but the re-authoring of self, and it is in that re-authoring that modelling shifts from skill transfer to identity work, the foundation of sustainable professional practice.

Theme 1 Synthesis:

Across these four subthemes, a pattern emerges: wellbeing and professional identity are sustained not through isolated techniques but through practices that reconfigure how teachers see themselves in relation to students and their work. Rapport, reframing, and anchoring (1.1) provided relational lifelines in moments of pressure; well-formed outcomes (1.2) clarified purpose and restored agency; language awareness (1.3) revealed how confidence and identity are continually reshaped through dialogue; and modelling (1.4) demonstrated how excellence becomes embodied as teachers internalise and re-author strategies. What stands out is the common thread of transformation from the inside out. Teachers were not merely adopting new tools, they were reconstructing meaning, identity, and resilience through the very processes of practice. The critical questions raised about *whose voices are heard* (in language) and *whose practices are elevated* (in modelling) underscore that professional growth is never neutral but always shaped by culture, power, and context. Theme 1 shows that NLP-based strategies support teacher wellbeing by anchoring immediate stability, clarifying direction, and cultivating identity practices that are both sustaining and adaptive within complex educational environments

5.4 Theme 2: Sustaining the Self: NLP and the Inner Work of Teaching

Theme 2 explores how teachers sustain themselves internally, highlighting values, emotional regulation, personal responsibility, and resilience as interwoven capacities. What struck me here was how these strategies were described less as isolated techniques and more as anchors of identity and wellbeing, enabling teachers to continue showing up under pressure. The following subthemes interrogate these dynamics, tracing how values, regulation, responsibility, and resilience each contribute to sustaining the self in education.

Subtheme 2.1 – Activating Teaching Identity through Personal Values

Participants described how aligning professional practice with personal values deepened their sense of agency and sustained motivation, reinforcing identity as teachers who could navigate challenges with integrity. They spoke of wellbeing as reconnecting with joy in the profession, regaining purpose, and experiencing trust and confidence in themselves. Ben's comment, *"who you are is how you educate"*, captured the sense that values were not abstract ideals but lived anchors shaping everyday choices.

Listening to these accounts, I became aware that in my early career I measured myself against external standards, performing a role defined by others. I was, in many ways, a tick in someone else's box. NLP training shifted this orientation: I began to notice how my values showed up in my choices, in how I related to students and how I held my ground in spaces that could easily consume me. This marked a move from performance to authenticity: teaching became less about doing the job and more about inhabiting alignment with what mattered most to me.

When teachers clarify their values, they strengthen wellbeing through coherence and authenticity, but this clarity can also be disruptive. In psychology, values alignment is linked to autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Yet in education systems built on compliance and performativity, teachers with strong identity may find themselves resisting institutional norms. What sustains wellbeing at a personal level may simultaneously sharpen awareness of systemic misalignment, leaving teachers to navigate the paradox of resilience through resistance. NLP adds weight here because its tools for eliciting values hierarchies and checking ecological fit not only help sustain practice but also equip teachers to recognise when their authentic identity cannot be reconciled with institutional demands. In this way, NLP functions as both a protective practice and a catalyst for questioning the structures in which teaching identities are shaped.

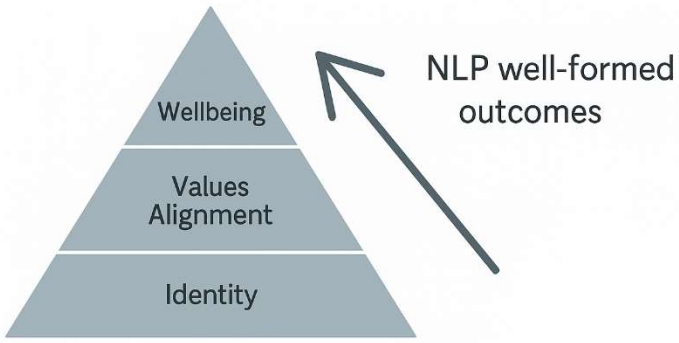
Research supports this dual function. Teacher identity is described as an ongoing negotiation between personal and professional dimensions (Beijaard et al., 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Values alignment contributes to motivation and resilience, while misalignment increases the risk of burnout and attrition (Day & Gu, 2010; Lin et al., 2022). Kelchtermans (2009) underscores the moral dimension of teaching, arguing that when values are undermined teachers experience profound vulnerability. NLP adds an applied dimension to this literature, offering strategies for clarifying and enacting values in practice (Dilts, 1998; Linder-Pelz, 2014).

Overall, values functioned as a stabilising anchor, enabling teachers to sustain their professional identity in the face of complexity. By clarifying and living their values, supported through NLP tools, participants transformed identity from something externally defined into a resource for resilience and wellbeing.

If values offered teachers an anchor for authenticity, the next subtheme turns to how they managed the shifting emotional currents that accompany sustaining that integrity in complex contexts.

Figure 39

Values alignment and identity coherence in sustaining teacher wellbeing (Author's own)



Subtheme 2.2 – Cultivating Emotional Regulation and Self-Management in Complex Contexts

Participants described emotional regulation as central to sustaining wellbeing, though their accounts revealed strikingly different manifestations of what regulation meant in practice. For some, it was recovery from personal crisis; for others, a way to critique systemic hierarchies; and for others still, a practical technique to restore confidence in daily teaching. These differences showed that regulation was not a single skill but a layered capacity, encompassing recovery, perspective, and adaptability under pressure.

What struck me was how NLP gave teachers a way to stay steady even when things went sideways, like a kind of inner compass. Carina described NLP as "a crack in the blanket of depression," showing how even small cognitive shifts disrupted entrenched hopelessness and opened new possibility. Others framed regulation as confronting structural strain or releasing embodied fear, reminding me that these practices were less about suppressing emotion than about reclaiming agency under pressure. This paradox of regulation as both liberation and compliance directed me toward Hochschild's (1983) and Kelchtermans' (2017) work, which frame emotion as deeply political, not in the partisan sense, but in how schools regulate, value, and sometimes exploit teachers' emotional labour.

Psychological perspectives affirm that emotional regulation, defined as conscious awareness and redirection of internal states, is critical for adaptive functioning (Gross, 2015) and a predictor of teacher wellbeing (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Pedagogically, such skills strengthen clarity and classroom responsiveness, supporting both teachers and students (Day & Gu, 2010). Yet regulation is never neutral. Hochschild's (1983) theory of emotional labour shows how institutions can co-opt regulation for compliance, and Kelchtermans (2017) warns against resilience becoming a moral expectation that conceals structural dysfunction. Carina's recovery underscores the life-giving side of regulation, while Faiz's critique reminds us that resilience can also mask harm. This paradox reframes regulation as a political practice: it can liberate teachers to sustain presence, but it can also normalise silence in unjust conditions.

NLP sits within this tension. Techniques such as reframing, anchoring, and timeline work interrupt spirals of stress and restore agency (Dilts, 1998; Bolstad, 2011), yet they also raise ethical questions about when regulation protects wellbeing and when it inadvertently upholds unsustainable systems. Emotional regulation, then, emerges not only as a psychological resource but as identity work, a way teachers claim agency in navigating complexity. Having considered how regulation sustained wellbeing under strain, the next subtheme turns to resilience as an extension of this capacity for agency.

Subtheme 2.3 – Empowering Agency through Personal Responsibility

Agency surfaced in the findings as a stance lived in daily practice, expressed not as abstract autonomy but as responsibility continually enacted. Teachers emphasised that agency meant remaining intentional even in complex environments, steering choices rather than being swept along by circumstance. Synthesising these perspectives, agency emerged as a

process of authorship: planning deliberately, reframing experiences, and reclaiming authorship of professional identity in the midst of pressure.

