



**MONASH** University

**Dialogic professional learning for Israeli teachers:  
A narrative inquiry**

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## Abstract

This PhD study is situated in the current age of educational standardisation and increased accountability in which professional learning for teachers has become a central focus for national and local policy making. There appears to be widespread agreement in policy and in the research literature that teachers in schools should be engaged in professional learning throughout their professional lives. There is, however, widespread disagreement on how teacher learning is defined and conceptualised, and how it contributes to professional practice and identity. Many OECD countries, including Israel, are attempting to standardise professional development through the introduction of policy which mandates and organises the professional learning of teachers. Teachers, themselves, are often unrepresented in debates on this crucial subject.

This thesis, written by a teacher researcher, reports on a critical and reflexive practitioner study undertaken in Israel. Using narrative inquiry methods, I explore the ways in which ten Israeli primary school teachers, who had one particular professional learning experience in common, experienced and understood this learning in their professional lives. This is a longitudinal study which focuses on a particular government authorised and funded ‘professional development’ program which I refer to in the study as *'Literacy Studies: Writing for the Development of Learning and Thinking'* (WDLT). This program of workshops was developed and led by me, and it is the site for much of the data generation.

The theoretical framework of the study draws on the work of Bakhtin and the concept of dialogism. In fact, the whole PhD study has been a dialogic process from the outset, in the process crossing many boundaries – cultural, linguistic, pedagogical, theoretical and methodological. This is one of the reasons why the structure of the thesis artefact is non-traditional, in some respects.

Narrative, in a multitude of forms is pivotal in the study: it is a focus of inquiry, the central form of most data, a research method, a mode of data analysis, and it is central to the ways I position myself reflexively in the study. Data for the study comprises a range of artefacts: transcripts of interviews; written reflective narratives; written correspondence; blog posts, and journal entries. This data was generated over a period of eight years. While much of the reflective narrative writing that forms part of the data set of this study was generated within the WDLT program, it is significant that some was undertaken in the liminal spaces around and just beyond that program.

One key finding in the study is that teacher conversation and writing in these liminal spaces can sometimes prompt profoundly important learning and identity development in a teacher.

This study describes and conceptualises teacher learning as a complex, messy experience which can be undertaken in pre-planned, structured programs, incidentally in classrooms with students, or elsewhere in the busy challenging lives of practicing teachers. This learning can be ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’; it can involve individuals or groups of teachers; it can be experienced in formal or informal settings. Rather than attempt to standardise programs and quantify the influence of teacher learning activities on classroom practice, student achievement and the development of teacher identity, this study recommends academics, policy makers, school leadership, and teachers critically grapple with the concept of professional learning in dialogical terms and so open up wider creative spaces for that learning. It suggests that more attention needs to be paid to the particular learning needs of individual teachers and groups of teachers, and that teachers need to be supported in schools in their pursuit of significant deeper learning. The allocation of time, space and resources for ongoing teacher dialogue is crucial.

Further, the study shows how dialogic writing can be significant in the professional learning of teachers, but organisational structures need to be created to better support teachers in their critical and personal engagement with this writing. The findings of this study contribute to and challenge some of the existing knowledge base of teacher learning, especially those studies that seek to standardise and quantify teacher learning and thereby lose the potential for bringing together teacher narratives and dialogic writing in significant learning for educators.

## Publications relevant to this PhD thesis

### Journal articles

- Aharonian, N. (2008a). Teacher writing for professional learning: A narrative. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 7(3), 115-125. Retrieved from <http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=797969347661043;res=IELHSS>
- Aharonian, N. (2009a). Writing in my personal and professional learning: A narrative. *English in Australia*, 44(1), 45-52.
- Aharonian, N. (2016). I thought to myself: what a long way I've come ...: Teacher writing for professional learning. *Teacher Development*, 20(2), 213-228.  
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### Conference presentations relevant to this PhD thesis

Year	Conference	Location	Paper title
2016	The 7 <sup>th</sup> Qualitative Research Conference	Ben-Gurion University	Never alone: Coping with the challenges of doctoral study in a changing digital world
2015	10th Conference of the International Association for the Improvement of Mother Tongue Education (IAIMTE)	Syddansk University, Odense, Denmark	Constructing a dialogical space for the professional learning of Israeli teachers of writing
2014	The 6 <sup>th</sup> Qualitative Research Conference	Ben- Gurion University	Translation in qualitative research: Linguistic, cultural and methodological dilemmas
2013	Changing Reality through Education	MOFET and David Yellin Academic College	Professional writing in many voices: Exploring my learning from a Bakhtinian perspective
2012	Academic Writing and Beyond	MOFET	Academic blogging as a dialogic process
2012	The 5 <sup>th</sup> Qualitative Research Conference	Ben- Gurion University	Teacher educators' learning – I thought to myself: ' <i>Who is learning more?</i> '
2011	Monash University Education Research Community	Monash University, Australia	Empowering professional learning for Israeli teachers: My experiences crossing borders
2011	ALEA - Australian Literacy Educators Association	Melbourne, Australia	Teacher growth on the bumpy road to improved writing pedagogy
2009	Australian Association for the Teaching of English	Hobart, Australia	Teacher writing for professional learning

## Acknowledgements

What happens if one tries to write, or to teach, or to think, or even to read without the sense of tradition? Why, nothing at all happens, just nothing. You cannot write or teach or think or even read without imitation, and what you imitate is what another person has done.

Bloom (1995, p. 167)

At the outset of this PhD journey, I purposefully and confidently chose Associate Professor Graham Parr as my main supervisor, after having successfully completing my master's thesis under his supervision. Associate Professor Parr is an inspiring professional in all respects. He is a hard-working, reliable and very supportive mentor, who always believed in my ability to successfully complete my inquiry. He is an approachable and talented listener, genuinely enthusiastic about my work. As an off-campus student living overseas, Associate Professor Parr was sensitive to my work load as vice-principal in a school and encouraged me to find a healthy balance between work and research demands.

Associate Professor Parr responded to my writing in a timely and respectful manner. His feedback was truly thoughtful and interested and his intelligent questions enhanced my learning and drove me forward. His honest and clear comments invited additional critical engagement with my work. Associate Professor Parr consciously positioned me as a scholarly researcher, not just as a PhD novice, in encouraging and supporting my ventures in publishing four journal articles and presenting at numerous academic conferences. He provided me with significant feedback and sensitively accompanied me in the triumphs and disappointments on the road to publication.

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Completing a PhD study from a distance of 14,000 km is no easy task. I want to express my true gratitude to some people I have never met. First, to Pat Thomson, @ThomsonPat, an incredibly

generous and inspiring academic who has been there for me 24/7 through her books and *Patter* blog posts. Her work supported and empowered me in many ways. Secondly, to the hard-working document delivery staff in the Monash University library. This study would not have been possible without their wonderful service which cannot be taken for granted.

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I am sincerely grateful to the ten teachers who participated in this study and opened up their hearts to me. I learned so much from them and hope I will be a better teacher and leader of professional learning as a result of our dialogue. I also want to thank Efrat Segev, my school principal, my partner in practice, who was always sensitive to the place this enormous project has in my life.

One morning in 2015, I found a note from my sensitive, loving daughter, Adi, pinned above my desk. It said: "*Imma, at chammuda vetechef tesaymi et hadoctorat! Od ktzat ma'amatz*" ["Mum, you are a sweetie and soon you'll finish your doctorate! A little more effort"]. This PhD is dedicated to my wonderful family who have given up so much for me to succeed: to my loving husband, Issachar, who never doubted my ability and never resented the ways in which this project dictated our lives in so many ways, for so long, to my loving and supportive daughters, Dana and Adi, and to my incredible son, Idan, who can't remember life without a PhD in it. I love you all dearly and appreciate your continual patience on this long journey.

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Thank you all,

Nikki

### List of abbreviations

AITSL - Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

BERA - British Education Research Association

BOSTES - Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards

DET - Department of Education and Training

MOOC - Massive Open Online Courses

MUHREC – The Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee

NCLB - No Child Left Behind

NWP - National Writing Project

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PCK – Pedagogical Content Knowledge

PD – Professional Development

PISA - Program for International Student Assessment

PL – Professional Learning

QTC - Quality Teaching Council

RAMA – *Hareshut Haartzit Lemedida Vahaaracha Bechinuch* [National Authority for  
Measurement and Evaluation]

STELLA - Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia

VIT – Victorian Institute of Teaching

WDLT - '*Chinuch Leshoni: Haktiva Lepituach Lemida VeChashiva*' ['Literacy Studies: Writing  
for the Development of Learning and Thinking']

## Table of contents

### PART 1 – BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

<b>Preamble</b>	15
<b>Chapter 1 – Introduction</b>	21
1.1 Professional learning for teachers in an era of standardisation and accountability	21
1.2 Involvement of teachers in debates on educational policy and change	22
1.3 The background to this PhD study	24
1.4 The professional context for this study	26
1.5 The role of story in this dialogic narrative based inquiry	28
1.6 Theoretical resources for the study: The work of Mikhail Bakhtin	32
1.7 Key concepts in this study on professional learning	35
1.8 Research questions	40
1.9 Structure of this thesis	41

### PART 2 – EXPLORING THE LITERATURE

<b>Chapter 2 - Professional learning for teachers</b>	45
2.1 ‘Defining’ professional learning for teachers	46
2.2 Prominent questions surrounding teacher learning	49

2.3 Reasons for engaging in professional learning for teachers _____	50
2.4 Teacher knowledge _____	52
2.5 Teacher identity _____	59
2.6 Characteristics of ‘effective’ professional learning _____	61
2.7 Additional principles of ‘effective’ professional learning _____	68
2.8 Professional learning – ‘managerial’ versus ‘dialogic’ or ‘democratic’ approaches _____	70
2.9 Provisional conclusion _____	77
<b>Chapter 3 – Professional learning for primary school teachers: The Israeli policy context _____</b>	<b>79</b>
3.1 The " <i>Ofek-Chadash</i> " ["New Horizon"] reform in Israel _____	79
3.2 Flexibility within the " <i>Ofek-Chadash</i> " framework _____	88
3.3 Israeli policy in comparison to other parts of the world _____	91
<b>Chapter 4 - Teachers as writers: A review of the literature _____</b>	<b>103</b>
4.1 The call for teachers to write _____	104
4.2 Teacher writing to improve writing pedagogy _____	106
4.3 Teacher writing for professional growth _____	108
4.4 Writing for enriching or focusing professional identity _____	108
4.5 Teacher writing – alone or in collaboration with peers? _____	109
4.6 ‘Speaking back’ through writing _____	112
4.7 Writing for publication _____	114
4.8 Teacher writing – dilemmas and difficulties _____	117

### **PART 3 - APPROACHES TO EPISTEMOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY**

<b>Chapter 5 – Epistemology: Behind the scenes of this PhD study</b>	123
5.1 A metaphor for this study: The kaleidoscope	123
5.2 Why qualitative research?	125
5.3 Interpretive and constructivist approaches to qualitative research	127
5.4 Epistemology and knowledge generation in this study	129
5.5 Narrative inquiry	130
5.6 Practitioner inquiry	133
5.7 The role of writing in this research	136
5.8 Language matters	137
<b>Chapter 6 - Research methods: Behind the scenes of this PhD</b>	147
6.1 Recruiting participants	147
6.2 Participants	149
6.3 Data collection	153
6.4 Data analysis	166
6.5 Questions of reflexive rigour and trustworthiness	170

### **PART 4 –REPRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

<b>Chapter 7 - Constructing a dialogic space for the professional learning of Israeli teachers</b>	175
7.1 Dialogic professional learning	175

7.2 Exploring the dialogic nature of the WDLT program _____	176
7.3 The challenges posed for dialogic professional learning under the “Ofek-Chadash” reform _____	187
7.4 Negotiating between situated dialogic learning for Israeli teachers and national Policy _____	190
7.5 Provisional conclusion _____	192
<b>Chapter 8 – Teacher writing for dialogic professional learning _____</b>	<b>194</b>
8.1 Writing our way back from a hike to hell: Significant teacher writing _____	194
8.2 Looking closer at Orly's story _____	196
8.3 Responding to Orly's story _____	200
8.4 Sharing the story: An additional opportunity for dialogue _____	202
8.5 Revisiting the narrative: Another challenge _____	202
8.6 And the chain of professional dialogue goes on _____	203
8.7 Dialogic teacher learning _____	207
8.8 The unfinalizability of dialogic learning _____	211
<b>Chapter 9 - Teacher learning in liminal spaces _____</b>	<b>213</b>
9.1 Stories of teacher learning in liminal spaces _____	215
9.2 Provisional conclusion _____	232

<b>Chapter 10 - Looking back, looking forward</b>	234
10.1 Inquiry as ongoing dialogue	234
10.2 The purpose of this PhD thesis	236
10.3 The significance of this study	237
10.4 Contribution to knowledge	242
10.5 A final engagement with my research questions	247
10.6 Recommendations emerging from this study	252
10.7 Recommendations for further research	256
10.8 Study limitations	256
10.9 Closing thoughts	257
<b>References</b>	258
<b>Appendix 1: Interview protocols</b>	306
<b>Appendix 2: Ethics approval: MUHREC and Ministry of Education, Chief Scientist's Office</b>	307

**PART 1**

**THE BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF**

**THIS PHD STUDY**

### Preamble

The wise are glad that in the world there is day and night, summer and winter, old and young;

That there are butterflies in the garden and birds in the sky;

That the flowers and the eyes of people come in different colours;

That God, who created humans, created them male and female.

Only those who do not like to think are grieved by difference

And irritated by the variety that compels us to think, to see and to understand

(Korczak & Joseph, 1999, p. 122)

I have been a primary school educator in Israel for 27 years and a leader of professional learning for the past 15 years. I actually began leading other educators long before then, within the rural primary school in which I am still employed today as a teacher and vice principal. Often I ask myself, when it was that I began to see myself as a leader, as an educator with knowledge worthwhile sharing with other teachers. What gave me the confidence to take the initiative and move into the role of supporting other teachers in their pedagogy, years before I was formally appointed to do so? I am really not sure, but one particular professional learning event is connected, in my memory, to inspiration, empowerment, and significant growth in my identity as an educator. That learning, which I experienced in the early 1990's, has shaped who I am as an educator and has continued to accompany me, surprising me by re-appearing in a multitude of ways in my classroom practice, in the professional learning I provide for Israeli teachers, in my research and in my academic writing.

I have always been deeply interested in language and literature and my Bachelor's degree at the University of Melbourne concentrated on those two areas in both English and Hebrew-as-a-second-language. After moving from Australia to Israel, I was determined to become a primary school homeroom educator, teaching most subjects and not to be classified as an English-as-a-second-language teacher. During my one year of teacher education, I became engaged in Israeli children's literature in Hebrew and enjoyed the challenge of reading the texts, understanding them and preparing myself to teach them.