Yet I could not help but ask: when responsibility is framed as constant, where is the space for retreat, imperfection, or rest? In my own practice, I found that responsibility felt less like blame and more like authorship, a way of reclaiming control over how I show up. In my own practice, NLP's stance of being "at cause" resonated strongly: it encouraged me to see responsibility not as blame but as authorship, a way of reclaiming control over how I show up. At the same time, this emphasis provoked unease: when responsibility is framed as constant, where is the space for retreat, imperfection, or rest?

Literature highlights the layered nature of this paradox. Sartre (1943/1993) framed freedom and responsibility as inseparable, echoing the burden and potential of always being "at cause." Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) similarly stress that teacher agency is never exercised in isolation but is relational and constrained, shaped by context and power. From an educational perspective, authorship through responsibility aligns with Day and Gu's (2010) view of professional identity as sustained through moral purpose and ongoing commitment, and with Beltman et al.'s (2011) analysis of resilience as identity work. NLP adds practical depth here: techniques such as perceptual positions or reframing cultivate precisely this shift from reactive to intentional stance (Bandler & Grinder, 1979; Linder-Pelz, 2014).

Yet critical scholars caution that discourses of responsibility can be co-opted by neoliberal systems, turning empowerment into pressure. Kelchtermans (2009) warns that moral responsibility may become a source of vulnerability when institutions demand endless self-sacrifice. For me, this tension sharpened the paradox: responsibility empowers, but it can also exhaust. The challenge is to hold both truths, that teachers find resilience in agency, and yet responsibility must be framed in humane, sustainable ways.

In this way, agency through responsibility becomes both a wellbeing resource and a political stance, reminding us that empowerment cannot be divorced from the systems in which it is enacted. This prepares the ground for the next subtheme, which turns to resilience as the longer-term expression of these moment-by-moment choices.

In the end, responsibility became both anchor and weight, empowering me to steer my own practice, yet reminding me that no teacher can carry authorship alone. This tension makes resilience not just desirable but essential, which is where the next subtheme turns.
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Subtheme 2.4 – Navigating Challenge: Growth, Disillusionment, and the Edges of Resilience

Resilience surfaced in the findings as both resource and risk: for some, a well of growth, for others, a point of disillusionment where even long-standing endurance frayed. In my own experience, resilience has sometimes felt like holding water in cupped hands, stabilising for a moment yet ultimately leaking away when systemic dysfunction persisted. NLP gave me tools to steady myself, but I recognised the fragility of this work when broader recognition and alignment were absent. This sharpened my awareness that wellbeing cannot be endlessly self-generated when the environment continually erodes purpose.

Teacher accounts reflected this paradox. Some described NLP strategies such as reframing and anchoring as supports for sustaining motivation and recovering more effectively from daily pressures, consistent with Gross's (2015) model of emotion regulation and positive psychology's framing of resilience as a dynamic process (Seligman, 2011; Beltman et al., 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Yet others acknowledged the limits: as Esmurelda's reflection illustrated, resilience could not undo the conditions when systemic barriers persisted. This echoes research showing that sustained misalignment between teachers' values and institutional contexts drives disillusionment and attrition (Kelchtermans, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

The extension here is that resilience cannot be understood apart from recognition. Teachers' wellbeing depends not only on their coping strategies but also on the extent to which their professional labour is acknowledged and valued (Honneth, 1995; Day & Gu, 2010). When systems fail to provide recognition, through policy, leadership, or adequate support, individual strategies, however effective, become fragile. This raises an ethical tension: resilience discourse can empower teachers, yet it also risks slipping into compliance, masking structural dysfunction by celebrating teachers' capacity to endure (Santoro, 2018; Beltman, 2020). NLP's emphasis on agency can thus be double-edged: a resource for regaining authorship and perspective (Dilts, 1990; Andreas & Faulkner, 1994), but also a potential amplifier of self-blame when external change proves impossible. Cultural framings sharpen this critique. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori educators often situate resilience relationally, within whānau and community (Bishop, 2019). Against this, NLP's Eurocentric focus on the individual "map of the world" risks replicating colonising tendencies unless critically adapted. Acknowledging resilience as relational and culturally embedded aligns with broader scholarship that frames resilience not as a fixed trait but as a socially mediated process (Mansfield et al., 2016; Ungar, 2012).

Resilience emerges here as both a strength and a strain, sustaining perspective in the moment yet fragile when systemic recognition is absent. For teacher identity and wellbeing, the implication is clear: resilience must be re-imagined not as infinite endurance but as the capacity to adapt without self-erasure, supported not only by individual strategies like NLP but also by institutional recognition and structural care.

This tension between resilience as sustaining resource and as potential compliance highlights the need to view wellbeing not only as an individual practice but as a relational and systemic responsibility.

Theme 2 Synthesis: Sustaining the Self through NLP and Inner Work

In synthesis, the four subthemes show that sustaining the self as a teacher involves more than isolated strategies, it is a layered process of aligning values, regulating emotions, exercising agency, and navigating resilience in complex environments. NLP practices offered participants practical entry points into this work: well-formed outcomes anchored purpose, language awareness expanded confidence, responsibility framed agency as intentional authorship, and resilience strategies provided short-term steadiness. Yet the discussion also revealed that these tools are never neutral. Their effectiveness depends on how they intersect with teachers' identities, values, and the systemic contexts in which they work. The synthesis here is that sustaining the self is both deeply personal and unavoidably political: NLP techniques can help teachers claim authorship over their professional lives, but without recognition and supportive structures, such strategies risk becoming fragile. For teacher identity and wellbeing, the insight is clear, professional sustainability requires practices that cultivate inner steadiness while also calling for systemic conditions that affirm and uphold teachers' work.

5.5 Theme 3: The Practitioner Transformed – NLP in Self, Mindset, and Method

This theme captures a profound shift: participants described not merely learning NLP techniques, but embodying them as part of their identity, mindset, and professional presence. Their accounts trace a journey from applying tools consciously to integrating them unconsciously, reshaping how they related to themselves, their students, and their roles as educators. What struck me here was how these shifts blurred the line between personal and professional growth, signalling transformation at the level of identity rather

than just skill. The following subthemes examine how this transformation unfolded across self-awareness, mindset, and classroom method.

Subtheme 3.1 – Transforming Identity Through NLP

Participants described how NLP reshaped their sense of self as teachers, shifting from applying techniques to embodying them as part of their professional identity. What began as conscious strategies gradually became unconscious ways of perceiving, deciding, and being in the classroom. This transformation went beyond professional development in a narrow sense, instead becoming a matter of coherence and authorship, teachers spoke of feeling more integrated, authentic, and aligned in their practice.