Despite my enthusiasm, during my first years of teaching, the pedagogy and curriculum in language and literature were blurry and unclear to me. Hebrew, a second language for me, still wasn't fluent and I felt overwhelmed by the task of supporting my pupils in reading and writing. I

worked hard to present interesting and engaging lessons but constantly experienced confusion, loneliness and frustration. A shy early career teacher lacking confidence, I didn't have the knowledge and the language to ask questions and discuss literacy with my more experienced colleagues. I assumed the problem was mine. In my third year of teaching, when I moved to another school, I began hearing other teachers sharing the challenges inherent in the teaching of Hebrew language and literacy. I began to understand that the lack of direction I was feeling was not unique to me.

I can't remember very much about the five days I spent in Jerusalem at the '*Beit HaSefer LeOvdei Horaa*' [the Educational Employee's School] in 1993. I do remember, however, that schools which performed badly on the external literacy examinations, '*mivchanei hamashov*' [feedback examinations], were required by the Israeli Ministry of Education to send teachers to a compulsory intensive program on the whole language approach. My school principal, responding to the dissatisfaction many of the teachers were expressing with the teaching of reading and writing in the school, had applied for us to participate in the program. The request was considered unusual as our pupils had performed reasonably well on the examinations. The Ministry leadership was eager to introduce 'whole language' principles to Israeli educators and as a result, we were invited to a special intensive program, for teachers from our school alone. The program, held in in the Passover school holidays, was taught by some of the head figures in the Ministry.

I remember the excitement of sitting in the classroom on the first day and being aware of a distinctly festive atmosphere. It seemed strange and special that so many of the staff members were prepared to leave home and give up their precious holiday days to study together. We had left our rural homes and school to meet in the city with respected lecturers and influential members of the educational leadership.

I recall an extremely intensive program, lectures and group seminars from early in the morning until well into the evening. We listened and talked and asked questions. I recall not wanting to miss a single word. In several sessions, we were directed to think about our own reading and writing and to reflect on the ways in which we learned to read as children. In the breaks and in our rooms after the lessons concluded, we continued the discussions. Those informal conversations

took on a significant role in our learning. From the outset it was clear that this was no regular professional development seminar; there was indeed something remarkable about the experience.

During those days in Jerusalem, I remember feeling as though the foggy haze which characterised my teaching of Hebrew language and literature was clearing a little. I became professionally acquainted with the term '*oriantut*' [literacy] for the first time and began to comprehend its significance in the development of young learners. Important in the learning experience was the way in which, together as a team, we acquired new concepts and ways of talking about literacy; together we were exploring new ways to talk about our work in a special common language.

I remember feeling tremendously excited and empowered; I was eager to get back to school and to try to experiment with my new understandings in my own classroom. The excitement was even physical in nature. While watching a film depicting a whole language teacher and his classroom in Australia or New Zealand, I sat breathless, tensed to soak in every word and picture. During those five days, we didn't create or receive lesson plans or activities. We were immersing ourselves in educational philosophy and theory.

All our spare time was spent dreaming, together, as a team. These were the days before mobile phones and the Internet. We weren't able to 'Google' 'whole language' in the break in order to see what else was available. We were being nourished entirely by the high powered team made available to us. Removed from our daily lives and routines, only calling home once a day on a public phone, we spent the days and the nights talking our way through the invigorating learning experience.

What else made that learning significant? The program allowed for the sounding of many different voices. Every participant connected from the point where she felt comfortable and brought her own experience and understandings with her. We were submerged in a sea of voices, literary and academic, which connected in different ways with the various voices of the participants. Again and again we were encouraged to explore our own literacy in order to see that of our pupils more clearly. I spent a lot of time reflecting on the education I received as a child in Melbourne, Australia in the 1970's and the early 1980's. I attended two different primary schools and a private girls' college in secondary school. I was interested in the different approaches to teaching literacy I had experienced as a pupil and reflected on the way they might have contributed to my adult literary

life. From the outset it was obvious that this program was the beginning of a long journey, one in which the end was nowhere in sight.

I remember the return to school. I said to my colleagues: "There is no way that I can go back to what I did before". Nothing remained the same. My whole presence in the classroom had changed. The way I saw myself as an educator, the way I looked at my pupils, their abilities, their needs, everything was different. For the very first time I began to plan for teaching individuals and groups; I couldn't ignore the differences I recognised between the pupils. It sounds exaggerated but I indeed returned a different educator. My colleagues and I returned a different staff group; and our school, quicker than anyone expected, became a different school. The feeling of pride in our work was tangible. There was enthusiastic collaboration and we had common goals. There was palpable excitement in the air.

We introduced a few changes in the remaining two months of the school year, but we had to wait for the summer holidays to plan more substantive change. When the break arrived, we met at school day after day to create teaching materials, read and write programs and prepare for the new school year in which whole language would be the leading approach. I recall celebrating the creativity in the writing of my pupils, the choices they made and the conversations between us as they experimented with genre and original ideas. I recall the enthusiasm surrounding silent reading and my insistence that each and every pupil find just the right book. We worked extremely hard and I was aware of my professional growth as I continually searched for solutions to the many challenges that emerged.

In Israel around that time, as in other places in the world, a political uproar occurred in response to the changes taking place in classrooms. The "literacy wars" (Snyder, 2008) raged and eventually the metaphoric pendulum swung back again. To our great dismay, whole language was banned by the Israeli parliament, although there were some basic principles which continued to direct and empower me in my work. The learning during that week in Jerusalem and its significance for me continued and indeed it has kept appearing in my work and in my writing for many years afterwards (see Aharonian, 2009a).

As educators, we were struggling for the knowledge we had accumulated as professionals in our classrooms to be recognised, for our successes to be considered valuable and valid. In hindsight, I

realise that I, myself, was playing an active role in a highly political process, even though I would never have described it as such. Actively continuing my learning about literacy independently in every possible way, translating materials about whole language struggles in the United States, Australia and New Zealand, writing letters to the newly appointed Minister of Education, responding to one-sided, anti-whole language articles in a major newspaper and struggling to overcome the ignorance I encountered about the work we were doing, I found myself moving into a position of leadership in my school.

Since those days as an early career educator, my passion for literacy has continued to grow. Joining professional organisations like the International Reading Association<sup>1</sup>, I kept up to date with research and publications in the field and regularly enrolled in relevant professional learning program. Particularly significant and relevant to my development was a five year long program called '*BeTzavta*' ['Together'], similar to 'Reading Recovery' (Clay, 1994), through which I became very confident in supporting struggling readers and writers. Eventually, in 2006, I enrolled in a Masters' program at Monash University, choosing to study there by distance learning as there was a degree in literacy offered.

I have written about the significance of that postgraduate study on my professional work and writing (Aharonian, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a). In the wake of that learning, I constructed a professional learning program for Israeli teachers, focusing on the teaching of writing in the classroom. This PhD study has emerged as a natural continuation of those events.

Today, exploring my beliefs and my practice, I comprehend that many of the assumptions I bring to my work as a teacher, as a leader of professional learning and as an involved and interested researcher, have their roots firmly planted in the significant learning I experienced in Jerusalem all those years ago. This PhD study explicitly reflects my confidence in the ability of teachers to generate significant knowledge connected to their practice and my unequivocal belief in the value of teacher conversation. The importance of teacher diversity in this study (see Kitchen, Ciuffetelli Parker, & Gallagher, 2008; Kitchen, Fitzgerald, & Tidwell, 2016; Olson & Craig, 2009; Parr, Bulfin, Castaldi, Griffiths, & Manuel, 2015) is reflected in my choice to open this preamble with an epigraph by Janusz Korczak. The work of that extraordinary, inspiring Polish-Jewish educator

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<sup>1</sup> In 2015, the International Reading Association became the International Literacy Association.

whose work I often discuss with my young pupils, reflects the principles behind this study and reinforces my insistence that each and every teacher and student be regarded as unique.

## Chapter 1 – Introduction

In this introductory chapter, I discuss some of the political and social forces influencing professional learning for teachers in the present era characterised by standardisation and accountability. I introduce the professional learning program which is the focus of this PhD, the theoretical groundings of the study and a number of key concepts. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the structure I have chosen for this thesis artefact.

### 1.1 Professional learning for teachers in an era of standardisation and accountability

As I write this thesis, I note that many member countries within the OECD<sup>2</sup> are responding to calls from politicians, employers and parents for the evaluation of students, teachers and schools based on high-stakes national and international testing such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Volante, 2016). Feniger, Israeli, and Yehuda (2016), for example, describe the introduction and implementation of the national “*Meitzav*” examination in Israel as “part of a global movement towards the quantification of education and educational accountability” (p. 196). According to Volante (2016), numerous countries have embarked on large scale educational reforms following what they see as their low rankings on PISA ‘league tables’. This has been enacted through calls for stronger teacher accountability (Sachs, 2016), improvements in teaching standards (Gannon, 2012; Kennedy, 2015) and better governance of teacher learning (Jacobs, Burns, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2015). Standardisation of practices and high-stakes testing are central to these educational reforms, and this is clearly reflected internationally in policy documents wherein “testing becomes synonymous with accountability, which becomes synonymous with educational quality” (Smith, 2016, p. 7). Although each country chooses to respond in its own ways to these pressures (Volante, 2016), there are similarities described in the literature. Lewis and Hardy (2015) describe the “pressure to perform” (p. 246) experienced by many teachers, and according to Day (2012) government actions pointed towards raising the quality of teaching and the achievement of students have made teaching “more complex, more intense” (p. 2).

Under these conditions, there is broad international recognition of the importance of ongoing professional learning opportunities for practicing educators (Jones & O’Brian, 2014). The

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<sup>2</sup> Israel has been a member of the OECD since 2010

connection between improvements in professional learning or professional development and improvement in teaching is generally accepted (e.g. Kennedy, 2016), and as a result, teachers in many countries are required to engage in formal learning activities as a means of ‘upgrading’ their practice. It is widely acknowledged that highly skilled teaching professionals are essential for improving student learning (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011; Kooy & Van Veen, 2012) and according to the OECD “teachers’ continuous professional development is extensively seen as essential for improving teachers’ performance and effectiveness, and for enhancing their commitment to their work” (Schleicher, 2016, p. 36).

In this international and national climate of standardisation and accountability, the ‘hot’ debates surrounding professional learning for educators have never been so prominent in educational policy (McLaughlin, 2013; Robinson, 2014) and in practice, in the United States (e.g. Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009), in the United Kingdom (e.g. Day, 2012; Kennedy, 2015; Sugrue & Mertkan, 2016), in Australia (e.g. Doecke, Parr, & North, 2008), in New Zealand (e.g. Locke & Goodwyn, 2004), and in documents published by international bodies like the OECD (OECD, 2014). Despite this seemingly global consensus, there is a great deal of disagreement regarding the *motivations* for professional learning (Kennedy, 2015), what *kinds* of professional learning should be promoted (Kennedy, 2016) and what are the best *ways to conceptualise* teacher learning. Despite the seemingly universal growing interest in teacher professional learning, OECD research (Schleicher, 2016) claims that there is still a significant lack of understanding surrounding the characteristics of professional development practices. Kennedy (2016) argues that educational researchers have constructed firm theories of student learning, but are still lacking refined ideas about teacher learning, and about the ways in which teachers combine new knowledge with their practice.

## **1.2 Involvement of teachers in debates on educational policy and change**

Although there is growing understanding that teachers have a critical role in educational change and reform (van Veen & Kooy, 2012) and in student learning (McLaughlin, 2013; OECD, 2014; Secretary of State for Education, 2010), professional learning programs and priorities are increasingly mandated and defined ‘from above’ by governments and stakeholders in different

parts of the western world (Parr, 2010). According to Sugrue and Mertkan (2016), “Professional learning opportunities more than ever have become sites of struggle between competing and conflicting (ideological) perspectives on what it means to be professional” (p. 16). In this context, some have argued that it is crucial to encourage teachers to contribute to discussion about priorities and understandings of professional learning and for teachers to become more involved in the improvement of educational institutions; their voices are often absent or silenced in the scholarly debate (DeBlase, 2007; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2011; Kooy, 2015; Lefstein & Perath, 2014) and policy documents. And yet, rather than presenting teachers as professionals capable of directing their own learning, much policy in the area of professional learning positions teachers as passive consumers of others’ knowledge rather than as active generators of learning opportunities and knowledge (see Parr, 2010, pp. 198-201). In this way, teachers are frequently presented as lacking agency. A recent publication by the OECD (Schleicher, 2016) stresses the importance of involving stakeholders, such as teachers, in the construction and implementation of policy on professional learning and teacher professionalism. In this way, Craig (2012a) argues that

Those conducting teaching and education research need to consciously cultivate ways to collaboratively inquire so that stakeholders (teachers and academics, for example) make their way into the creation of policies and programs that effect the learning lives of teachers and students. (p. 109)

Similarly, Sachs (2016) argues for “a profession that engages in systematic inquiry, develops strategies to constantly improve and be innovative in their practice and to share that practice” (p. 424).

This PhD study is in part prompted by the body of literature that sees value in teachers and teacher educators being heard in these debates and in policy making. It is also concerned to see that alongside large scale international and national studies, specific research into local sites of professional learning should be valued for the nuanced insights such research makes into this complex topic.

### 1.3 The background to this PhD study

This PhD study crosses geographical and linguistic borders. It was grounded in my professional experience in my role of leader of professional learning in Israel and was written in my role as an off-campus postgraduate student at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. Associate Professor Graham Parr and Dr Scott Bulfin, my thesis supervisors, supported the conceptualisation of this study by means of regular email communication, ‘Skype’ video conversations online and a small number of face-to-face meetings when I travelled to Australia, and on one occasion when we co-presented at an international conference in Denmark. Designing a study in this way involved many challenges, for example in the area of ethics authorisation (see 6.1 and 6.3) and translation. Much of the data in this study was generated in Hebrew and was translated by me as an integral part of the research process. A detailed description of the issues arising from the bilingual nature of this PhD appear in 5.8.

This PhD study extends the narrative research I undertook for my MEd thesis (Aharonian, 2008b), where I explored and reflected on my own experiences as a teacher in a primary school in Israel and as a writer active in various professional learning and research communities in Israel and beyond. In that study, I employed narrative inquiry (Josselson, 2010; Tuval-Mashiach, & Spector-Mersel, 2010) and autoethnographic approaches (Dyson, 2007; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010; Etherington, 2004) to trace and to critically and reflexively investigate my own personal learning journey. The critical narratives I wrote examined my learning and the role of writing in the ongoing development of my identity as a teacher, as a leader of professional learning and as a researcher (see Aharonian, 2009a). Part of that journey involved academic writing, maintaining a study blog<sup>3</sup>, and participating in dialogue with other teacher-writers, ‘edubloggers’, from various countries. Publishing some of that work in research journals was an additional attempt on my part to become involved, as a teacher and teacher educator, in the international discussion on writing and learning for teachers (see Aharonian, 2008a, 2009a).

In this present study, a practitioner inquiry, I again utilise narrative inquiry to explore the situated learning occurring in professional learning programs on writing pedagogy that I designed and taught in Israel. The study critically scrutinises the way cohorts of Israeli literacy educators, who

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<sup>3</sup> *thesisthoughts* - <http://naha1.edublogs.org>

participated in the professional conversations and writing central to these learning experiences, undertook and experienced in-service professional learning. It seeks to inquire into their understandings of the role of these experiences in their professional lives and their ongoing identity work. The program at the centre of this study, which I will explain in more detail in Chapter 6, is a government supported teacher learning program called, '*Chinuch Leshoni: Haktiva Lepituach Lemida VeChashiva*' ['Literacy Studies: Writing for the Development of Learning and Thinking'] (hereafter WDLT). I examine ways in which the program did or did not meet the particular professional learning needs of the participants in their unique settings while still attempting to satisfy standards based accountability requirements of these teachers as articulated in current Israeli professional development policy (see Ministry of Education, 2008a).

While much recent literature focuses on professional learning policy or programs that attempt to define or to develop clear guidelines for what is claimed to be *effective* professional learning (e. g. Covay Minor, Desimone, Caines Lee, & Hochberg, 2016; Schleicher, 2011; Soine & Lumpe, 2014; van Veen, Zwart, & Meirink, 2012), this study enacts a more critically nuanced, dialogic inquiry into teachers' stories and experiences of professional learning. It appreciates that there may well be a variety of aims for professional learning programs, and these will vary depending on particular personal, professional and institutional variables. Indeed, the study draws attention to the ways in which the needs of teachers in each specific context can be both unique *and* shared by groups of teachers. Much literature suggests that there are dangers associated with attempts to standardise teachers' professional learning – and the study does not contest that. However, I argue that there *is* value in being able to conceptualise that learning in ways that maximise the richness of the learning and identity work that teachers experience through their active participation despite policy and institutional constraints.

As mentioned earlier, this research crosses borders in numerous ways and readers of this thesis will be able to discern the transcultural and translingual nature of the study. While my work focuses on Israel, the context of my research and my professional practice, I often choose to compare that context with Australia, a country in which I have a strong background and broader knowledge and experience. Needless to say, my extended conversation with my PhD supervisors was always framed by their own practice in Australian education, and their experience of that context was

valuable to consider. My ongoing engagement with the very different educational realities in different hemispheres was central to the generation of new understandings in my study.

#### 1.4 The professional context for this study

In order to closely examine the stories and experiences of the Israeli literacy teachers engaged in the WDLT program, it was necessary to critically review contemporary theories and policies of professional learning for teachers. As part of that review in Part 2 of the thesis, I inquire into the tensions between professional learning as it is often mandated ‘from above’ in today’s climate of standardisation and accountability and how some teachers navigate their way through professional learning practices which are significant and suited to their professional needs.

Central to the study is my detailed critical engagement with a particular site of professional learning, the aforementioned WDLT program for literacy teachers in northern Israel. The program was a 30 hour<sup>4</sup> government-sponsored in-service course for primary school teachers in nine cities in northern Israel. Data in the form of narratives, reflective writing, and written communication, as well as my own research journal, was generated and archived from 2008 when I first proposed the program to the Israeli Ministry of Education and subsequently began teaching it. The ten participants whose stories, writing and interviews are represented in this study come from 501 early career and experienced teachers who took part in the program<sup>5</sup>. Those teachers were divided into 16 cohorts (on average two cohorts per year for eight years<sup>6</sup>).

In the WDLT professional learning program, which was ratified and wholly funded by the Israel Ministry of Education, teachers from different schools, representing diverse cultural groups, met in regional *Pisga*<sup>7</sup> teachers' centres to learn about the teaching of writing. The program was designed in alignment with my understandings of the research literature on professional learning

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<sup>4</sup> Two of the programs were 60 hours in length.

<sup>5</sup> The process in which those seven teachers became involved in this PhD study is described in detail in 6.1.

<sup>6</sup> The exact numbers of cohorts and teachers are presented in 6.2.

<sup>7</sup> According to the directions from the managing director of the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2007), "*Pisga*" teachers' centres aim to provide professional development for Israeli teachers throughout their careers. There are presently 56 "*Pisga*" centres in Israel, operated by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the educational departments of the local councils.

for educators, writing pedagogy and the value of narrative in both these endeavours. The program was planned to address the difficulty many teachers face when teaching writing in the classroom (Morgan, 2017). In those state sanctioned professional learning sessions, teachers met to write and collaboratively reflect on their writing pedagogy. The program was originally designed and was regularly modified to align with Israeli education policy guidelines – as I was required to do. It was also important to me for the program to encourage participating teachers to reflect upon and ‘speak back’ to some national education policies through their writing. Writing about students, Smyth, Down, and McInerney (2014) explain the term ‘speaking back’ as “exercising a voice in having a stake in their learning in a context that would prefer that they be docile and compliant” (p. 6). In the WDLT program, teachers had the opportunity, in a safe and collegial place, to ‘speak back’ (that is, to talk and write critically about their work) with respect to current policy and in so doing to negotiate the challenges of teaching and learning in the everyday reality of the Israeli educational system.

The creation of formal spaces for educators to think together and to respond to the realities of the contexts in which they work is not new and is mentioned in the work of other researchers. Parr, Bellis, and Bulfin (2013), for example, discuss how “when space and resources are provided for teachers in schools to work collaboratively...in ongoing professional networks, it is possible to speak back productively to the standards-based rhetoric” (p. 19). A decade earlier, in the Australian “*Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia*” or “STELLA” project (AATE/ALEA, 2002), educators joined together in conversation to write and create professional standards, long before top-down teaching standards were imposed in that country. The STELLA project is an example of a framework developed to provide teachers with a space to take an active role in thinking about educational policy and practice and as a way of being involved in making a move towards a reality suited better to their needs and the needs of their students. Gannon (2012) explains that “The STELLA standards were designed... to situate teachers at the centre of all their activities” (p. 67). In 2013, the STELLA project was reconceptualised and re-enacted as stella2.0. In this new project, groups of educators and teacher educators congregated in order to write together and discuss the teaching of English, this time explicitly addressing the pressures of external, governmental standardisation. According to Parr and Bulfin (2015), “the kind of writing that participants in stella2.0 were doing contributes powerfully to a sense of agency of English educators, as individuals and as a collective” (p. 165). Doecke (2013) contends that the importance

of teacher storytelling inheres in its affording educators a means of reacting to the changing realities of educational policy. He explains that storytelling, in “its situatedness and specificity, its reflexivity and provisionality, its focus on lived experience – show[s] that it is an indispensable means for remaining fully responsive to what is happening around us” (p. 20). In the United States, the National Writing Project (hereafter NWP), initiated in 1974, is a long running example of a professional learning community which brings educators together to write and discuss the teaching of writing. Many studies have inquired into the ways in which NWP members benefit from the empowerment and agency experienced when teachers negotiate their practice through writing (e.g. Whitney, 2009; Yagelski, 2009). In recent years, variations on the NWP concept have been initiated in England (see Andrews, 2008; Smith & Wrigley, 2016; Wrigley & Smith, 2010) and in New Zealand (see Locke, 2015; Locke, Whitehead, & Dix, 2013; Locke, Whitehead, Dix, & Cawkwell, 2011). Internationally there are other localised teacher inquiry groups utilising collegial conversation and writing for teacher empowerment. Riley (2012), for example, in the United States, describes one of those groups as a space which enables teachers to write and learn together and “to see new possibilities for themselves and students, often within constrained policy environments” (p. iv).

### **1.5 The role of story in this dialogic narrative based inquiry**

One of the ways that this study enacts its dialogic, narrative based inquiry, is through (re)presenting and critically investigating the stories of participants engaged in the WDLT program and my own stories in and around leading that program. As part of my framing of this whole study, I want to share now one of those stories, a brief autobiographical vignette, which demonstrates some of the many ways in which my research and my practice embodied in my various professional roles were constantly intertwined and consistently informing this PhD study. The story also highlights how teacher learning is at the same time deeply connected to policy and government and to the way teachers and their professional knowledge are regarded in Israel and in other parts of the world.

This story, and others like it in my thesis, are all told with a first person narrator, and are included as a means of opening up for closer scrutiny the complexity of teacher learning from within, as it is experienced by teachers and myself as a teacher educator. In many ways these stories are

different from those told *about* teachers and teacher educators and those told about what teachers *should* know and practice. These narrative pieces often speak back to what is written with respect to teachers and their work in dominant political discourses (e.g. Lewis & Hardy, 2015; Smith, 2016). Stories and the critical discussion surrounding them are at the heart of this study and reflect its dialogic nature. Doecke (2013) explains the way in which the “the provisional character of storytelling” (p. 19) not only involves the way in which different meanings intended by the writer can emerge, but the multitude of ways in which those ideas can draw the attention of readers who, through their own readings of the text, engage with their opinions and understandings and continue the dialogue with the writer and others. In any study grounded in narrative and storytelling, it needs to be established that “the point of inquiry-focused interaction is not standardized agreement; rather it is increased awareness of the diversity of possibilities that might be explored within particular contexts” (Hart, 2014, p. 268). I want to say briefly at this stage, I am well aware that the role of stories in this PhD thesis may prompt questions about the nature of knowledge and trustworthiness of the study overall. I discuss such questions at length in Chapters 5 and 6.

The following vignette appears in my reflective journal, dated ‘February 2013’. It describes one of my thought provoking experiences as a leader of professional learning at one of the *Pisga* teachers’ centres in northern Israel.

*“Can I please have the password for the Wi-Fi?”*

*An experienced teacher politely asked this question at the front desk at the Pisga teachers' centre in a small city in northern Israel. We were in a ten minute coffee break in the middle of a workshop on engaging with children's' writing. The teacher participants, sitting in small groups, had been involved in conversation deeply exploring the abilities of student writers through texts they had brought from their schools.*

*"Oh, no," the receptionist replied. "We don't like teachers using the internet in the middle of the lesson." Turning to me, the leader of professional development in the program, she said, "They do all kinds of things, play games..."*

*I felt embarrassed, surprised and uneasy. I looked at the teacher standing beside me, who looked shocked and a little angry, and then back to the receptionist who had returned her gaze to the large computer screen in front of her.*

*I was aware that I was standing adrift in a middle space – somewhere unstable, between the teachers and the Pisca administration, and in a broader sense, between teachers and the Ministry of Education. Questions were racing through my head: Who do I represent here? In what way are teachers being treated here? Are these teachers, who spend the day responsible for the education and well-being of a class full of students, being regarded as irresponsible and childish? Who is taking responsibility here for the learning of these teachers: the Pisca receptionist (not the principal or the pedagogical staff...) or me, their program teacher educator? What should I do here? I was intensely aware that this question was far more significant than the Wi-Fi code... What I was witnessing was the discourse of teacher deprofessionalisation<sup>8</sup> at a time and in a place I hadn't expected to encounter it.*

*I smiled and replied: "On the other hand, the internet is a learning tool for them and they come here to learn. They are interested in looking up web sites, the materials I post online and other references that I mention..."*

*I realised the conversation was futile. This was a critical discussion, central to the professional learning of these educators, extremely significant in the way that they conceived of themselves as professionals. Indeed, on that day I was confronted with a dominant discourse which was mediating the teachers' learning experience in the centre. On that occasion, I decided not to open up the issue further with the teachers in the program. Feeling uncomfortable and frustrated, I decided that maybe the best thing to do was to return to the workshop and to attempt to reassure the teachers of my confidence in their agency through our work together.*

*I smiled again and started to walk in the direction of the seminar room. The receptionist called after me: "Well, if you agree, I'll give it!" (Journal entry, February, 2013)*

This conversation troubled me in the days following the workshop. Writing about the ramifications of the situation in my study journal, I was again profoundly aware of the ways in which my work as a teacher educator could not be disconnected from questions of autonomy, control and teacher agency.

As the short autobiographical vignette above might suggest, this PhD study is committed to foregrounding and inquiring closely into the particularity and the specificity of educators' experiences and understandings of their professional learning. I am hoping that stories such as the

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<sup>8</sup> "According to the deskilling approach, teachers increasingly lose control over their own labor. In other words, authorities present teachers with ready decisions in many situations where teachers are otherwise able to make their own decisions and implement them autonomously" (Gur, 2014, p. 890).

one told here will contribute to a wider understanding of the complexities of teacher learning and identity. Moni, Thein, and Brindley (2014) explain that “teacher voice has been lost and replaced by teacher silence” (p. 1), and Smith (2005) argues that the use of narrative in first person, in this fashion, is a means of “giving voice to experience... [It can be] a rich source of understanding... people’s lives, inserting knowledge that ruptures those subject to the monologies of institutional discourse and ideology...” (p. 124).

This thesis connects with the work of other scholars who believe that rather than allowing media and politics to position us, we as educators “must instead reclaim the agenda of teaching and learning..., developing a professional discourse which allows us to speak with confident, convincing voices, drawing on research, on our empirical knowledge of the professional work of teachers” (Moni et al., 2014, p. 1).

One important aim of this PhD study is to give voice to those whose experiences and opinions may be lost in the politics of teacher education, silenced by the dominant discourses about ‘effective’ teaching, teachers’ knowledge and teacher professionalism. I believe, with Ambler (2016), McLaughlin, Cordingley, McLellan and Baumfield (2015) and van de Ven and Doecke (2011) that carefully situated and theorised accounts of practice and critical dialogic inquiry into such accounts can contribute crucial knowledge about teacher professional learning in a policy environment driven by standards based reforms and increasingly intrusive accountability regimes. This is one of the distinctive dimensions of the epistemology underpinning this PhD study. By the end of this thesis, I will use these accounts and this mode of inquiry to refine existing theory and conceptions of teacher professional learning in ways that better speak to, and speak back to, the contemporary policy environment than some previous studies that have paid only passing attention to this environment and its effect on teachers’ learning and professional identities.

At a more personal level, this study is a manifestation of my commitment to professional praxis (van de Ven & Doecke, 2011). That is, it reflects my ongoing striving, as an experienced teacher, teacher educator and researcher, to deepen my understanding of professional learning and to try to critically negotiate between that understanding and the vast body of literature defining and critically exploring teacher learning. Thus, the study can be seen as a dialogic exploration of my

own learning and that of the teachers in my professional context alongside the ever growing body of professional development policy and scholarship, both in Israel and in other parts of the world.

### **1.6 Theoretical resources for the study: The work of Mikhail Bakhtin**

In the course of undertaking this study, I have immersed myself in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986), whose dialogic theory and worldview have, in many ways, influenced my thinking about my work as a teacher and teacher educator and how I develop and sustain dialogue with colleagues and with the teachers who participate in the professional learning programs I teach. My developing and evolving understanding of Bakhtin's conception of dialogue has become central to this critical inquiry into professional learning for teachers. Indeed the active involvement of some of the teacher participants in the creation of this thesis can also be traced back to my engagement with those theories.