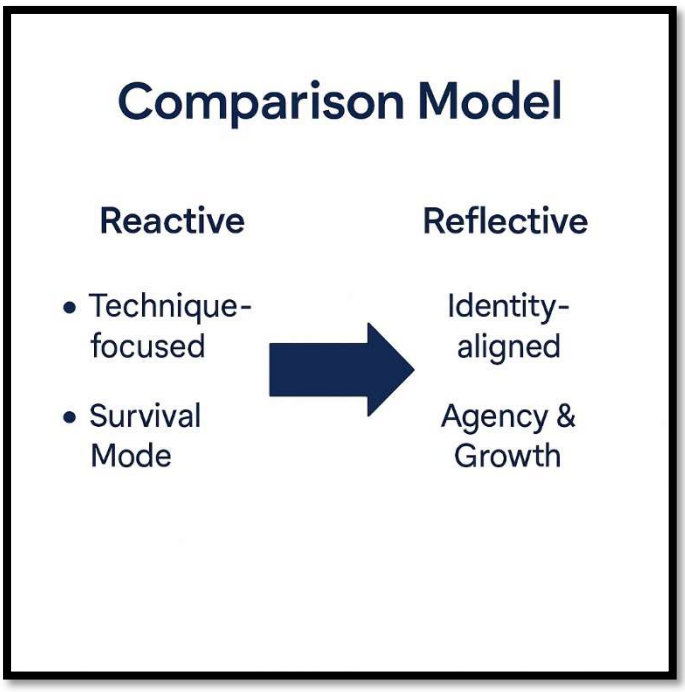
From where I stand, the shift was never just about applying an NLP technique. It was about becoming a teacher who sees differently, thinks differently, and interrupts old unconscious patterns in real time. For me, that was when NLP ceased to be a toolkit and became a worldview. It reshaped not only my practice but the way I made sense of myself, showing how identity is rewritten whenever the lens shifts and the world that is seen changes too. In that process, I've rewritten internal narratives, interrupted inherited patterns, and opened up entirely new possibilities for identity and wellbeing.
This shift illustrates how NLP operates not only at the level of skills but at the level of identity, aligning with research that frames teacher identity as dynamic, relational, and continuously reconstructed through reflection and practice (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Rewriting internal narratives, choosing which stories to interrupt and which to strengthen, highlights how language, power, and identity are tightly interwoven (Freire, 1970; Chawla & Atay, 2018). NLP's tools, such as the Meta Model, provide practical ways to surface and disrupt limiting scripts, enabling teachers to author new professional narratives that feel coherent and aligned. In this way, NLP becomes not just a set of pedagogical strategies but a means of identity work, allowing teachers to reconcile inherited narratives with chosen values and purposes.

The implications for wellbeing are significant. Research shows that identity coherence, the sense of living and teaching in alignment with one's core values, is central to teacher resilience and sustainability in the profession (Day & Gu, 2010; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). By re-voicing limiting narratives and embodying new ones, teachers were not only better equipped to support students but also to sustain themselves professionally. Identity, then, emerges as both a site of vulnerability and a source of strength, with NLP offering tools for authorship that restore coherence and agency.

In this way, identity transformation is not an incidental outcome of NLP practice but its deepest contribution: enabling teachers to move from performing strategies to becoming resourceful, coherent professionals. This foundation provides a natural bridge to the next theme, where transformation is expressed not only in identity but also in mindset and presence.

Figure 40

Practitioner transformation through NLP – from reactive practice to reflective identity (Author's own)



Subtheme 3.2 – Applying NLP for Reflective and Responsive Pedagogy

Participants described NLP as a catalyst for reflective and responsive pedagogy, giving them new language for their instincts, heightening self-awareness, and enabling more intentional, adaptive engagement with learners.

What stood out to me was realising that my *map was not the territory*: the unconscious perfectionism I carried into teaching shaped stress before I had even begun. NLP practices surfaced those hidden scripts, and with visibility came choice.

Much teacher reflection remains technical, asking whether a lesson strategy "worked." Yet NLP encouraged a deeper loop, where reflection moved from evaluation to transformation. It illuminated the tacit frames shaping my practice, the drive for flawless delivery, the tendency to equate mistakes with failure, and reframed reflection as questioning the beliefs beneath action. This resonates with Mezirow's (1991) description of transformative learning, where reflection reshapes the very frames of reference that govern perception and response. What became clear is that reflection inevitably exposed the *me behind the professional*. The standards I chased in my practice were less about pedagogy and more about how I measured my own worth. Through NLP I could see how professional stress was intertwined with personal narratives, and how reframing those narratives opened space for greater compassion toward myself. This aligns with identity scholarship that views the professional self as inseparable from the personal (Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

These inner shifts translated directly into pedagogical presence. By using NLP tools such as reframing or anchoring, teachers not only adapted methods but also regulated their own states in ways that students could feel. The result was a more responsive classroom climate where trust and wellbeing could grow. Research on social-emotional competence (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) supports this link: reflective teachers regulate their inner world to remain present for students, sustaining both learning and relationships.

Over time, this form of reflection became identity work. It was less about fixing lessons and more about shaping the teacher I was becoming. Loughran (2002) argues that reflective practice makes tacit knowledge visible, while Beijaard et al. (2004) highlight identity coherence as central to sustaining professional growth. In this sense, NLP expanded reflection into a practice of authorship: a continual re-writing of internal narratives that aligned who I am with how I teach.

Reflective and responsive pedagogy therefore operates on multiple levels, from strategy adjustment to identity transformation. Its power lies in moving beyond surface fixes to deeper authorship, sustaining adaptability as a resource for wellbeing rather than a source of strain. This prepares the ground for the next subtheme, which considers how such inner transformations shape outward presence and professional method.

if reflective responsiveness shaped how teachers engaged with practice in the moment, the next subtheme explores how deeper mindset shifts consolidated those changes into sustained professional presence.

Subtheme 3.3 – Supporting Emotional Resilience Through NLP

Participants described resilience as curating beliefs and language to stay "at cause," shifting their states, and reframing challenges so they could sustain motivation and presence under pressure. For some, resilience carried an almost visceral quality, a surge of energy and possibility that renewed motivation, while for others it became a transferable practice, where personal metaphors for safety and reframing were later modelled for students.

From an NLP perspective, emotional wellbeing and resilience involved cultivating self-awareness, shifting state, reframing negative experiences, adopting empowering beliefs, and monitoring the impact of language on self-talk and communication. Participants framed these practices as supporting their competence to manage themselves under stress while sustaining motivation and presence in teaching.

For me, resilience was not the absence of strain but the spaciousness to move through it. NLP gave me maps, not to erase difficulty, but to navigate it differently. I've rewritten internal narratives, interrupting inherited patterns, and opened up entirely new possibilities for identity and wellbeing.

Resilience here first emerges as an identity practice: through NLP, teachers re-authored their sense of being "at cause," curating beliefs and aligning actions with values to preserve coherence and professional integrity (Day & Gu, 2014; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Alongside this identity work, participants described resilience in psychological terms, drawing on techniques such as reframing or state-shifting to regulate emotion and sustain motivation in moments of stress (Gross, 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Yet systemic perspectives remind us that resilience discourses are not neutral. When institutions expect teachers to self-manage endlessly without structural recognition or support, resilience risks sliding into complicity, masking dysfunction rather than enabling flourishing (Hochschild, 2012; Kelchtermans, 2009). NLP-supported resilience can be read as multi-layered: a psychological capacity, an identity practice, and a political act of sustaining humanity within unsustainsble systems.

This understanding reframes resilience not as a fixed trait or simple endurance but as a dynamic, layered practice that holds together wellbeing and professional identity. It signals that sustaining resilience requires both the inner resources teachers build through NLP and the outer recognition of their work, a balance that prepares the ground for the next theme on how these inner transformations consolidate into professional presence.

These insights frame resilience as a dynamic practice of self-authorship, creating a natural bridge to the next theme, where attention turns to how teachers' professional presence is transformed.

Subtheme 3.4 Beyond Technique: NLP as a Way of Being

Participants described how NLP no longer felt like a set of techniques to apply, but something they carried into who they were as teachers, a presence that shaped how they thought, spoke, and acted. For me, it was the repeated experience of NLP's effects, in my own practice and in others, that shifted it from a strategy to a way of being, a process best understood through theories of experiential and embodied learning (McCarthy, 1987; Eraut, 2000).