The basic unit of meaning in Bakhtinian theory is 'the utterance', a segment of speech which may be as short as a word or longer than a novel. According to Bakhtin (1986), no utterance stands alone; it is always constructed in response to or in anticipation of the words of others. In that very sense, this thesis emerged from within my ongoing dialogue with my colleagues, the teacher participants in my WDLT programs, the ten participants in this study, my two PhD supervisors in Australia and members of my doctoral writing group in Israel. The words of Bakhtin (1981) enable me to appreciate the contribution of my critical interactions with those important 'others' in the unfolding of this PhD project:

Within the arena of almost every utterance an intense interaction and struggle between one's own and another's word is being waged, a process in which they oppose or dialogically interanimate each other. The utterance so conceived is a considerably more complex and dynamic organism than it appears when construed simply as a thing that articulates the intention of the person uttering it, which is to see the utterance as a direct, single-voiced vehicle for expression. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 354 - 55)

Dimitriadis and Kamberelis (2006) describe dialogism as the most significant element in Bakhtinian theory. They explain that on one hand it relates to language, "a complex amalgam of

multiple voices” (p. 51), and on the other to “the human subject as an unfinalizable complex of identities, desires and voices” (p. 50). From the outset, this thesis has been conceptualised in dialogic ways. I have made every effort to approach the professional learning of educators in dialogic ways, adopting dialogic discourse which “emerges in the midst of several unmerged voices... an undirected intersection of voices manifesting a ‘plurality of consciousnesses’ that do not all join together in one monologic voice. It cannot be systemized or finalized” (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 51). My engagement with both the ideas of other scholars, as presented in the literature on professional learning, and my participants, as presented in the data generated in this study, has been essentially dialogic in nature. I have made every effort to see the data generated in interview situations or in texts written by my participants and myself in open ended and complex ways. Rather than attempt to organise the data into neat and ordered categories, I have attempted to explore its “dialogic potential” (see Wells, 1999, p. 92) in different ways. Rather than searching for generalisations and a tidy answer to the questions I posed at the outset of this study, I have constantly been aware of the complexity of the subject and strived to open up that complexity to the view of my readers. Bakhtin’s words here help to describe my dialogic interpretation and analysis of the data and the stories:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and boundless future). Even past meanings... can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) - they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). (Bakhtin, 1986, p.170)

I adopt the Bakhtinian term ‘unfinalizability’ (Bakhtin, 1986) to describe both the nature of the ongoing dialogic learning generated in the settings described in this thesis and to illustrate the ways in which, the writing of this thesis unfolded. In many senses, when I renewed my relationship with some of the teachers who had studied in the WLDT program in the past and they became involved in the creation of this PhD study, I became aware that the interviews and the research interactions between us were in various ways a continuation of our previous learning experiences. The relationship between us, the dialogue and the learning were constantly evolving in surprising ways.

In this research, I regularly returned to texts produced by these teachers and myself in the professional learning program in which we first met. The conversations and the written artefacts of the learning achieved in those WLDT sessions, remain unfinalized and open to interpretation and reinterpretation. They continue to accompany me and inform my learning, as they do some of the teachers who participated in this PhD study.

Several other concepts central to the work of Bakhtin have accompanied me in my learning and in the creation of this thesis. For example, the term ‘polyphony’ (Bakhtin, 1984) has enriched my sensitivity to the voices of others ever present in my thought, my professional practice, my research and my writing. Bakhtin describes polyphony as “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6). I have made every effort to respect the different voices arising in the narratives and in the research conversations central to this study, allowing them to be heard and open to a multitude of interpretations. Although my voice as the researcher and writer is unavoidably dominant, I have strived not to impose my own voice, or a single reading of their texts upon the reader.

This thesis is grounded in my understanding that the stories I am presenting here are only some of the possible ways to understand the complex reality of educational work. According to Fecho (2011)

Practice is always subject to context and is forever in a state of becoming. Therefore what teachers share is practice – messy, complex, thoughtful, inspired, limited, and full of potential. It is offered for the dialogue it will stimulate. It is suggested with the full understanding that it could be done differently. It is practice that we hope will be adapted and not adopted. It is one possibility among many. (p. 11)

I find this provisional description of professional teacher dialogue to be an extremely useful way of conceptualising the epistemology underpinning this thesis. A critical exploration of the complex ways in which understandings were generated throughout the study as a result of my interactions with others and with the data in this study can be found in chapters 5 and 6.

The Bakhtinian concept of ‘unfinalizability’ is fitting to explain my awareness that while this thesis artefact was completed and submitted on a particular date, the thinking, learning and experiences

contained in it will continue to develop and, I imagine, will eventuate into other relationships, projects and texts. According to Bakhtin (1986),

The utterance is related not only to preceding, but also to subsequent links in the chain of speech communication... from the very beginning, the utterance is constructed while taking into account possible responsive reactions, for whose sake, in essence, it is actually created. As we know, the role of the others for whom the utterance is constructed is extremely great... From the very beginning, the speaker expects a response from them, an active responsive understanding. The entire utterance is constructed, as it were, in anticipation of encountering this response. (p. 94)

My readers, some of whom I saw as teacher educators and researchers interested in professional learning and writing for educators, were constantly in my mind in the writing of this thesis. I invite them all to explore the dialogic potential of my study and to find ways in which it may be relevant in their own professional contexts.

## **1.7 Key concepts in this study on professional learning**

In this section, I identify two concepts which are central to this study, and explain my ‘position’ with respect to these concepts. I discuss dialogic professional learning and explain my choice of the term ‘professional learning’ rather than ‘professional development’ or similar terms.

### **1.7.1 Dialogic education**

Before focusing on ‘dialogic professional learning’, it is helpful to explain the value of the word ‘dialogic’ in relation to education more broadly. Higham, Brindley and Van De Pol (2014) choose the inclusive term “dialogic education” (p. 86) to describe a range of educational philosophies, grounded in the Bakhtinian concept of dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). Other educators and scholars such as Barnes (1976), Dewey (1966) Dixon (1967/1975) and Korczak (see Joseph, 1999; Korczak & Joseph, 1999) were enacting and writing about dialogic forms of education some time before Bakhtin was widely known in the English speaking world.

In contrast to Matusov (2009), who firmly argues that all pedagogy is dialogic in nature and that all educational encounters are intrinsically dialogic, other scholars (e.g. Alexander, 2008; Boyd &

Markarian, 2011; Renshaw, 2004) assert that dialogic kinds of teaching and learning stand in particular contrast with other options. Alexander (2008), for example, outlines five principles underpinning education that can be considered dialogic. These principles can be summarised by the following five adjectives: “collective... reciprocal... supportive... cumulative... and purposeful” (p. 185). In the section that follows, I will tease out these adjectives and explain their relevance to this study.

For Alexander (2005), learning and teaching become dialogic when teachers and students are *collectively* involved in learning tasks. Dialogic learning, in this respect, situates teacher and students as partners in the teaching and learning process. These *collective* kinds of learning recognise that learning is deeply social in nature (Barnes, 2008; Vygotskii, 1978). Higham et al. (2014) are also foregrounding the social dimension of learning when they explain that learning and understanding are “co-constructed” (p. 87). Flecha (2000) concludes that in a dialogic understanding of learning, knowledge generated is markedly influenced not only by the teacher, but by the collective identity of the group involved and the specific context in which the interaction takes place.

Alexander’s second principle argues that dialogic learning and teaching are *reciprocal* in nature (Alexander, 2005, p. 185), in that both teachers and pupils listen to and communicate knowledge and ideas to and with others. Flecha (2000) explains that dialogic education recasts educational sites as learning communities whose significant relationships are formed “creating new cognitive development and greater social and educational equality” (p. 24). In this dialogue, teachers and students contemplate and grapple with ideas together as a collective and, at its best, that collective grappling enables all participants to share in the process of contributing ideas and jointly generating (or co-constructing) new knowledge. Barnes (2008) explains that this articulation of ideas and understandings is particularly conducive for learning. Mercer (2000) describes this joint construction of knowledge as “interthinking” (p. 1).

Alexander’s third principle (2008) sets out the *supportive* dimension of dialogic education (p. 185). In this dimension, learners assist one another and feel safe to participate in the learning process without fear of making mistakes. An example of this is Fecho’s description (2011) of the ways in which learners in a dialogic classroom write and learn to share their life experiences as one means

of building this sense of trust and community between them. In the field of teacher education, Kitchen (2008) uses the term “relational” to describe this kind of supportive environment for teacher learning, based on empathy and respect. Higham et al. (2014) approve of Alexander’s proposal that “dialogic education is about the quality of classroom relationships as well as pedagogical technique” (p. 91)

A fourth principle of dialogic education is that it is *cumulative* (Alexander, 2005, p. 185). It relates to Barnes’ (2008) notion that all new learning must be based on the existing knowledge of the learner. Dialogic education takes into account that each learner is unique and arrives at the site of learning equipped with knowledge, cultural perspectives and a range of personal and professional experiences. Learners and their teachers all build on the knowledge they bring with them to the classroom. Each learner contributes to and draws from the character of the group, and thus influences the directions that learning takes in that classroom. The stories pupils tell, the questions they ask, the experiences they bring and the comments they make, all determine emphasis and turns taken in the learning. In this way, dialogic teaching and learning are different from traditional monologic forms of instruction in that they are not characterised by the linear transmission of a body of knowledge from teacher to students. Dixon (1967/1975) proposes that in this kind of education, “‘knowledge’ may be interpreted as something less as well as more explicit, and may arise from pupils’ learning as well as teachers’ instructing (Dixon, 1967/1975, p. 73)

The final principle proposed by Alexander (2008) is that dialogical education is *purposeful* – that is, it is designed and directed by the teacher with clear aims in mind. Despite the traditional emphasis on planning and preparation in much literature about dialogic education, many scholars point out that dialogic teaching and learning should remain “unfinalized” (Bakhtin, 1984), open ended and flexible. According to Renshaw (2004), dialogic teaching differs from other paradigms of teaching by “foregrounding the interactive, contingent, responsive and flexible features of instructional activities” (p. 6). In this kind of educational dynamic, curriculum is constantly open to interpretation, negotiation and questioning, and time is allocated according to the needs of the participants, their pace of learning and the understandings generated along the way. O’Connor and Michaels (2007) agree with the studies mentioned here that dialogic education is not entirely predetermined and that participants are all potential contributors to a democratic educational dynamic, but continue on to argue that dialogism in the classroom embodies particular

"possibilities for critique and creative thought" (p. 277). Barnes (2008) explains that despite the collaborative nature of dialogic learning, each learner in a group remains an individual and emerges from classroom dialogue with somewhat unique understandings and meanings. In this sense, in dialogic classrooms, the outcomes of learning are often unanticipated. Teachers can be surprised by learning outcomes which can occur, in the words of Dixon (1967/1975), as a result of the "liberation of pupils from the limits of their teacher's vision" (p. 48).

Concluding this introduction on dialogic education, before I contemplate my own practice as a leader of professional learning, I wish to highlight a note of caution sounded by O'Connor and Michaels (2007) regarding the temptation to oversimplify the classification of approaches to learning into an either-or, monologic or dialogic, binary. There are of course a multitude of approaches on the spectrum between the two concepts.

### **1.7.2 Professional development or professional learning – more than a name?**

The terms used to describe the learning undertaken by teachers are many and varied. They include: professional development (e.g. Craig, 2012a; Jacobs et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2016); teacher development (e.g. Blau, 1988; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Kitchen, 2008); teacher learning (e.g. Kooy & van Veen, 2012; Korthagen, 2016; Lieberman, Campbell, & Yashkina, 2017; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008); professional learning (e.g. Aharonian, 2009a; Netolicky, 2016; Schleicher, 2016); teacher professional learning (e.g. Choi, 2012; Doecke et al., 2008; Leonard, 2015); continuing professional development (e.g. Day, 1999; MacDonald Grieve & McGinley, 2010; McMillan, McConnell, & O'Sullivan, 2014); in-service learning (e.g. Mitton-Kukner, Nelson, & Desrochers, 2010); and in-service training (e.g. Sneyers, Jacobs, & Struyf, 2016). Most authors use one term consistently while others use the terms interchangeably to describe the learning teachers engage in after completing their initial teacher preparation. Some authors choose (as I have) to explain their choice of term, while others don't. Readers should be aware that the same terms can be used for very different conceptualisations of teacher learning. The use of the various terms has been discussed at length by other scholars (see Doecke et al., 2008)

At times, the discourse of professional development can be seen to take the agency away from teachers. Webster-Wright (2009) claims that if we are aiming to transform professional learning, the emphasis must be moved from development to learning. She avoids the term 'development'

which, in her understanding, implies that teachers are lacking and in need of improvement and chooses the term "CPL – continuing professional learning" (p. 705) which implies that teachers have more professional autonomy in their learning. In Webster-Wright's use of this term, there is a separation between undergraduate teaching studies and the learning of practicing teachers, but more importantly, it "avoids a dichotomy between formal professional development (PD) courses and everyday professional growth that are often treated separately in the literature..." (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 705). Similarly, Parr (2003) explains his choice of the term professional learning "because it foregrounds the ongoing and diverse ways in which teachers construct their knowledge and develop their skills and because it avoids discourses of professional passivity and inadequacy" (pp. 69-70). As mentioned at the beginning of this section, there is a wide variety of discourses and it becomes apparent that some scholars use the terms 'professional learning' and 'professional development' interchangeably and others use the terms differently from the ways I have suggested here. A clear example of this is the definition Day (1999) offers. While choosing the term 'professional development', he describes an extremely multifaceted and flexible range of learning situations connected to diverse aims and outcomes.

In this thesis I have adopted the terms 'professional learning' and 'teacher learning' to describe the rich ways in which teachers are deepening their understandings of themselves as educators, their role as teachers, learning and their students. This term implies to me that the teacher is responsible for his or her own learning, even if that learning emerges in a compulsory program in which he or she is required to take part. It should be made clear that the choice to use this term or that for the learning teachers do does not, in any way, free us from the complexities connected to the issue.

Teacher learning, as I understand it, is the interplay of many of the situations described by Day (1999). It is always an inherently messy and tangled entity, occurring every day in interactions both planned and unplanned in schools and classrooms, in formal seminars and programs, in homes and increasingly, online. Learning in this sense is constant in the practice of many teachers, an integral part of the way they navigate their professional lives and develop their professional identities.

## 1.8 Research questions

The four research questions generated in the process of this study reflect the dialogic nature of this PhD. Some of the research questions concentrate on the stage when the teachers were participants in the WDLT professional learning program in which we met and some concentrate on our meetings in more recent interviews conducted for this study. The first three questions focus on the teacher participants and the final one on myself as leader of professional learning.

1. What was the nature of the learning experienced by Israeli primary school teachers in a dialogic professional learning program on writing pedagogy which involved teacher writing?
2. How were these learning experiences significant in the teachers' work and their sense of professional identity?
3. How do these Israeli literacy teachers understand professional learning and its role in their professional lives?
4. What characterised my teaching and leadership in a dialogic professional learning program in which teacher writing was central?

Research questions 1 and 2 specifically relate to learning experiences of the teachers during and immediately following the WDLT professional learning program. The inquiry into these questions was mainly achieved through an analysis of texts written by participants during the program (teacher narratives, teacher reflections and my own reflective writings as program leader).

Question 3 relates more widely to professional learning experiences in general. This question was mainly addressed by the teachers in their semi-structured interviews, which took place months or even years after the program concluded. The teacher responses in those interviews related to a wide range of learning experiences and some spoke about the WDLT program. These extended responses and stories afforded me additional understandings on the significance of those experiences in the professional lives of those teachers.

Question 4 highlights the emphasis in this study on researcher reflexivity. It focuses on my own role in this learning context and reinforces both my decision to engage in practitioner inquiry and

my methodological choice to intentionally interview teachers who participated in the programs I initiated and facilitated.

It is my hope that these rich critical descriptions of how learning is conceptualised, encouraged and facilitated contribute to a broader understanding of teacher professional learning, enrich the wider research conversation on teacher learning and motivate other teacher educators to critically explore the professional learning they provide for teachers and continue to initiate unique context-sensitive forms of learning for teachers.

## **1.9 Structure of this thesis**

In 2000, Richardson (2000) was already observing that "Dissertations violating the traditional five-chapter, social science writing style format are accepted in the United States, Canada, England, New Zealand, and Australia... All of these changes in academic practices are signs of paradigm changes" (pp. 938-9). This study, in line with my philosophy of education and writing, is dialogic in nature. I am drawing on some traditional thesis structures – with literature review chapters and methodology chapters – but I frequently challenge those entrenched structures of PhD theses, starting with the overall structuring of the thesis into four parts: Part 1 introduces the background to the study, Part 2 engages with the research literature and policy documents relevant to this thesis; Part 3 delineates the epistemology and the methodology behind the study; and Part 4 presents the analysis of the data generated and the resulting discussion.

Part one consists of two chapters. The current chapter, Chapter 1, sets out the historical and policy contexts for this study, with respect to teacher professional learning and explains the theoretical background and concepts central to the study. Part two of this thesis consists of three chapters which detail my engagement with the work of other scholars in three separate areas of professional learning for teachers: Chapter 2 discusses international and national literature probing the importance of professional learning for teachers, Chapter 3 examines how Israeli educational policy, in particular, frames the professional learning of teachers in schools, and Chapter 4 explores the literature on the role of teacher writing in teacher learning and growth.

In Part three of this thesis I devote two chapters to explaining and justifying the methodology of my research. Chapter 5 looks closely at the epistemology guiding this study. In that chapter I discuss my choice of interpretive and constructivist qualitative research paradigms and also detail my choices of narrative inquiry and practitioner inquiry. In this kind of narrative inquiry, the researcher aspires “to explore and conceptualise human experience as it is represented in textual form. Aiming for an in-depth exploration of the meanings people assign to their experiences” (Josselson, 2010). Data generated in my study includes teachers’ written reflections, letters, and stories collected over the eight years of the WDTL program, my own stories, blog posts and my research journal. Gannon (2009) clarifies the place of narrative in this kind of interpretive research.

Rather than the objectivity aspired to in positivist research, the researcher’s own narratives – both of her lived experience and of the conduct of the research – are also likely to be woven around the narratives she has gathered in the field. (p. 74)

Other important questions I explore in the chapter are the role of writing in this study and dilemmas concerning translation in bi-lingual research in a country where English is a second language. Chapter 6 presents my research methods – who my participants are and how they became involved in this project, the different kinds of data generated in the study and my work in making meaning through data analysis.

Part four consists of three chapters of data analysis and discussion and a provisional conclusion. Drawing on narrative based data, interviews and my own research journal, Chapter 7 concentrates on the way non-traditional dialogic professional learning can be enacted within a tightly defined policy climate and the challenges this poses. Chapter 8 centres around one particular narrative written by Orly<sup>9</sup>, a teacher participant in the WDLT program mentioned earlier. Orly describes a traumatising experience she had with her pupils on a school trip and how her understandings from her professional learning helped her cope. Chapter 9 presents the stories of five teachers who tell of significant professional learning in liminal spaces, spaces outside traditional, formal frameworks of professional learning, often on the borderline between their personal and professional lives. While examining how these teachers understand their practice, I have

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<sup>9</sup> All the names of teachers and pupils in this thesis are pseudonyms.

confronted and reflected upon my own assumptions about writing, writing pedagogy and professional learning.

Chapter 10, the concluding chapter in this thesis, articulates the contribution of this study to the fields of teacher professional learning and writing as professional learning, and the significance of the knowledge generated through the study. I return to the research questions posed in this introduction and conclude with suggestions for future research, policy and practice associated with teacher professional learning in Israel and beyond. Like all other parts of this thesis, the final chapter avoids firm conclusions and easy generalisations about teacher professional learning. Rather, I reflexively present and critically engage with the understandings which have emerged and are still emerging from this study.

## **PART 2**

### **EXPLORING THE LITERATURE**

## Chapter 2 - Professional learning for teachers

Who dares to teach, must never cease to learn.

- John Cotton Dana, 1912

In the past three decades scholarly writings and policy documents from many parts of the world have regularly proclaimed the importance of ongoing teacher learning. This apparent consensus is reflected in the plethora of articles, books and policy documents inquiring into teachers' knowledge, practices and development. A close critical reading of this literature reveals, however, that beyond the broad consensus on the value of teacher learning, lies a variety of discourses, definitions, perspectives and approaches. In 1.7.2 I highlighted the range of terms used to describe teacher learning. It seems that at no stage in the past 30 years has there been agreement about the naming of this teacher learning or the central issues connected to teacher learning, beyond the sense that it is important. This is not to claim that historical, cultural, social and political context have no relevance in discussions about teacher professional learning or about the way teachers and their learning are positioned by international, national or local policy documents or by the research literature. However, it is worth noting that the different perspectives on teacher learning are grounded in divergent understandings of learning and of knowledge, and contrasting views of the role of schools and teachers in society.

In this chapter, I attempt to delve beyond the apparent consensus as to the importance of teacher learning in order to explore the complexity and the enormous divergence in teacher learning practices and the many ways in which teacher learning is conceptualised. I inquire into the multitude of ways in which teacher learning is approached in different academic and policy writing, often focusing on the language used to position teachers and their knowledge. Resisting the voices which call to simplify the discussion and present teacher learning as a straightforward step-by-step process (e.g. Speck & Knipe, 2005), this PhD study aims to problematise the concept and to acknowledge its complexity. In order to highlight the ways in which teachers and their learning have been represented in policy in recent years, I have included in this chapter a close critical reading and comparison of two recent policy documents from different national settings: *The Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders: A Shared Responsibility and Commitment* (AITSL, 2012) and the *Standard for Teachers' Professional*

*Development: Implementation Guidance for School Leaders, Teachers, and Organisations That Offer Professional Development for Teachers* (Department for Education, 2016b) from the UK. These two policy documents are representative of many other similar documents across the world and my discussion of them identifies the shared or distinctive discourses they employ. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the way in which this study conceptualises teacher learning and its importance. The reading of these two documents will later be joined by the critical engagement with Israeli policy in Chapter 3.

## **2.1 ‘Defining’ professional learning for teachers**

Doecke et al. (2008) are not alone in pointing out the high degree of contestation around definitions of professional learning and professional development. Campbell, McNamara and Gilroy (2004) suggest that the difficulty in defining teacher learning is due to differences in the dominant cultural and ideological discourses operating in the different periods. Among definitions regularly cited in the past two decades, there has been a deal of support for narrow, outcomes-driven discourses of professional learning (e.g. Desimone & Garet, 2015; Ingvarson, 2009; Reeves, 2010; Victoria Parliament, Education and Training Committee, 2009). Other scholars (e.g. Gallo-Fox & Scantlebury, 2016; Kyndt, Gijbels, Grosemans, & Donche, 2016; Netolicky, 2016; Olsen, 2016) define professional development in a more open and expansive discourse. For instance, Day (1999), writing in the late 1990s, proposes a discourse that encompasses a wide range of possibilities for professional learning, or what he terms continuing professional development (see also Day & Sachs, 2004). Taking Day’s broader, inclusive approach to ongoing professional development, one sees a view of teacher learning as consisting of all ‘natural’ learning experiences and those conscious and planned and unplanned activities which are of direct or indirect benefit to the individual teacher, to groups of teachers or to the school. For Day (1999), professional development is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment to developing their professional practice as they seek to improve their teaching and their students’ learning; this developing involves acquiring and critically evaluating the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence they bring to their work with children, adolescents and professional colleagues

Desimone (2009) undertakes a historical examination of definitions of professional learning and professional development in the literature and concludes that teacher learning in more recent times tends to be described in more elaborate and heterogeneous discourses than in the past. She notes that many more traditional definitions of professional development in national policy documents attempt to link professional development of teachers to measurable improvements in student achievement, and this is typically underpinned by an argument that highly proficient teachers are essential for improved student learning (e.g. AITSL, 2011; Kooy & van Veen, 2012). When Guskey (2000) argues the need to "enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators" (p. 16) in order to improve student learning and outcomes, the outcomes being referred to are quantitatively measurable. Other definitions of professional learning stress the attainment of discrete pedagogical skills or identifiable subject content (e.g. Desimone & Garet, 2015; Edwards & Nuttall, 2016), while van Driel and Berry (2012) combine these two elements and discuss the importance of focusing professional learning on what Shulman (1986) first called "pedagogical content knowledge" (Driel & Berry, 2012, p. 9).

In agreement with Day (1999) quoted above, Livingstone, Smaller and Clark (2012) propose an "informal-formal continuum ranging from spontaneous responses to everyday life to highly organised participation in official education programs" (p. 5). They highlight the range of ways in which professional teachers can engage in informal learning: "We all engage in self-directed or collective informal learning, explicit or tacit learning either individually or collectively done without direct reliance on a teacher/mentor or an externally organized curriculum" (p. 5). Dall'Alba and Yendol Silva (2006) are keen to separate what they call formal as distinct from informal teacher learning, explaining that the informal is usually learning which is integrated naturally into everyday practices in schools. Richter, Kunter, Klusmann, Ludtke, and Baumert (2011) use discourses of formal and informal learning and refer to the "uptake of formal and informal learning opportunities that deepen and extend teachers' professional competence, including knowledge, beliefs, motivation and self-regulatory skills" (p. 116). Borko (2004) recognises these two broad discourses but chooses to combine the two, formal and informal modes, and defines professional learning as a blend of formal learning with informal in-school learning and reminds researchers to examine professional learning in the full range of contexts rather than attempt to privilege only certain sorts of teacher learning. Similarly, Livingstone et al. (2012) highlight the reciprocity between informal and formal learning and remind us that professional learning can indeed take

place in blurry, liminal spaces, somewhere between the formal and the informal (see Alsup, 2005; Bettis & Mills, 2006). This view has particular resonance with my PhD study and is explored in detail in Chapter 9.

Minott (2010) explores various definitions of professional development and finds common emphasis on the individual teacher and on refreshing and extending professional knowledge in order for individuals to work effectively in the work place. Similarly, Reeves (2010) argues that most learning opportunities for teachers are directed towards transmitting decontextualised content to individual educators. van Veen et al. (2012) call this kind of learning “traditional” and they wish to differentiate it from “innovative” teacher learning (p. 12). This emphasis on learning as an individual practice has been questioned by large numbers of studies and government inquiries (e.g. Danielson, 2009; Musanti & Pence, 2010; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006) which warn of the disadvantages of this paradigm of professional learning, because it does not recognise the ways in which knowledge is generated in collaborative contexts and because it tends to discourage collaboration between colleagues. For at least two decades, scholarly writing in the area of professional development/learning has reinforced what has already been written about student learning as a social activity (Putnam & Borko, 2000) and the significance of learning in communities (e.g. Farnsworth, Kleanthous, & Wenger-Trayner, 2016; Spanneut, 2010; Stewart, 2014). Vrieling, van den Beemt, and de Laat (2016) argue that group interaction has been found to provoke and promote teacher professional learning. Putnam and Borko (2000) explain that our social interactions with others influence both what we learn and how that learning takes place and Wenger (1998, 2000) discusses the potential for the design of social frameworks which cultivate learning. While Doecke (2006) blurs the boundaries between individual and group learning when he critiques discourses of ‘teacher quality’, Kennedy (2014) draws a distinction between professional learning as “an individual endeavour related to accountability” and professional learning as “a collaborative endeavour that supports transformative practice” (p. 336). Invoking the term “deficit model” (p. 340) to describe frameworks for professional development aimed at ‘fixing’ the teaching problems of the individual educator, Kennedy (2014) – like Doecke et al. (2008), Hargreaves and Goodson (1996), and Parr (2010) - points out that this approach to teacher learning ignores school and government responsibility in educational performance. Boreham (2004) presents and rejects the ways in which neo-liberal governments have traditionally emphasised individual “competence” (p. 8). In stark contrast with models of professional learning

focused on teachers as individuals, social dimensions of teacher learning are emphasised in some studies, and these also draw attention to professional learning as it is written about in academic and policy writings. Boreham (2004) reminds us of the complexity of the term and of the competing discourses it represents. This study takes the view, with Boreham (amongst many others), that when engaging in any discussion on definitions of professional learning, the way teachers and their knowledge are positioned (as passive practitioners in need of experts to 'develop' them or, conversely, as active intellectuals capable of contributing to the professional knowledge base, for example) must be made explicit. In addition, what counts as learning must be unpacked. The following section begins this unpacking by addressing prominent questions in the literature surrounding teacher learning.

## **2.2 Prominent questions surrounding teacher learning**

Despite the seeming consensus on the importance of ongoing teacher learning, international and national emphasis on standardisation, accountability, and teacher quality in education have fuelled lively debates on the role and form of that learning. Discussing teacher quality, Darling-Hammond and Lieberman (2012) argue that despite the international agreement on its importance, there is a multitude of opinions on the best ways to achieve teacher learning. Sugrue and Mertkan (2016) also emphasise the diversity in approaches and claim that "professional learning opportunities more than ever have become sites of struggle between competing and conflicting (ideological) perspectives on what it means to be professional" (p. 16). The contestation around teacher learning focuses on questions such as:

- What constitutes teacher knowledge and learning? (e.g. Adoniou, 2015; AITSL, 2011; Ben-Peretz, 2011; Brindley, 2013; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001; Elbaz, 1983; Heilbronn, 2010; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Richter et al., 2011; Shulman, 1987)
- Why do teachers engage in professional learning? (e.g. Bigsby & Firestone, 2016; Cameron, Mulholland, & Branson, 2013; Chi-Hung, 2010; McMillan et al., 2014; Richter et al., 2011)

- What activities count as professional learning? (e.g. Beck & Kosnik, 2014; Doecke et al., 2008; Leonard, 2015; Clark, Livingstone, & Smaller, 2012; Mockler, 2012; van Veen et al., 2012; Victoria Parliament, Education and Training Committee, 2009)
- What kind of professional learning should be available to teachers? (Covay Minor et al., 2016; Czerniawski, 2013; Grosemans, Boon, Verclairen, Dochy, & Kyndt, 2015; Kyndt et al., 2016; Stewart, 2014)
- How responsive should/can professional learning be to particular students' and teachers' needs in a context of standards based demands? (Colbert, Brown, Choi, & Thomas, 2008; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009; Korthagen, 2016; Locke, 2004; Murray & Zoul, 2015; Sugrue & Mertkan, 2016)
- Who determines what should be learnt by teachers? (e.g. Blank, 2013; Colbert et al., 2008; Jaquith, Mindich, Chung Wei, & Darling-Hammond, 2010)
- What professional learning can take place in schools and through classroom practice? (e.g. Ambler, 2016; Kyndt et al., 2016; Warren Little, 2012)
- How can the impact of professional learning programs be evaluated? (e.g. Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2000; King, 2014; Soine & Lumpe, 2014)

This list of questions (and mapping of some literature that addresses the questions) is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather to gesture at the plethora of questions about professional learning that invariably complicate definitional debates, such as I have discussed in the previous section.