This shift from strategy to way of being reflects what Grinder and Bostic (2001) describe as the progression to unconscious competence, where repeated application reorganises perception itself rather than simply supplying techniques. Eraut (2000) similarly frames professional expertise as embodied learning, a process in which tacit knowledge becomes ingrained and responsive to context. In this sense, NLP's anchoring, reframing, or linguistic precision cease to function as discrete tools and instead shape a practitioner's stance toward challenges, allowing presence to remain steady even when stressors persist.
From a pedagogical perspective, Schön's (1983) notion of the reflective practitioner and the Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) skill acquisition model illustrate how teachers evolve from deliberate, rule-based action to intuitive artistry. NLP contributes to this trajectory by providing structured entry points that, over time, dissolve into fluid practice. Teachers are no longer "doing" NLP but enacting professional judgement informed by it, demonstrating a kind of artistry that aligns technical competence with responsiveness to learners.

At the level of identity, this integration matters for teacher wellbeing. Day and Gu (2010) emphasise that sustaining authenticity requires coherence between personal values and professional practice, while Akkerman and Meijer (2011) highlight identity's dialogical, evolving nature. When NLP is embodied, it supports this coherence by aligning inner narratives and outer action, enabling teachers to author themselves as resilient professionals. What begins as learning techniques becomes a process of sustaining presence, confidence, and integrity across the pressures of teaching.

Theme 3 Synthesis:

Across these subthemes, a clear progression emerged: NLP was not only applied as a set of strategies but gradually integrated into teachers' sense of self, shaping identity, reflective practice, resilience, and presence. Teachers described moving from using tools consciously to embodying them as part of their professional identity, an evolution that supported authenticity, coherence, and agency. Reflexive accounts highlighted how this integration disrupted inherited narratives, surfaced unconscious patterns such as perfectionism, and opened space for more responsive, sustainable teaching practices. Interrogating these findings with identity theory (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), resilience scholarship (Day & Gu, 2010), and embodied learning (Eraut, 2000), NLP's contribution can be seen less as a technique and more as a worldview, a way of being that anchors wellbeing and sustains the professional self. In this sense, the practitioner transformed is not simply more skilled but more present, resilient, and aligned, setting the stage for Theme 4's focus on professional presence.

5.6 Theme 4: Navigating the Challenges of NLP in Education

While participants consistently described NLP as transformative, this theme revealed how systemic, reputational, ethical, and cultural barriers shaped its use in education. Teachers applied NLP with care, but their experiences highlight that professional practice cannot be disentangled from context. I have felt this tension myself: the same strategies that opened new possibilities in my practice were sometimes met with skepticism or misunderstanding. The challenge, then, lies not in whether NLP "works," but in how it is positioned, adapted, and sustained within education's complex ecologies. The following subthemes explore these tensions, moving from systemic constraints to reputational and ethical concerns, and finally to cultural considerations in adapting NLP for diverse educational settings.

Subtheme 4.1 – Systemic Resistance and the Realities of Implementation

Participants highlighted that the main barriers to applying NLP were systemic rather than personal. Rigid hierarchies, compliance-driven cultures, and NLP's contested reputation meant strategies often had to be reframed or renamed to gain acceptance. This paradox shows that while NLP supported teaching and wellbeing, institutional contexts frequently marked it as illegitimate or risky.

For me, this tension is familiar. I have seen NLP reframed through neuroscience, communication theory, and relationship research to make it more palatable. That

adaptability signals potential, yet the very need for re-labelling reveals a deeper problem: what counts as legitimate knowledge in education is not always what sustains teachers. This reflects the clash between adaptive professionalism and structural rigidity. Research distinguishes between adaptive expertise, flexible, context-responsive practice, and technical compliance (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986; Timperley, 2013). Participants demonstrated adaptability, but systems often resisted it. Innovation flourished in voluntary adult learning yet faltered in compliance-driven schooling cultures where flexibility was treated as liability rather than strength.

These accounts also reveal the politics of legitimacy. Schön (1983) described practice as "knowing-in-action," but institutions privilege codified, research-validated knowledge (Bernstein, 2000). NLP's reputation positioned it outside mainstream legitimacy, making re-labelling a professional survival tactic. Resistance is therefore epistemic as well as bureaucratic, delineating what counts as pedagogy.

Systemic resistance also shapes teacher wellbeing. When sustaining tools are delegitimised, the burden of adaptation falls on individuals already under strain. Kelchtermans (2009) highlights teacher vulnerability as structurally produced, while Day and Gu (2010) argue that motivation requires recognition at both personal and institutional levels. NLP's marginalisation illustrates this: resilience cannot be reduced to individual effort when institutional legitimacy is withheld.

Systemic resistance, then, is not merely background but an active force shaping identity and wellbeing. Teachers' agency lies not only in applying NLP but in navigating recognition within resistant structures. NLP's capacity to support adaptability is real, yet its transformative potential remains mediated by systems that determine what can and cannot be named.

Alongside institutional resistance, the credibility of NLP itself became a second obstacle, as its public reputation shaped how, and whether, teachers could introduce it in professional spaces.

Figure 41

Challenges and adaptive responses in applying NLP within education (Author's own)

Challenge	Risk	Practitioner Adaptation
Credibility	Dismissal	Rebranding
Cultural Fit	Misuse	Ethical framing
Systemic Rigidity	Misalignment	Cultural integration

Subtheme 4.2 Rebuilding Credibility: NLP's Reputation in the Public Eye

Participants highlighted that credibility was not just about whether NLP "worked" in practice but how it was perceived by peers, leaders, and the wider public. For some, reputational concerns were constant barriers to implementation: the very mention of NLP evoked skepticism, stigma, or associations with commercialised self-help. Others described strategic re-framing, introducing NLP through the language of coaching, neuroscience, or social-emotional learning, as a way to sidestep dismissal while still drawing on its tools. What emerged was not a rejection of NLP itself but a recognition that its public image is fragile, and teachers must actively manage how it is presented to be taken seriously in professional contexts.

In my own experience, the gap between quick online certifications and rigorous, internationally accredited training captures why NLP's reputation is so uneven. On one side, it risks being dismissed as superficial; on the other, it demands deep learning, ethics, and sustained practice. Holding that tension has reminded me that credibility is not

automatic it must be continually built. NLP itself is simply a tool, and as with any tool, its impact depends on the integrity and skill of the person using it.

This tension echoes wider debates in education and professional practice about legitimacy and boundary-work. Becher and Trowler (2001) argue that disciplines police the boundaries of what counts as "valid" knowledge, often marginalising practices that do not align with conventional research paradigms. NLP, with its hybrid roots in therapy, linguistics, and coaching, sits outside these boundaries, which explains why its reputation is contested in academia (Craft, 2001; Tosey & Mathison, 2009). For teachers, this creates reputational risk: to use NLP is to engage in identity work, navigating between personal conviction and professional credibility (Mockler, 2011). Reframing NLP as "applied neuroscience" or embedding it under coaching frameworks is not simply a semantic strategy but an act of boundary negotiation, allowing educators to reconcile their practice with institutional expectations.

Ethical questions surface here too. As Gergen (2009) suggests, professional credibility is relational: it rests not only on competence but on the trust of others. Teachers' choices about whether to name or disguise NLP raise dilemmas about transparency and authenticity. Is it enough that techniques support wellbeing and learning outcomes, or does credibility require explicit naming and scholarly legitimation? These questions place responsibility back onto educators as both practitioners and gatekeepers of trust.
In this sense, rebuilding credibility is less about defending NLP abstractly and more about recognising that professional trust is co-constructed. For teachers, the reputational challenges reveal the politics of pedagogy: credibility is earned at the intersection of evidence, ethics, and identity.