### **2.3 Reasons for engaging in professional learning for teachers**

One of the central issues of contention concerns the aim or aims of professional learning and its expected outcomes. In the literature, there is a range of reasons for stressing the importance of professional learning and not one predominant aim (Kennedy, 2015). Professional learning for teachers, for instance, has been recommended as a means to 'upgrade' the quality of teaching practice (Colbert et al., 2008; Correnti, 2007; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2010), to achieve national or regional goals (Owens, Pogodzinski, & Hill, 2016), to improve student learning and

achievement (Guskey, 2000; Speck & Knipe, 2005) and to increase equity between student populations (Meissel, Parr, & Timperley, 2016). Typical of the trend to yoke the aims of professional development programs or agendas to measurable student learning outcomes. Jaquith et al. (2010) suggest a variety of aims: “We define effective professional development as that which leads to improvements in teacher knowledge or practice, or in student learning outcomes” (p. 2). Schleicher (2016), writing for the OECD (for which he conducts research) proposes an even broader set of aims, wherein improvements in teacher learning can lead to improvement of teacher practice and efficiency and increased levels of teacher commitment. And yet the literature shows that each of these concepts – ‘teaching practice’, ‘student learning’, ‘student achievement’, and others which appear frequently in current discourse on professional learnings for teachers – is multifaceted, complex and therefore difficult to pin down. The conclusion is often drawn in the literature I have mentioned here, that teacher learning is an immediately visible and measurable phenomenon, and that inputs of teacher learning should lead uncomplicatedly to improvements in students’ achievement provokes questions about the nature of learning and knowledge in general, the role of schools in the education of young people and the work of teachers as individuals and as professionals working together in collegial ways.

Other scholars discuss the role of professional learning for teachers in more situated and provisional terms and tend to describe teacher learning processes which are more inclusive or open-ended. Citing the deep but difficult-to-measure connection between teachers’ teaching and students’ learning, Day (1999), for example, describes the need for “continuing career-long professional development” (p. 2) in order for teachers to keep up with change and to constantly reflect on their knowledge, teaching capabilities and conceptions of effective practice. He explains that teachers will only be capable of achieving their goals if they are well equipped for the task before they embark on teaching and continue to cultivate their practice through learning. Introducing an additional aim, Day explains that teachers should undertake their own program of continuous learning if they hope to instil an inclination towards lifelong learning in their students. Other scholars remind that there are alternate or additional goals for professional learning such as “boosting staff morale or enhancing teacher feelings of efficacy or collegiality” (Meissel et al., 2016, p. 164) and the renewal of teacher identities (Battey & Franke, 2008; Halse, 2010; Olsen, 2016). Olsen (2016) in no way negates the importance of student achievement and argues “a teacher is only as good as the growth demonstrated by his or her students, and a school is only as

good as the success of the children it serves” (p. 124). He does, however, question the narrow ways in which ‘achievement’ is conceptualised and measured. And he goes on to argue the centrality of identity construction in teacher learning explaining “teacher identity is the place where all your personal and professional, social and individual, past and present experiences combine into a productive tangle of beliefs, values, practices, and predictions for your teaching work” (pp. 136-137). The suggestion is that this kind of development is deeply situated, not easily measurable and that teacher identity is not static; it is constantly changing. It appears that the shaping of teacher identity is an aim of teacher learning which is worthy of additional attention.

Korthagen (2016), equally intent to problematise teacher learning, which he describes as “often unconscious, multi-dimensional, and multi-level” (p. 13), explains that aims for professional learning cannot be uniform, system-wide, predetermined and unchanging, as “each individual teacher should be taken seriously and the process should build upon his or her concerns, gestalts, personal strengths and mission, within the context of their actual work” (p. 14). My study joins with the voices of Olsen (2016), Korthagen and others who recognise the intricacy in teachers’ work and learning and search for broader and more inclusive definitions and goals for teacher learning.

## **2.4 Teacher knowledge**

At the base of arguments about teacher learning lie contested understandings of what teachers know and need to know in their everyday professional lives. Questions surrounding teacher knowledge have long been prevalent in the literature (Santoro, Reid, Mayer, & Singh, 2013) and for the past twenty years teacher knowledge has been identified as a pivotal issue for policy makers (Ben-Peretz, 2011; Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000). Writing over a decade ago, Campbell et al. (2004) identified teacher learning as a “hi-profile, politically ‘hot’ issue (p. 13). How teacher knowledge is conceptualised and what kinds of knowledge it involves have been questions at the heart of scholarly writing and heated policy debate for decades. This should not be surprising as Brindley (2015) reminds, all discussion of knowledge is value laden. In this section I will proceed to make explicit some of the different value positions informing and underpinning conceptualisations of teacher knowledge in the literature.

There has long been awareness that teaching is an intellectual activity in which educators are fully able to learn from experience (Schön, 1987) and that the knowledge of practicing teachers should be respected (Loughran, 2002). Three decades ago, Blau (1988) was optimistic about the way that teachers and their professional knowledge were coming to be recognised:

The hierarchy of authority in the educational community has shifted from one in which classroom teachers who were once seen as obstacles to change, deficient members of the academic community, defective in professional knowledge, consumers of the expertise of specialists, are now seen as (or potentially as) expert practitioners, writers, agents of change, teacher-consultants, classroom-based researchers, contributors to the pool of current professional knowledge, trainers of administrators, curriculum specialists, and publishing authors. (p.35)

There is a rich tradition of teachers engaging in praxis, adopting a “critically reflective stance” (van de Ven & Doecke, 2011, p. 16) in order to inquire into, and reach new understandings about their practice. van de Ven and Doecke (2011) describe educators “opening their teaching up to scrutiny by others and interrogating the assumptions behind their pedagogies... believing that reflection of this kind is an integral part of their role as teachers” (p. 4). This involves, according to van de Ven and Doecke, “developing their understanding of the intellectual and pedagogical traditions in which they work, as well as learning from their practice and trying to grasp the full implications of what they do” (van de Ven & Doecke, 2011, p. 220). There are strong traditions of praxis associated with literacy teachers and professional communities of literacy teachers and these kinds of critical teacher inquiry appear widely in the literature (e.g. Doecke, 2015; Hardy, 2014; Riley, 2012). Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell, and Mockler (2016), for example, argue that

practitioner inquiry undertaken within a praxis framework provides a means by which teachers can carefully consider the moral underpinnings of their work, build and extend their teaching knowledge, and develop classroom practices that are ethical and equitable for all students. The transformations that can emerge as a result of practitioner inquiry, be they teaching practices and/or outcomes for students, are crucial forms of what we term “authentic” school improvement. (p. 87)

My study is strongly aligned with traditions of teacher praxis and I draw confidence about the value of such work when I consider the lively and rigorous accounts of practice that I have read by authors who identify with such traditions. And yet, despite the optimism of Blau (1988) and

Coghlan's (2013) description of 'scholar-practitioners', who "are not merely practitioners who do research but rather that they integrate scholarship in their practice and generate actionable knowledge, that is, knowledge that is robust for scholars and actionable for practitioners" (p. 121), teacher knowledge such as they have generated through practitioner inquiry projects or studies is still often deemed inferior in descriptions of the state of teaching and schools by policy makers and many researchers.

Almost forty years on, it appears that Blau's (1988) 'alternative' view of teachers and the professional knowledge they create is not generally accepted and may still be limited to professional associations in the UK, Australia and the US, and university based teacher educator researchers, that have advocated for the value of teachers in knowledge creation. The national secondary English teacher professional association in Australia (AATE), for example has deep and sustained traditions of praxis based professional learning for teachers through publications (e.g. Doecke, Howie, & Sawyer, 2006; Doecke, Parr, & Sawyer, 2011) through projects like the STELLA project (AATE/ALEA, 2002; Doecke & Parr, 2011) and the related stella2.0 project (Parr & Bulfin, 2015). There are also similar projects in England (e.g. Smith & Wrigley, 2012). The most well-known, and longest running, of these is probably the NWP in the United States (Kaplan, 2008; Lieberman & Wood, 2002; Tedrow, 2016; Whitney, 2008) mentioned earlier.

According to Doecke (2004), reports by policy makers and external researchers still tend to be considered more authoritative than research and knowledge produced by teachers in practitioner inquiry projects. Biesta (2017) is concerned about the ways in which teacher professionalism is regarded and argues:

Professional judgement in a range of different professional domains is increasingly being replaced or pushed out by a demand for an evidence-based approach... The idea here is that professional action can only become really professional if it is no longer based on the singular insights (or according to some subjective opinions) of professionals, but when it becomes based upon secure scientific knowledge about 'what works'. And the claim is that the *only* way in which we can be certain that a professional intervention 'works' is by means of randomised controlled trials... (p. 322)

Milner (2013), concerned with this undervaluing or complete disregard of qualitative research and knowledge that is expressed through narrative-based research, for instance, provocatively poses several questions, including: “Why is some knowledge more important than other knowledge?” and “Who decides the relative importance of different types of knowledge?” (p. 5). Several studies warn that the suspicion of knowledge generated within teachers’ praxis or practitioner inquiry projects (see, for example, Fenstermacher, 1994) has deprived teachers and the teaching profession of important knowledge of their practice and disenfranchised them (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 2009; see also Craig, 2012b). Servage (2009) explains that when teachers’ knowledge generated from within the profession is disregarded, teachers may be inclined towards passive acceptance of the ideas of others even when they learn in collaborative environments.

One of the ways that researchers have attempted to counter these attacks on the integrity or validity of teacher knowledge that emerges from the scholarly work of practitioners is to develop seemingly scientific categories of teacher knowledge that can be studied and discussed separately. There is a huge body of literature that has grown from Shulman’s (1986, 1987) attempt to classify teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge (or pck), which first emerged not surprisingly in the field of science education. This literature attempts to identify a body of knowledge, constructed in the academy, which teachers transform into knowledge that can be taught to children in schools using particular pedagogical strategies. Using quite different epistemological assumptions about knowledge and yet still intent on constructing categories, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) describe three categories of knowledge about teaching; “knowledge-for-practice” (p. 47), which relates to knowledge as produced by researchers in academic settings for use by teachers as they endeavour upgrade their practice; “knowledge-in-practice” (p. 47), which relates to the knowledge developed by experienced educators through work in the classroom in collaboration with reflection; and “knowledge-of-practice” (p. 48), which explores the synthesis of local practical classroom knowledge acquired through hands-on experience together with focused reflection with formal knowledge and theory produced by others. In their conceptualisation of knowledge, “teachers learn when they generate local knowledge of practice by working within the contexts of inquiry communities to theorize and construct their work and to connect it to larger social, cultural, and political issues” (p. 48). Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2008) call these three approaches “practitioner knowledge... public knowledge... and new knowledge” (p. 229). Richter et al. (2011) discuss a model of teacher competence which separates teacher knowledge into five different

fields: "content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, pedagogy and psychological knowledge, organizational knowledge and counseling knowledge" (p. 119). Adoniou (2015) proposes six kinds of teacher knowledge: "knowledge about content, knowledge about theory, knowledge about teaching, knowledge about learners, knowledge about school context, and knowledge about the sociocultural politics of teaching" (pp. 103-104). The work of these scholars and others illustrates the complexity of the term 'teacher knowledge' and makes apparent the intricacy of teacher wisdom. Santoro et al. (2013) illustrate this multifaceted nature of teacher knowledge by pluralising the concept into "teacher knowledge(s)" (p. 123).

Many of these attempts to categorise teacher knowledge begin with the epistemological assumption that knowledge is a reified and deliverable entity that can be acquired through formal learning in similar ways irrespective of sociocultural context (Doecke et al., 2008; Webster-Wright, 2009; Wenger, 1998). Alternatively, Richards (1998) employs the complex "teacher-as-thinker" metaphor to explore the growth of teachers and argues that "the acquisition of teaching expertise is seen to be a process that involves the teacher in actively constructing a personal and workable theory of teaching" (p. 65). Also highlighting the intricacy of knowledge necessary for teaching, Heilbronn (2010) explains that

Each individual situation of practice is unique and complex, and knowing what to do in any moment requires more than the ability to apply formulaic, technical knowledge. Teachers... need to engage successfully in the practice and also reflect critically about the practice, stepping back from it to gain a wider perspective. (p. 29)

According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), it is widely accepted that teachers who have developed a larger personal knowledge base teach more effectively and that is a powerful argument for the centrality of teacher knowledge and professional development programs in nationally driven educational reform agendas (e.g. Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Richter et al., 2011; No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). Reform movements in many western countries focus on teacher learning of particular kinds and attempt, as mentioned earlier, to link that learning directly to measurable student outcomes. Scholars in several of these countries have warned that this narrowing of focus on 'teacher quality' and standards based learning and teaching have contributed to a process of de-professionalisation of teachers (Angus, 2013; Burns Thomas &

Niesz, 2012; Carter Andrews, Bartell, & Richmond, 2016; Milner, 2013; Parr, 2010; Roseler & Dentzau, 2013). Alongside this literature which attempts to outline the various kinds of expertise and proficiency involved in teacher knowledge in simplistic terms, there has been an increase in policy and standards documents which aim to tightly define what exactly a teacher needs to know in the classroom (Santoro et al., 2013). Examples of these documents are *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL, 2011) in Australia; *Teachers' Standards: Guidance for School Leaders, School Staff and Governing Bodies* (Department for Education, 2011) in the United Kingdom; *Practising Teacher Criteria* (Education Council New Zealand, 2010) in New Zealand, and *Professional standards for English teachers: Knowledge and performance* (Ministry of Education, 2003b) for English-as-a-second language teachers in Israel.

Such standards can involve the development of more prescriptive student learning curricula and centrally determined learning goals not just for students but also for teachers in teacher learning agendas that are driven by a central body (see Doecke & Parr, 2011). There are scholars, many of them actively pursuing the kinds of praxis based projects mentioned above, who use this work to 'speak back' to standards based agendas and discourses associated with the standardisation of teacher learning practices (Parr, 2010), de-professionalisation of teachers' work, the disregard of teacher knowledge and the marginalisation of teachers from debates about teacher learning. Some of these scholars have consistently recommended learning through practitioner inquiry as a means of empowering teachers as professionals (e.g. Brindley, 2015; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 2001; Doecke et al., 2008; Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014; Parr & Whitney, 2016). Lieberman and Wood (2001) stress that the most influential learning teachers undertake in the NWP framework is that teacher knowledge is considered valid, a valuable commodity to be shared and utilised.

It is not coincidental that the conceptualising of teachers' learning found in the published work of the researchers, teacher educators, and school teachers who sustain the praxis work discussed here is often underpinned by narrative based methodologies. Indeed, many of the researchers I have cited above have worked with narrative as a means of representing and critically exploring the kinds of knowledge teachers construct in their professional lives. Perhaps the most widely cited of these are Connelly and Clandinin (1999), who describe teacher knowledge in terms of the personal

and professional stories which develop from the contexts in which teachers live and work. They use the term “personal practical knowledge”

to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons. Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in future plans and actions. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25)

Such a conceptualisation of teacher knowledge acknowledges the dynamic and situated nature of knowledge, and devotes time and space to detailing the contextual, cultural, and historical factors which mediate the shifts and changes in this knowledge over time and between settings. Clandinin et al. (2015) explain in this way that "teacher knowledge is context dependent, uncertain, always changing, and lived, told, retold and relived in stories" (p. 192).

Traditionally teachers have been positioned as implementers of others' knowledge; and they have sometimes been accused of not being successful in making their professional knowledge public (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993). Warren Little (1990) claims that many teachers view their knowledge as intuitive and that they may have difficulty articulating what they know. Despite these reservations, more recent scholars have argued, as Greene (2008) does, that teacher knowledge can become public through professional conversation and social interaction amongst professional communities. Altrichter et al. (1993) advocate for the dissemination of teacher knowledge through conversation, explaining that sharing teacher knowledge ensures it is preserved and that teachers who share their knowledge with others receive feedback and present themselves as professionals willing to reflect significantly on their practice. Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2010) explain that knowledge which enters the public domain can be "shared, critiqued, and verified" (p. 77) and reinforce the idea that the work of 'making teaching public' contributes to professional learning and improves practice. The authors recommend all teachers present their work to others and suggest that today technology can be useful in spreading information about classroom practice through blogging, podcasts, email etc. Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2010) join a range of authors proposing that teacher writing is a useful means of constructing and sharing teacher knowledge. Readers will find a detailed review of that literature in Chapter 4 of this PhD thesis.

Adoniou (2015) uses the metaphor “complex tapestry” (p. 114) to describe the intricate ways in which various types of teacher knowledge converge and intertwine and she is not alone in her understanding of this complexity. Livingstone et al. (2012) argue that

By any definition, teachers are knowledge workers. In the school systems of modern societies, they have the primary responsibility to transmit formal knowledge to the next generation of workers and citizens. Teachers’ work is among the most demanding and complicated of jobs focused on knowledge. To do their job well, teachers have to master the changing content and pedagogy of formal fields of specialized knowledge, develop empathic understanding with diverse groups of students and perform a multiplicity of other complex roles. But teaching is also among the most underappreciated jobs and the complexity of teachers’ learning has been virtually ignored...” (p. 1)

As seen in this section, any discussion of teacher knowledge and learning becomes unavoidably entrenched in political connotations of who teachers are, what they know and how capable they are to contribute to the development of schools and education in general in this standards based age of accountability. This study, acutely aware of the political forces influencing any engagement with this topic, acknowledges the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of teacher knowledge. I take the position that teachers can usefully be seen as historically, and in the current moment, playing a central role in the development of knowledge about teaching, learning, classroom practice and teacher learning.

## **2.5 Teacher identity**

Identity, according to Bauman and Vecchi (2004), is “a subject that is by its very nature elusive and ambivalent” (p. 2). It is, they say, delicate and maintains an “eminently negotiable and revocable” (p. 11), “forever provisional status” (p. 16). Throughout the life of a professional teacher, his/her personal and professional identities are continually shifting and being shaped by experience, dialogue with others and learning; Badley (2016) characterises this as an “ever-lasting human quest” (p. 377). Curwood (2014), Arvaja (2016), and Akkerman and Meijer (2011) all advocate for, following the work of Bakhtin, a dialogical understanding of identity in which “the individual and the social environment are inextricably linked and continually shape one another”

(Curwood, 2014, p. 157). In the teacher professional learning literature, there is increasing interest in teacher identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011) and the elaborate connections between teacher identity and teacher learning. Netolicky (2016), for example, describes professional learning as being involved in the shaping of teacher identity as an integral part of the process of “professional becoming” (p. 271). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Olsen (2008) defines teacher education in terms of identity, as the shaping of professional identity and explains:

What we might call ‘teacher development’ doesn’t reside solely in the abstract, intellectual mind of a teacher. It includes the whole person. As teachers learn, they make use of their memories, political and philosophical beliefs, personal dispositions, family experiences, and current and past relationships alongside the professional knowledge and formal educational activities in which they’re officially engaged. And whoever they’re working with... is also having an influence on how they are constructing their professional knowledge. Accepting these facts requires us to adopt a broader and deeper way of looking at teacher learning. (p. 28)

Olsen (2008, 2016) proposes that, as such, professional identity may be a more useful concept when attempting to understand teacher knowledge. He argues that while the experience of an individual teacher is unique, it cannot be separated from the social interactions in which he or she is engaged. According to Olsen (2008),

This leads to a shift away from the discrete ‘teacher knowledge’ as unit of analysis towards a broader, more situated, recursive notion signalled by ‘teacher identity’ instead. Teacher identity as a unit of analysis widens and deepens how we can examine and understand influences on teacher development. (p. 125)

Edwards and Edwards (2016) similarly adopt a sociocultural perspective on teacher learning and identity. They describe a situated process of identity development over time which is “complex and idiosyncratic” (p. 2) and “culturally-based ... in a range of contexts” (p. 3).

This PhD is interested in the connections made explicit here between teacher learning and the development and shaping of teacher professional identity. It is somewhat surprising that this space in which the personal and professional, individual and social, formal and informal knowledge, beliefs and philosophies all meet is still often excluded from discussion on professional learning.

## 2.6 Characteristics of ‘effective’ professional learning

Much of the literature on professional learning over the past three decades has been preoccupied with pinpointing 'effective professional learning', and there has been a proliferation of lists of effective professional learning characteristics or principles. In recent publications, Covay Minor et al. (2016) stress the importance of gaining a deeper comprehension of the varying effectiveness of professional development in order to create better learning opportunities for all teachers. While the attraction of simple lists or even ‘checklists’ (Hunzicker, 2011) may be somewhat expected in light of the current neo-liberal fetish for quantitative measures and standards based evaluation, inquiring into the effectiveness of professional learning appears to be more difficult than suggested and poses significant questions about learning and teaching and indeed about research itself. Meissel et al. (2016) explain that questions about effectiveness are often ambiguous as the processes of teaching and learning are so complex that it is difficult to make that learning apparent and explicitly linked to student outcomes. This complexity is emphasised by Barrera-Pedemonte (2016) and similarly reflected in an Australian government funded study (Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005) that concluded there are just too many variables to enable researchers to assert a simple linear causality between professional learning and ‘effects’ in terms of student learning outcomes or other ‘measures’ of teacher ‘effectiveness’.

van Veen et al. (2012) composed a literature review on ‘effective’ teacher professional development in 2012, analysing 11 broad-scale reviews and another 34 empirical studies written over the past 25 years. While many of their conclusions on characteristics of effective professional development are similar in nature to other scholars (e.g. Labone & Long, 2016), their review raises important questions which need to be grappled with. One of these questions, for example, is what counts as ‘reliable’ or ‘valid’ research when attempting to determine what effective practice is? Another relates to the need to assess ‘effectiveness’ in relation to pre-determined goals for professional development (PD). The variation in aims and contexts, discussed earlier in this chapter, invariably problematises any attempt to make simple comparisons between programs. Acknowledging the multifarious attempts in the literature on professional learning, covering almost all conceivable research paradigms, feature everything from large-scale surveys to small, localised accounts of professional development. van Veen et al. (2012) reach the conclusion that “no rigid conclusions can be drawn on ‘what works’ in PD interventions or on specific

interventions” (p. 17). They explain that what is possible is “describe[ing] what is known about effective features of PD in general, which should be regarded as indications of what works” (p. 17). Similar findings are reported by Guskey (2003), nine years before the work of van Veen et al. (2012). Guskey analysed 13 lists of characteristics for effective learning and identified 21 distinctive characteristics. His study concludes that there is little evidence supporting the value of different lists which are often incompatible. Outlining instead the importance of discussion and the evaluation of criteria for professional learning, Guskey explains that as professional learning is so complex, researchers are unlikely to reach consensus on a definitive list of characteristics.

Despite the difficulties raised here, proposed characteristics of ‘effective’ professional learning are of interest to this study, as part of my efforts to map and critically investigate the discourses employed by different researchers in this field. In addition to van Veen et al. (2012), who present a list of characteristics as an integral part of their scholarly text, I have chosen to look closely at the work of Borko and Putnam (1996), Doecke et al. (2008), and Desimone and Garet (2015), scholars who all present lists of ‘characteristics’ of ‘effective’ or ‘rich’ professional learning. The following table presents some of the ways in which characteristics of ‘effective’ professional learning have been discussed in the literature over the past 20 years. While the similarities between the lists are obvious, it is interesting to explore the distinct and distinguishing use of language in the various studies. An example of this is that while all four studies recommend that teacher learning be connected to the knowledge and experience of teachers, they involve very different discourses and they position that knowledge and experience in different ways. Borko and Putnam (1996), for example, describe learning as “a constructive and iterative process in which the person interprets events on the basis of existing knowledge, beliefs and dispositions” (p. 674). In this way, learning is mediated through prior knowledge which is inseparable from the learning itself. This is very different from the way Desimone and Garet (2015) argue that teacher learning should be “consistent” (p. 253) with teacher knowledge. They consider teacher knowledge a transferable entity which can be “integrated” (p. 256), “implemented” (p. 258), “improved” (p. 258), “increased” (p. 259), and “translated” (p. 260) into daily practice. While van Veen et al. (2012) discuss teachers becoming involved in and taking responsibility for their learning, Doecke et al. (2008) is the only study out of the four which engages with the term ‘accountability’ in relation to teachers and their learning. This may be surprising considering the centrality of discourses of accountability in recent policy documents and published research focused on teacher learning.

**Table 2.1: Characteristics of ‘effective’ professional learning: A closer look at four studies**

	<b>Borko &amp; Putnam (1996)</b>	<b>Doecke, Parr, &amp; North (2008)</b>	<b>van Veen, Zwart, &amp; Meirink (2012)</b>	<b>Desimone &amp; Garet (2015)</b>
<b>Prior Teacher Knowledge</b>	PL connecting to teachers' prior knowledge and professional beliefs	PL “explicitly embedded within teachers’ work” (p. 260).	PL in line with school and national policies and corresponding to problems teachers experience in their daily teaching.	PL aligned with school curricula, teacher knowledge and beliefs, the needs of students, and school regional policies.
<b>PL Content</b>	Extended opportunities to expand content knowledge in subjects taught.	Particular focus not mentioned. PL content must be relevant to the needs of teachers and their students.	Focus on teaching, subject content, specific subject pedagogy and student learning in the subject.	Focus on subject content and student learning of that content.
<b>Conceptions of PL</b>	Approach teachers as learners in a way teachers should approach their students as learners.	PL should involve “continuing inquiry into practice” (p. 262).	“Active and inquiry-based learning” (p. 13).	Active rather than passive PL, involving teachers observing, receiving feedback, analysing student work etc.
<b>Situated Nature of PL</b>	Teacher learning and reflection grounded in classroom experience	“appropriate to teachers’ particular needs and the needs of the students they teach” (p. 260)	Ideally PL is “situated in the daily teaching practice and the possibilities and limitations of the workplace are taken into account” (p. 3).	“Teachers come to PD... from various classroom contexts... PD should be calibrated to individual teacher needs” (p. 255)
<b>Time Span</b>	PL should accommodate “sufficient time and support” (p. 703).	PL “supported over a sustained period of time” (p. 260).	Occurring over a “substantial amount of time” (p. 14).	Ongoing PL throughout the school year; at least 20 hours long.
<b>Collaboration in PL</b>	“Teachers themselves need to experience what it means to actively participate in a community of learners” (p. 703).	PL should be “strongly collegial and collaborative” (p. 262) and the development of networks within schools and with a range of bodies outside the teachers’ schools should be encouraged.	PL should involve “collegial learning” (p. 17); “collective participation and collaborative teacher learning... collaborations between teachers from the same school, grade or department” (p. 13).	Collective participation: groups of teachers from the same grade, subject, or school participate in PD activities together to build an interactive learning community

In the following section, I undertake a critical consideration of the five ‘characteristics’ of professional learning listed by Borko and Putnam (1996), the earliest of the studies in Table 2.1. While I acknowledge that the highly referenced work of Borko and Putnam is limited in ways (20 years after its first publication), it is useful at this stage of my study to consider the strengths and shortfalls of their characteristics, and to use this in constructing my own framework for investigating teacher learning. I have chosen to use their list of characteristics as a springboard for a critical inquiry into the central themes in these four studies and other related literature. These characteristics are listed in the left hand column of the table. In 2.7 (below), my inquiry moves beyond a consideration of these characteristics (and identification of other literature that identifies similar characteristics) to explore what I see as the lacunae or gaps in Borko and Putnam’s framing of professional learning. I begin with one of the key characteristics of professional learning, according to Borko and Putnam:

1. *“Addressing teachers’ pre-existing knowledge and beliefs about teaching, learning, learners and subject matter” (p. 700)*

This characteristic aligns with constructivist theories of learning (see Pritchard & Woollard, 2010) where learning occurs in the intersection of prior learning and new knowledge. Richardson (2003) and Calnin (2006) both take teachers’ prior professional knowledge into account and Calnin describes effective professional learning as a process in which teacher beliefs and practice are refreshed. Brown Easton (2008) proposes that "powerful professional learning honors the professionalism, expertise, experiences, and skills of staff members" (p. 757). Both Desimone and Garet (2015) and Labone and Long (2016) discuss the importance of ‘coherence’ in teacher education, looking far broader than what is suggested by Borko and Putnam (1996); both studies propose that teacher learning necessarily connects to teacher knowledge and beliefs, and to the demands of reforms and policies. It seems extraordinary that of the four studies included in Table 2.1, only Desimone and Garet (2015) and Doecke et al. (2008) argue the need for teachers’ professional learning to connect to the needs of students and schools. van Veen et al. (2012) do suggest that a professional learning program should seek to connect teachers’ learning to the “specific problems the teachers experience in their daily work” (p.14), and yet there is no mention of this learning needing to connect in any way with their existing knowledge and or beliefs.