Subtheme 4.3 Ethics, Culture, and Inclusivity in NLP Practice

Participants described NLP as both empowering and risky: its flexibility supports curiosity, but outcomes depend on practitioner integrity and training. They noted cultural blind spots, pointing to NLP's Western, monocultural roots and its lack of spiritual or systemic awareness. These critiques highlighted the need to re-situate NLP within inclusive, ethical, and relational frames that honour diverse worldviews and collective wellbeing.
Emerging in the 1970s, NLP reflects the cultural assumptions and positionalities of its time, shaped largely by white male perspectives and thus carrying traces of colonisation and patriarchy (Tosey & Mathison, 2009; Witkowski, 2010; Macfarlane, 2004; Bishop, 2011).

Participants' concerns align with broader critiques of Eurocentric methodologies and the need to decolonise knowledge practices (Smith, 2012; Chawla & Atay, 2018), and with analyses of colonised mental frameworks that shape how tools are received and used (Ngũgĩ, 1986; Fanon, 1963).

This context matters in education, where participants highlighted both the liberating possibilities of NLP and the risks of reinforcing exclusionary practices if applied uncritically. For some, NLP's non-dogmatic stance, "let's just suppose", felt liberating precisely because it was provisional, not tied to rigid belief. Yet this openness also means NLP can be adapted in ways that distort its purpose or clash with cultural values.

My reflexive stance is interpretive:is interpretive: NLP has been one of the few professional frameworks that felt flexible enough to accommodate both my cultural identity and my ethical commitments. Its presuppositions invite curiosity rather than closure; this openness also means NLP can be adapted in ways that distort its purpose or clash with cultural values.

Literature reinforces this duality. Coaching literature underscores the need for ethical frameworks when adapting psychological methods (Grant, 2016), while bicultural and decolonising perspectives (Macfarlane, 2004; Bishop, 2011) caution against practices that ignore indigenous values. Teachers cannot bracket out who they are: identity and culture shape how they teach, learn, and respond to pressure (Day & Gu, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2009). The challenge is not whether NLP can be adapted, but how to do so inclusively.

There were also reflections on cultural fit particularly from our Māori educator who questioned whether NLP's origins and frameworks sufficiently addressed indigenous perspectives or systemic inequities. This reflects wider critiques of Eurocentric methodologies (Smith, 2012; Bishop, 2011) and highlights the importance of reflexivity in decolonising knowledge practices (Chawla & Atay, 2018), while also aligning with Tosey and Mathison's (2009) recognition of NLP's culturally situated nature. This critique resonated deeply with me given my own history of growing up under apartheid in South Africa and later navigating the legacies of colonisation in Aotearoa. It reminded me that NLP's Eurocentric framing is not encountered in a vacuum but within colonised mental frameworks (Ngũgĩ, 1986; Fanon, 1963) that I too have had to unlearn.

Diana raised the way NLP can be seen as monocultural when looking through the lens of its underlying assumptions as a field (Smith, 2012). While NLP is grounded in a model of the "individual map of the world," this framing is culturally situated and can be read as

Eurocentric in its assumptions of selfhood and change (Tosey & Mathison, 2010). From a Māori perspective, individual mapping may be less meaningful than collective understandings based on whānau, whakapapa, and relational identity (Bishop, 2012). This highlights a need to consider how NLP strategies might be adapted or critiqued in relation to indigenous and collective worldviews and underscores the importance of engaging with literature that interrogates NLP's cross-cultural application (Smith, 2012; Bishop, 2012).

Reflecting on these tensions, I position NLP and tikanga Māori as principle-informed, relationally oriented frameworks with resonances, not equivalences (Tosey & Mathison, 2009; Macfarlane, 2004; Bishop, 2011).

Figure 42 and Figure 43 illustrates how selected tikanga values align with key NLP assumptions and practices.

Figure 42

Tikanga Māori Values and NLP Resonance (Author's Own)

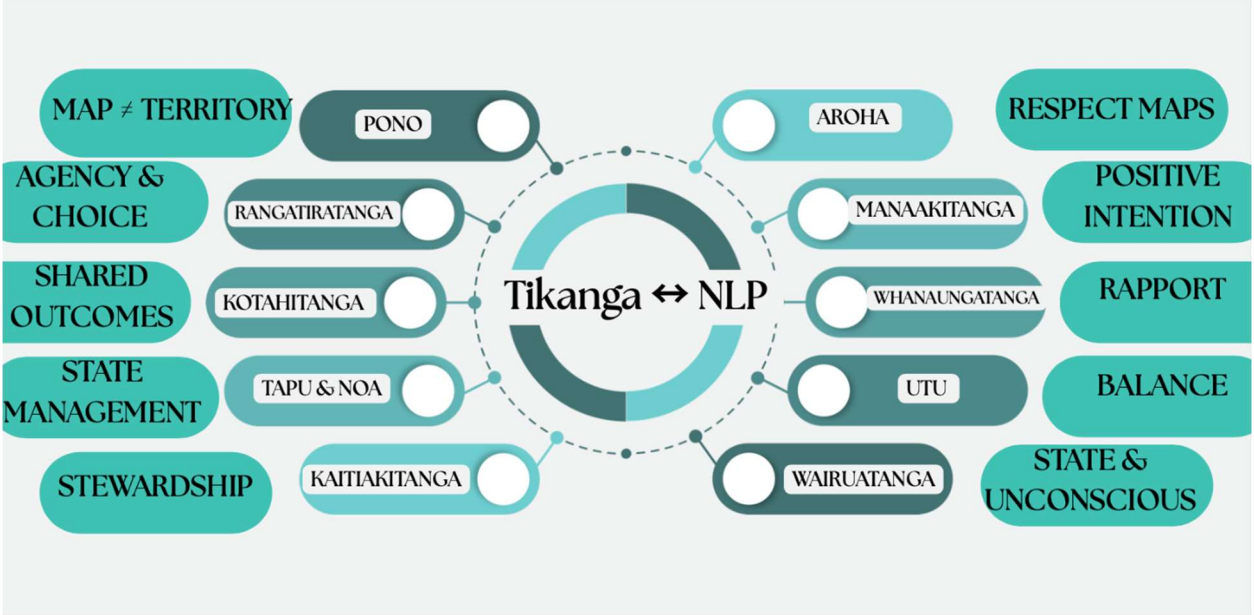


Figure 43

Alignment of Tikanga Māori Values and NLP Presuppositions (Author's Own)

Tikanga Value	NLP Presuppositions / Practices	Alignment / Explanation
Aroha (love, compassion, empathy, heart-centred practice)	Respect each other's map of the world; Every behaviour has a positive intention; People are not their behaviours; Rapport-building; Anchoring positive states	Aroha is about empathy and compassion. NLP aligns by honouring others' perspectives, separating person from behaviour, presupposing positive intent, and fostering relational safety through rapport and anchoring caring states.
Manaakitanga (care, generosity, uplifting others)	Rapport-building; Respect each other's map of the world; People respond better to choice than no choice	Manaakitanga uplifts and respects others. NLP resonates through relational care (rapport), dignity in acknowledging perspectives, and empowering people by expanding choices.
Whanaungatanga (relationships, kinship, interdependence)	Rapport-building; The meaning of communication is the response you get; Modelling excellence; Systemic flexibility	Whanaungatanga strengthens kinship and belonging. NLP parallels this by emphasising relational responsibility, co-creating meaning, learning through modelling, and adapting flexibly within systems.
Utu (reciprocity, restoring balance)	Reframing; Anchoring; Ecology check	Utu restores balance in relationships. NLP techniques like reframing restore perspective, anchoring restores resourceful states, and ecology checks ensure wider harmony in outcomes.
Wairuatanga (spirituality, unseen dimensions)	State is the foundation of all behaviour; Unconscious processes direct behaviour; Anchoring/state work	Wairuatanga acknowledges the unseen dimensions of life. NLP similarly works with states and unconscious processes, recognising invisible but powerful influences on wellbeing.
Kaitiakitanga (guardianship, stewardship, responsibility)	Ecology check; I am at cause; Modelling excellence	Kaitiakitanga is stewardship and protection. NLP aligns through ecological awareness of impact, personal responsibility (*cause* frame), and modelling as a way of transmitting excellence and safeguarding knowledge.
Tapu & Noa (sacred/profane balance)	Anchoring/state management; Behaviour and change are contextual; Ecology principle	Tapu/noa regulate balance between sacred and ordinary. NLP mirrors this by contextualising behaviour, using state management to restore balance, and applying ecology to keep boundaries safe.
Kotahitanga (unity, collective purpose)	Well-formed outcomes; Rapport-building in groups; Systemic flexibility	Kotahitanga is about unity and collective goals. NLP aligns through shared outcome-setting, group rapport that builds cohesion, and systemic flexibility that supports collective focus.
Rangatiratanga (leadership, self-determination)	I am at cause; Well-formed outcomes; Anchoring confidence; Everyone has the resources they need	Rangatiratanga affirms leadership and agency. NLP reflects this through presuppositions of cause and resources, outcome clarity, and anchoring confidence to embody self-determined authority.
Pono (truth, integrity, honesty)	The map is not the territory; Meta-model questioning; Congruence	Pono values integrity and truth. NLP aligns by acknowledging limits of perspective (*map ≠ territory*), using meta-model questioning to clarify truth, and insisting on congruence between words, actions, and values.

NLP presuppositions function as orienting assumptions for communication and change, while tikanga principles serve as guiding values for relational and collective life. Although they arise from different cultural origins, both emphasise that practice must be grounded in values rather than only in outcomes. The new contribution here lies in recognising how particular tikanga values, such as manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, utu, wairuatanga, and kaitiakitanga, resonate with NLP presuppositions when applied relationally in education. This alignment is not about equivalence but about identifying meaningful points of connection that expand how NLP can be interpreted in Aotearoa.

These alignments highlight that NLP can be interpreted through values-based connections with tikanga Māori, creating opportunities for more culturally resonant practice. Extended explanations and examples are provided in Appendix M. In Aotearoa, for example, values such as manaakitanga (care) and whanaungatanga (relational connection) offer culturally resonant anchors that can reshape NLP into a living practice aligned with wellbeing and community. When reframed this way, NLP moves beyond imported technique toward a culturally responsive, ethically grounded way of sustaining teachers in complex contexts.

Overall, participants' reflections made clear that NLP's value in education depends not only on its techniques but on how it is ethically applied and culturally adapted. When aligned with responsibility, inclusivity, and collective wellbeing, NLP moves beyond strategy to become a practice capable of supporting transformation.

Theme 4 Synthesis

These subthemes show that NLP in education is entangled with systemic, reputational, and cultural conditions. Teachers described both adaptation and resistance: they navigated institutional rigidity, rebranded NLP for credibility, and interrogated its ethical and cultural fit. These findings echo broader debates about teacher agency, identity, and wellbeing: inner strategies may be powerful, but their application depends on context. For professional practice, the implication is clear, NLP cannot be treated as a neutral technique. Its sustainability lies in responsible adaptation, cultural responsiveness, and systemic advocacy. Only when these conditions are present can NLP's potential to sustain teacher identity and wellbeing be fully realised.

5.7 Chapter 5 Discussion Conclusion:

Across the four themes, this chapter has traced how NLP functions in education not merely as a set of tools but as a catalyst for reshaping identity, wellbeing, and professional practice. A consistent pattern emerges: the value of NLP lies less in technique itself and more in how those techniques are integrated into the teacher's self, situated within cultural and systemic contexts, and sustained through ethical practice.

Theme 1 showed that practices such as rapport, outcomes, language awareness, and modelling were not only applied tactically but became sites for reconstructing meaning and resilience. Teachers' accounts revealed that NLP supported them in clarifying direction, stabilising under pressure, and re-authoring identity practices. Yet the theme also surfaced critical questions about whose voices and practices are legitimised, signalling that professional growth is always shaped by power and context.

Theme 2 extended this by illustrating how sustaining the self is a layered process: aligning values, regulating emotions, exercising agency, and negotiating resilience within complex environments. NLP offered practical entry points into this work, but the discussion revealed that their effectiveness depends on intersection with identity and systemic conditions. Sustainability, therefore, is both personal and political, without recognition and supportive structures, strategies risk fragility even when they offer moments of steadiness.

Theme 3 traced a progression from conscious skill use to embodied identity transformation. Teachers described NLP not simply as applied technique but as a worldview that altered how they saw themselves and their work. Reflexive analysis highlighted how NLP disrupted inherited narratives and unconscious patterns, opening space for more authentic, resilient teaching. Literature on identity and embodied learning reinforced that what is at stake is not only competence but coherence, the practitioner transformed is better able to sustain presence, agency, and wellbeing.

Theme 4 confronted the realities that shape whether such transformation can flourish. Teachers acknowledged systemic resistance, reputational stigma, and cultural blind spots that complicate the integration of NLP. Their accounts underscored that credibility, inclusivity, and legitimacy are not givens but must be continually negotiated. NLP's promise is therefore contingent: it can resource teachers' wellbeing and agency, but only when embedded in culturally responsive, ethically grounded practice and supported by systemic recognition.

These themes show that NLP's role in education cannot be reduced to technical skill or personal coping. It is a dynamic interplay of identity, wellbeing, and systemic positioning. For teachers, the integration of NLP provides pathways to sustain authenticity, coherence, and agency; yet its transformative potential remains bounded by questions of legitimacy, culture, and institutional support. Professional practice thus carries both opportunity and

responsibility: to apply NLP not as isolated strategy but as an evolving framework of practice that is reflexive, inclusive, and ethically aligned.

This conclusion points forward: the promise of NLP in education lies in its capacity to be lived as a way of being, while the challenge is to ensure that such practice is recognised, resourced, and adapted to diverse cultural and systemic realities.

Appendix O: Response answer to assessment panel questions

Responses to Assessment Panel Questions:

Note:

Each of the questions presented below is multifaceted and complex. There are many components within each, and the specific focus you are seeking shapes how a response can be constructed. To address them satisfactorily requires breaking each question down into its individual elements, reflecting on these in turn, and then synthesizing the answer through the particular lens you have asked for. In truth, each question could form the basis of a thesis in its own right. What I have presented here are my initial, considered responses. In my oral presentation, due to time constraints, I will be providing succinct versions of these reflections, which inevitably lose depth and nuance due to time constraints, and so I have provided the full written versions here for your perusal.

1. **Could you share the motivations and professional reasoning behind your decision to engage primarily with Masters of NLP as your key informants?**

We're interested in how this choice reflects your aspirations, professional identity, and the potential for transformational impact within your sector.

I chose Masters of NLP as key informants because I wanted to hear from educators who had already moved through the initial stages of experimentation and integration, where NLP shifts from being a set of tools to becoming embedded in daily practice. One participant described this clearly: there is always a period of processing, testing, and learning, and I wanted to capture what it looks like on the other side of that, where the knowledge has settled and become integrated into practice and where this knowledge is shaping their classrooms in real ways. By focusing on formally trained educators with internationally recognised credentials, I ensured that the data came from those with rigorous and credible NLP backgrounds, rather than surface-level exposure. This matched my own positioning as an NLP practitioner and trainer, where NLP has become part of who I am as a professional, not just a collection of techniques.

NLP appealed to me because of its breadth and adaptability. Its origins in linguistics, systems theory, conditioning, relational and family therapy mean it is not locked into any single ideology but instead asks a pragmatic question: what can work here, and how can we use it? Gregory Bateson's influence on NLP through his work on epistemology, systems, and cybernetics reinforced this open-ended stance, and it is that spirit of curiosity and ecological thinking that underpins my own practice. For educators, this flexibility is critical.

It allows them to draw from NLP whether they are sustaining wellbeing, reshaping classroom communication, or even repairing harm caused by the system itself.
I also made this choice out of care for the teaching profession. While I no longer want to remain in full-time public sector teaching because it does not align with my values of balance, self-care, and honesty teachers hold a special place in my life. They have shaped me through my own family and through the many classrooms I have worked in. I hear constantly that their work is not getting easier, and I have never once heard a teacher say conditions are improving. This is deeply concerning when teachers are responsible for educating every generation who then go on to shape society. For me, choosing NLP-trained educators was about supporting this sector in a way that is practical, hopeful, and sustainable.
In choosing these voices, I was also choosing to position myself among educators who treat NLP not as a technique but as part of their professional being a stance that mirrors how I now see my own identity and future contribution to education.

1. **Can you tell us in a little bit more detail how your rigorous work as a researcher came, stage by stage, to land on the interesting themes and sub-themes discussed in Chapter 4.** Similarly, we're looking for a clearer sense of how the interview questions connected to the (sub)themes e.g. those on well-being.

My analysis followed a systematic, iterative path. First, I designed semi-structured interview questions aligned with my research aims, seeking to elicit teachers lived experiences with NLP strategies. Alongside these interviews, I kept practitioner journals and crafted reflective vignettes, which doubled as a way of interrogating literature and embedding theory into practice. After recording and transcribing the interviews, I began the process of coding. Initially, following an academic mentor's advice, I attempted to physically cut participant quotes into piles and cluster them thematically. This proved extremely difficult, and, despite weeks of effort, I felt constrained and overwhelmed by the lack of structure. Eventually, I recognised a key learning moment: if I were my own teacher, I would advise myself to stop forcing a method that was not working and to try a different approach. Acting on this, I turned to Excel, where I could highlight, group, and re-arrange codes in a structured, visual way that aligned with how I think. In this sense, I became my own teacher through the learning process. A learning process that remains with me, instead of doing what I've been trained to do my entire life, listen to the person with authority I could check in with myself and my knowledge base and see what aligns with me. It appears simple on the outside, but it is woven into many complexities that will take time to unravel.
Using Excel, I coded and refined multiple iterations, grouping ideas into categories and then into emergent themes. The refinement of themes was iterative to ensure validity. I

continually cross-checked these against my journals and vignettes, ensuring triangulation across perspectives. This recursive process allowed me to distil the findings into robust themes and sub-themes, which authentically reflected participant voices and were critically grounded in both practice and literature. The final stage was to frame these themes in relation to literature during the Discussion, showing how they, both extend and challenge existing research.

The interview questions were deliberately aligned with the study's focus on teacher wellbeing and professional practice. The initial questions were asked with variations of the same core idea, so participants could flow with what felt right for them. Their answers were reflected back to them through reflective listening, which allowed participants to build on and link ideas in their own neurology. The space created by hearing their thoughts returned to them, with no expectation other than to share their lived experience, gave them permission to think and speak freely. This framing was established before the interview began, so participants understood that the purpose was not to perform but to reflect deeply.

Questions such as "Describe your perception of your classroom and practice before you learnt NLP" and "What would you say is the difference after you integrated these skills and techniques?" generated contrasts that later informed themes around teacher identity and resilience. Asking "What tools and strategies have you found effective or ineffective, and why?" directly connected to sub-themes on wellbeing strategies and classroom management. Broader prompts such as "How do you see NLP fitting into the education system?" and "What do you believe made NLP work for you?" provided material for themes on sustainability, contextual fit, and professional agency. In this way, the interview design mapped directly onto the wellbeing-focused themes and sub-themes that were developed in Chapter 4.

Because wellbeing and professional practice are vast terms, the questions were framed to help teachers live the learning process they may not have consciously recognised before. A before-and-after question, for example, requires a "before frame" so participants have something to contrast. This is why I always had multiple versions of the same question language and communication resonate differently for different people, and sometimes one phrasing unlocks memories where another does not. Participants were asked to track these changes, which enabled me to draw out insights into their wellbeing, professional development, and emotional lives sometimes insights they had not considered until that moment.

I knew from my own experience that this framing mattered. In my Transcendental Meditation practice, for instance, I cannot clearly recall what I was like before I learnt the technique; it feels as though I have always been this way. Without a before-and-after frame, the depth of integration can be missed. By assisting participants in their remembering, I

enabled them to access that depth of contrast. This process revealed themes and sub-themes around emotional lives, struggles, mental health, wins, professional growth, and wellbeing. Many of the stories' participants shared began with “what it used to be like” and then moved into “what it is like now.” This allowed them to live through their learning process within the interview itself.

Because of the short time we had together, building rapport quickly was also essential. I needed participants to feel comfortable enough to share deeply personal experiences, sometimes with me as a complete stranger. Variations such as “Did you have any recurring wins?” or “What stood out to you in your practice before you learned NLP?” supported that process. Asking “What tools did you find effective or ineffective, and why?” encouraged participants to reflect on their thinking, not only about classroom strategies but also about themselves as professional practitioners and their wider emotional and wellbeing practices. In this way, the design and delivery of the interviews supported participants to surface the stories that became the wellbeing-centred themes and sub-themes in Chapter 4. The care I took in both the analysis and the framing of questions has left me with findings that feel not only academically robust but also deeply respectful of the profession I am trying to serve.

1. **Could you reflect on any ethical dilemmas you encountered while sharing the stories of others in your inquiry?** We’re interested in how you navigated these challenges and what this reveals about your evolving professional identity and leadership within your field.

One of the main ethical dilemmas I encountered was the tension between word count limits and my responsibility to honour the depth of participants’ stories. Cutting back their words created a sinking feeling that I was losing the truth of what they had trusted me with, and the decision not to allow extended findings in my appendix intensified this challenge. I also held a constant awareness of the risk of slipping into my own interpretation rather than staying true to their meaning. To navigate this, I worked to keep their words in context when assigning them to themes and sub-themes, ensuring they retained integrity. I approached this almost like Clean Language remaining in participants’ language, so I reflected their inner world rather than introducing my own. This process revealed how much I now see ethical representation as central to my professional identity, and how seriously I hold the responsibility of leadership when entrusted with others lived experiences. This experience sharpened my sense that leadership is not always about speaking the loudest, but about ensuring that when others speak, their voices are carried with integrity.

1. **Without requiring a defence of NLP as a modality, could you critically reflect on what NLP uniquely contributes to your inquiry, especially in comparison to other approaches such as CBT or positive psychology?**

Does NLP offer distinct pathways to transformation, or are these methods complementary in reframing experience?

Although NLP drew on therapy-based modalities in its origins such as Ericksonian hypnotherapy, Gestalt, and behavioural psychology it was never intended to be only therapy. Its construction deliberately integrated multiple disciplines: linguistics, systems theory, cybernetics, and, most distinctively, modelling. Modelling provides a methodology for observing, eliciting, and replicating excellence across contexts, and this positions NLP as uniquely relevant to education, where teaching is itself an act of modelling practice, behaviours, and identity. In this sense, NLP is multi-modality and multi-contextual, whereas approaches such as CBT and positive psychology are primarily therapy frameworks. What makes NLP distinctive is that it can encompass and extend these approaches: for example, a CBT strategy can be modelled, refined, and applied in ways that create new and desirable outcomes for teachers. This adaptability means NLP functions like a stem cell able to draw on what works elsewhere and differentiate it into context-specific tools that support identity, resilience, and sustainable professional practice. Its applications remain firmly within an educator's role as communication strategies, state management tools, and frameworks for reflection while still supporting wellbeing and professional sustainability. Thus, NLP's unique contribution lies in its ability to draw from therapy but not be confined to it, complementing but not duplicating modalities like CBT and positive psychology, while offering teachers ethically grounded, adaptable strategies for transformation. For me, the distinctive contribution of NLP lies in that adaptability and my responsibility as a practitioner is to apply it ethically in ways that strengthen teachers' capacity to thrive rather than simply survive.

1. **Given NLP's application in personal development and performance enhancement, what support structures exist within your sector (as referenced on p. 111) for practitioners who may be exposed to deeply personal or distressing narratives?**

How does this inform your understanding of professional responsibility and care?

Within schools, the only formal support structures available to educators who encounter personal or distressing narratives are limited, such as EAP programmes or senior leadership teams, and these often carry power dynamics that can feel intimidating rather than supportive. Recognising this gap has shaped my understanding of professional responsibility and care. I see my role as ensuring safety at the core of any work and holding to the principle of not making things worse for those already stretched by the demands of teaching.

My responsibility extends beyond the individual session to the wider community. I teach in a way that ensures educators leave not only with understanding but with embodied skills they can immediately use, and with colleagues who share that skill base. This reflects a tikanga Māori perspective of collective strength, where wellbeing is sustained through whanaungatanga and mutual support. My aim is that teachers walk away empowered, connected, and able to care for one another as part of a community of NLP-informed practitioners, rather than isolated or dependent on me as an individual. In this way, professional responsibility is not only about ethical care in the moment but about building a sustainable culture of wellbeing in education. This has shaped my leadership into something less about the role I hold and more about the kind of community I help to create, where wellbeing is sustained collectively rather than individually shouldered.

1. **The 'programming' aspect of NLP is often critiqued for its behaviourist undertones and perceived lack of agency. How do you respond to these critiques within your own practice and research?**

Do you conceptualise this more as 'restorying' or 're-cognition'? A recent example is the case of Charlie Kirk as a reprogrammer of his own demographic via tele-evangelism.
I am aware that the term "programming" in NLP can raise concerns because people attach different meanings to words. For some, it evokes behaviourism or even manipulation, but for me it has always been simply the "behaviour" element of mind–language–behaviour. I see us as meaning-making beings we assign and reshape meaning constantly, whether in how we use a name like "Karen" or in how we frame our own experiences. In that sense, NLP is less about "programming" and more about opening choice. Within my research and practice, I experience it as both restorying and re-cognition: restorying in the sense that teachers can reframe and re-author the narratives they carry, and re-cognition in that they begin to see differently, noticing patterns and possibilities that were not visible before. I do not feel tied to defending the label of NLP, my commitment is to curiosity, adaptability, and what works in practice to support teacher wellbeing. In that sense, my professional identity is less about defending labels and more about cultivating environments where educators can experiment with language and meaning in ways that return them to agency and choice.

1. **While NLP may be effective in individual contexts, how might it be applied to reframe broader systemic realities, such as toxic workplaces, hierarchical school structures, or dysfunctional governance?**

We're interested in your reflections on the potential and limitations of NLP in these complex environments.
Toxic workplaces and hierarchical school structures are not surface problems; they are multi-layered systems of dysfunction, historically embedded in military traditions, colonial

frameworks, and ingrained patterns of authority. To work with them requires an ecological lens: if one element is shifted, others will inevitably be affected. The question is not simply "how do we apply NLP to reframe systemic realities," but rather how do we carefully break apart the layers, understand their interconnections, and rebuild in a way that strengthens, rather than harms, the whole. Within that complexity, NLP's most immediate potential lies in supporting individuals and leaders. It equips them to notice repeating patterns, challenge unhelpful narratives, and create new frames of communication. These skills can make an important difference in how teachers, leaders, and communities navigate toxic dynamics in real time.

At a broader systemic level, NLP also has potential, but it is not a spray-and-walk-away fix. To genuinely transform deeply ingrained structures such as hierarchical schooling would require time, resources, trained professionals, and the collective commitment of schools, ministries, government, and society at large. NLP can contribute valuable tools and perspectives to such a project, but it cannot substitute for the wider systemic reform and sustained resourcing needed.

In this sense, NLP is both a practical tool for individuals and a model that offers systemic insights. Its presuppositions such as curiosity, ecology, and the recognition that "nothing is true, only useful "encourage thought experiments that can help re-imagine systems. However, any systemic application must be handled with care, ensuring that shifts are ecological, sustainable, and genuinely in service of wellbeing. Holding that balance between individual tools and systemic realities is what I see as leadership: being honest about limits while still opening pathways for possibility.

1. **To what extent do you believe NLP must be adopted as a comprehensive framework, versus selectively applying tools that resonate with specific contexts or individuals?**

Could you reflect on the idea of using the NLP framework as a 'smorgasbord', particularly in relation to interrupting negative self-image patterns?

I think what would be really valuable to see would be a pilot school where NLP was trialled at a whole-school level. That remains a thought experiment, but in Vignette 5 of my thesis I described teaching at a school and connecting with a principal whose leadership style felt very NLP-aligned. They were not practicing NLP by name, but their culture, language, and approach to growth carried the same resonance. I had never experienced anything like it in a school before, and it was the first time I thought I might want to apply for a full-time role.

To ask whether NLP must be adopted as a comprehensive framework or applied selectively as tools, my honest answer is that it is impossible to give a single definitive view. We simply don't know what the possibilities are. It may work in extraordinary ways, it may expose gaps, or it may need to be reshaped. Schools are multi-layered systems: students,

teachers, leadership, curriculum, correction, growth, and language and so much more. My research focus was teacher wellbeing rather than systemic dysfunction, so I cannot claim certainty about how NLP would operate across all those layers. What I can say is that NLP has been applied successfully in many other contexts corporate, medical, coaching and it has consistently proved adaptable. So whole-school adoption is still untested, but the evidence suggests it is worth imagining.

At the same time, NLP's greatest strength is its flexibility. It doesn't have to be taken as an entire framework it works just as well as a smorgasbord of tools. One of my participants, a very experienced NLP trainer and coach who has worked with thousands of people, told me she has never seen a time when something in NLP did not work for someone. What that means specifically, is that some people will be more aligned with one tool or another, but he has never found at least one tool/strategy/technique that hasn't worked for someone. That reflects the fact that we are all meaning-makers, and our models of the world are shaped by countless factors: culture, family, religion, education, travel, experience. What resonates for one person may not for another.

This flexibility is especially powerful when dealing with negative self-image. NLP provides tools at many levels. Some are more therapeutic and body-based, such as desensitisation or trauma cures. Others are lighter, such as anchoring love for yourself, reframing, or using presuppositions as empowering mental frames. Sub-modality shifts can recalibrate how someone holds their self-image and allow them to adopt more resourceful patterns. Coaching ties this together, because the teacher sets their own goals and chooses the pathway. Self-Coaching is something I have been doing for quite some time and is intrinsically linked to my framework of practice created in the MPP. If negative self-image is the barrier, there are multiple options available, always explained and always consent-based.

So, to the extent the question asks, I see NLP's potential as a framework in theory, but in practice its value lies most in its selective, contextual application. Its strength is in increasing clarity, expanding choice, and supporting educators to align with their values and sustain their wellbeing. In practice, my leadership comes through not by prescribing a framework, but by equipping teachers with choices and trusting them to select what sustains their own wellbeing and professional growth.