2. *“Providing teachers with sustained opportunities to deepen and expand their knowledge of subject matter” (p. 701)*

Garet et al. (2001) and Darling-Hammond, Wei, Richardson, & Orphanos, (2009) stress the importance of teacher learning programs focusing on content knowledge and Birman et al. (2000) reinforce this point, explaining that programs which focus on teaching strategies without stressing specific content, or ‘content knowledge’, have been found to be ineffective. Desimone and Garet (2015) and Labone and Long (2016) add a focus on student learning, as do Whitcomb, Borko, and Liston (2009), who assert that there is increasing consensus that student thinking and learning should be central in professional learning programs. Calnin (2006) is typical of a number of government positions in arguing that teacher learning should concentrate on ‘standards’ for student learning and that it should be research based. Suggesting another priority, he calls for focus on both content and learning and adds “higher order thinking skills” (p. 18). Ball and Cohen (1999), like van Veen et al. (2012), call for a focus on professional learning which encompasses all of the areas mentioned here. Ball and Cohen (1999) explain their notion of the “cornerstones of education” as follows:

Any design for improved professional learning must be grounded in the cornerstones of education: what needs to be learned (content), the nature of that content and what that implies about how it might be learned (theories of learning), curriculum and pedagogy (with what material and in what ways the learners can be helped to learn that content, given who they are, the nature of what there is to be learned, and theories of how it is best learned). (p. 6)

3. *“Treating teachers as learners in a manner consistent with the program’s vision of how teachers should treat students as learners” (p. 701)*

It has sometimes been suggested that teacher learning should be grounded in theories of adult learning (Calnin, 2006) and that professional learning opportunities should model strategies that teachers will use with their students (Loucks-Horsley, Stiles, Mundry, Love, & Hewson, 2010). There is wide agreement in the literature that teachers are more likely to experiment with strategies presented in professional learning settings if they are integrated into the teaching in the professional learning program (e.g. Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Borko and Putnam (1996) recommend that teacher learning programs be founded on what is known about learning to teach

(i.e. the pedagogy of initial teacher education) and others suggest that teacher learning should be administered in groups which encourage collaboration and sharing of knowledge (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004; Popp & Goldman, 2016; So, 2013). Sweeney (2005) remarks that although ‘learning by doing’ is common in classrooms today, it is seldom seen in professional development. They explain that teacher learning is a slow and cumulative process, similar in many ways to student learning (Sweeney, 2005), and much research recommends that it be an active process (Birman et al., 2000; Calnin, 2006; Desimone, 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Putnam & Borko, 2000). van Veen et al. (2012) argue that this sense of teacher learning needing to be ‘active’ is increasingly connected to what Parr (2010) calls “inquiry-based professional learning”. Garet et al. (2001) recommend that teachers make public presentations, write personal and collective reflective texts, and lead professional learning discussions as a way of acquiring and sharing knowledge in significant ways. Desimone and Garet (2015) add to this list the making of “opportunities for teachers to observe, receive feedback, analyze student work” (p. 253). Day (1999) argues, along with Doecke et al. (2008), Labone and Long (2016) and van Veen et al. (2012) that teachers should be actively involved in the planning for their own learning. In this way, Day (1999) recommends that teachers be given the opportunity to explore their own learning needs and Calnin (2006) stresses the importance of autonomy and self-direction in their learning.

#### 4. *“Grounding teachers’ learning and reflection in classroom practice” (p. 701)*

The importance of grounding teacher learning within teachers’ classroom practice is emphasised by numerous scholars in different international contexts (e.g. Ambler, 2016; Calnin, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Grosemans et al., 2015; Whitcomb et al., 2009). Ball and Cohen (1999) call for teachers to learn from their own practice while they teach and they argue that collaborative study of teaching practice is an effective way to blend professional learning and everyday classroom practice. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) explain that while teachers are engaging in specific teaching tasks, assessment and observation, they should be supported to plan for and engage in their own learning processes. Desimone and Garet (2015) recommend the analysis of student work and mutual feedback as part of teacher learning but do not mention reflection. Labone and Long (2016) view self-reflection as part of the collaboration between teachers. Dall’Alba and Yendol Silva (2006) call for “promoting development of professional ways-of-being that can deal with the complexities, ambiguities, and

dynamic change inherent in professional practice" (p. 401). van Veen et al. (2012) discuss the prominence of reflection in literature on learning communities but are concerned about the organisational limitations of schools.

5. *"Offering ample time and support for reflection, collaboration, and continued learning"*  
(p. 701)

Borko and Putnam (1996) draw attention to a range of studies which show that teacher learning and educational change as a result of that learning take time (see also Desimone, 2009). There is a range of opinions about what constitutes the optimal amount of time and duration for teacher learning. All four studies represented in Table 2.1 above recommend "ample time" (Borko & Putnam, 1996, p. 701); Desimone and Garet (2015) argue that teacher learning should continue "throughout the school year and include 20 hours or more of contact time" (p. 253), whereas Labone and Long (2016) recommend "a minimum of one semester and include follow-up and classroom based support" (p. 58). Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) report that approximately 50 hours of learning are necessary in order to make an impact. Rather than specifying a particular time allocation, Garet et al. (2001) explain that when learning is undertaken over a substantial period of time, teachers can engage in deeper exploration of content, pedagogy and student learning. In addition, they contend that a longer period allows teachers to apply (and experiment with) what they are learning in their classrooms and to receive feedback (Garet et al., 2001). van Veen et al. (2012) argue that both the span of time and the number of contact hours in PD hours should be taken into consideration.

Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2010) remind us that time should be considered a valuable resource in teacher education and Danielson (2009) argues that "professional learning is not an add-on to the daunting responsibilities of teaching: it is integral to those responsibilities" (p. 3). Doecke et al. (2008) make the same point – it should not be an "add-on" (pp.13, 19, 234) – and they argue that the time for professional learning should be thoughtfully built in to the process of planning teachers' workloads. Taking this one step further, Brown Easton (2008) recognises the flurrying pace of school life and described time when teachers can stop and reflect on their practice as "a gift to educators" (p. 757).

Borko and Putnam (1996) argue that if teachers are expected to create supportive learning environments for their students, they need to experience the same kind of environment in their own learning. Calnin (2006) and Whitcomb et al. (2009) call for this learning to take place in professional communities and Buczynski and Hansen (2010) argue that the more teachers from the same school take part in learning events, the greater the influence that learning will have on their educational environment. Peer interaction and conversation can promote significant teacher learning (Borko, 2004; Warren Little, 1993). Darling-Hammond (1998) proposes that "teachers learn best by studying, doing, and reflecting; by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see" (p. 8). In order to keep the conversation going, Eun (2008) and Richardson (2003), like Labone and Long (2016), argue that in order for teachers to maintain their learning, they need continuing support from school leadership, following a professional learning program, in the period when they are attempting to incorporate what they have learnt into their classroom practice. Doecke et al. (2008) extend that call for support to government as well as school leadership.

## **2.7 Additional principles of ‘effective’ professional learning**

Needless to say, these few five characteristics of ‘effective’ professional learning listed in Table 2.1 are not comprehensive and additional characteristics are proposed by other researchers, which I will briefly canvas here. Richardson (2003) mentions the need for professional learning to be school wide, have the support of school leadership, have adequate funds allocated and access to an external facilitator. Calnin (2006) recommends a professional learning ‘facilitator’ should be an appropriately skilled school leader, but explains that there is as yet little support for the idea of an external facilitator of professional learning within a school. It is also recommended in the literature that facilitators use specialist language to discuss effective classroom practice (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010).

In the *National Mapping of Teacher Professional Learning Project*, Doecke et al., (2008) draw attention to additional factors which they consider crucial when planning for significant professional learning. The first is the need for a wide-spectrum of professional learning opportunities to be available in order to meet the specific needs of teachers and their students. The

second factor is the significance of emphasising the local in planning and engaging in professional learning. The authors showcase research which identifies the local and specific nature of professional learning and argue that often teachers need help understanding how to cater for the needs of their immediate communities. These kinds of situated professional learning are fundamentally different to the “one-size-fits-all’, teacher-proof packages” (Doecke et al., 2008, p. 260) often offered or recommended in policy documents. The third factor presented in the report by Doecke et al. (2008) is that planning for professional learning should be a priority at all levels: state, school, and teacher. This is indeed a central principle in the Israeli “*Ofek Chadash*” policy on professional learning for Israeli teachers (Ministry of Education, 2010). The fourth characteristic highlighted by Doecke et al. (2008) is encouragement for professional learning to be grounded in a variety of networks – between teachers, between teachers and institutions of higher learning, between schools of different kinds, between teachers and professional organisations and even between teachers and or schools and bodies outside education, industry for example. Through these rich relationships, they argue, teachers can be introduced to and jointly develop new approaches and ideas. This argument for collaboration outside the immediate educational institution is different from that suggested by Borko and Putnam (1996), van Veen et al. (2012), and Desimone and Garet (2015), whose focus is more on the particular institutions where the teachers are teaching.

Finally, Doecke et al. (2008) devote considerable time and space to focus on the issue of accountability for teachers’ learning, a facet of teachers’ contemporary practice which can in no way be ignored in a standards based environment that requires constant evidence to prove one is meeting specific professional standards. Jacobs et al. (2015) caution that as the pressures of accountability rise, professional learning often narrows and concentrates on those activities that will produce particular measurable improvements. In Biesta’s (2017) discussion on accountability, he takes this warning one step further when saying “We should not forget that if we try to control education completely, we turn it into a machinery in which what matters educationally – such as freedom and independence of the student – is ultimately squeezed out” (p. 317). Doecke et al. (2008) recommend governments refrain from imposing narrow accountability requirements for professional learning and argue that research (especially the praxis related research detailed earlier) repeatedly shows how teachers are capable of taking responsibility for their learning and providing evidence of that learning. It is just that this learning is not always reducible to neat

quantitative measures premised on inputs (teacher learning) and outputs (student performance). Masuda (2010) warns that “contexts of mandates, accountability and compliance position teachers as deficit or inadequate even if they have years of hard-earned knowledge behind them” (p. 468). She demonstrates the contribution of teacher study groups as a significant form of professional learning for some teachers. Her research suggests that these groups can help teachers resist the pressures of accountability demands and “be supported through spaces for agency which involve professional dialogue around contemporary pedagogical issues and which challenge their assumptions about teaching” (p. 479). Sugrue and Mertkan (2016) make an interesting distinction between accountability and responsibility. They explain that “in contrast to degrees of trust and commitment, the logic inherent in an accountability framework relies on compliance, conformity to a set of predetermined measures or outcomes” (p. 4). Acknowledging the many ways in which the current mandated policy environment is moulding teacher practice, they argue the need for professional learning frameworks to provide “opportunities for, as well as sources of, alternative discourses, of dissent, of more open-ended possibilities for professional well-being” (p. 16).

As I have outlined in this section, much of the literature on professional learning over the past three decades has been preoccupied with pinpointing ‘effective’ professional learning and with the formulation of lists of characteristics or principles which guarantee the effectivity of professional learning programs. Despite the commonalities or overlaps in this literature, there remains a great deal of uncertainty and contestation concerning professional learning policy and practices for teachers. My study takes the view that socio-cultural variation in teaching contexts and the unique character and needs of individual teachers, and the needs of institutions within which the teachers teach, make it impossible to determine a single, finite list of conditions or strategies to achieve significant and ‘effective’ professional learning.

## **2.8 Professional learning – ‘managerial’ versus ‘dialogic’ or ‘democratic’ approaches**

Parr (2010) describes the debates surrounding professional learning in the literature as “contrasting discourses in an ongoing struggle” (p. 186). This conflict is evident when critically engaging with research and policy documents. As I have shown earlier in this chapter, any study of teacher

learning must pay attention to the particular language used to describe or conceptualise that learning, and the knowledge underpinning that learning. In my own reading of the research and policy literature on professional learning, it is disconcerting to see the ways authors use the same language or terms to discuss competing or even opposite understandings of a concept. In this section of the chapter, I scrutinise two policy documents from different parts of the world in order to critically engage with the discourses of professional learning and teacher knowledge embodied within them. I am interested in the ways in which language is used to position teachers and their learning and, in a Bakhtinian sense, to identify the voices and ideologies dominant in each text. In my exploration of the policy documents I have been guided by the framework suggested by Kennedy (2014) in *Analysis of Aspects of CPD Policies Against Perspectives on Professionalism* (p. 695) and Doecke and Parr's (2005) *Contrasting Understandings of Professional Development and Professional Learning* (p. 2; see also Parr, 2010, p. 187). I undertake this exploration mindful of Parr's (2010) caution that because of the complexity of the conceptual issues I have been discussing up to now, professional learning policies and programs are often resistant to researchers' efforts to form neat categories and structures from them. I will begin with the earlier Australian document.

### **2.8.1 Australian Charter for the professional learning of teachers and school leaders: A shared responsibility and commitment (AITSL, 2012).**

This policy document was published by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), in August 2012 (AITSL, 2012), a body that is funded by the Australian Government and yet in some ways is independent of the government. It is significant, therefore, that the document is called a "Charter" (intentionally capitalised), which appears intended to emphasise the official nature of the text, something which is reinforced by the repetition (four times in the twelve page document) that AITSL is funded by the Australian Government. Again, in order to claim authority for the Charter, we read that it was written in consultation with a group of "experts", various "authorities" and representatives of teacher and principal associations. The rhetoric appears to be that the authority of the document cannot be challenged. Ostensibly, the language of the document is 'straightforward'. Indeed the word "straightforward" is used in the document to suggest that teachers will have no trouble understanding it or complying with its recommendations. Leaving aside the offensive patronising tone here in relation to teachers, the

implication is that there is no need for interpretation or critical engagement with the document and the language it uses.

The Charter defines professional learning as

The formal or informal learning experiences undertaken by teachers and school leaders that improve their individual professional practice, and a school's collective effectiveness, as measured by improved student learning, engagement with learning and wellbeing. At its most effective, professional learning develops individual and collective capacity across the teaching profession to address current and future challenges. (AITSL, 2012, p. 2)

The chief aim of that learning, as it is initially articulated in the AITSL Charter, appears to be that the learning should be open-ended and inclusive in nature. It should “promot[e] equity and excellence” and it should enable “all young Australians [to] becom[e] successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens” (p. 2). And yet immediately after these statements, the language changes to emphasise the imperative that professional learning must be seen to improve teaching practice and be shown to improve ““student outcomes”” (p. 2), a term mentioned 14 times in the short document. While these ‘outcomes’ are not specified, it is inferred that they are easily visible and measurable academic achievements, perhaps connected to high-stakes testing (although, again, this is not stated explicitly). Prøitz (2015) studies Norwegian education policy and concludes that although ‘learning outcomes’ can be defined in a variety of ways, there seems to be a prevailing and accepted interpretation of the concept and that it is “results-oriented, full ended, and measurable” (p. 289). On page 4 of the AITSL Charter, there is a reference to wider gains for students from the process: “... improving student learning, engagement with learning and wellbeing” (p. 4). Nevertheless, some researchers have suggested that AITSL’s professional learning policy is firmly grounded in “a deficit model of teachers” (Moni et al., 2014), directed towards identifying the deficits and then fixing them, whether they be deficits of teachers or deficits of their students. Such an approach aligns with Parr’s (2010) and Kennedy’s (2014) critiques of a “managerial” rhetoric associated with much contemporary professional learning policy documents.

The Charter instructs policy makers and educational leadership to ensure all teachers undertake professional learning: “The Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and

School Leaders... articulates the expectation that all teachers and school leaders actively engage in professional learning throughout their careers” (p. 2). This requirement is directed clearly at individual teachers, but cooperation between teachers is encouraged: “A high quality professional learning culture will be characterised by: disciplined collaboration aimed at specific and relevant goals that relate to the learning needs of students” (p. 3) and “collective responsibility for improving practice” (p. 3). This encouragement of collaborative learning practices is undercut somewhat by the requirement that improvements in practice and student learning outcomes should be measurable according to each individual teacher. This emphasis on accountability of individual teachers is more significant when one realises that there is no attention paid in the Charter document to the diversity of the professional learning needs of individual teachers or to the unique personal and professional experiences they bring to their learning; nor is there any guidance of the ways in which collegial professional learning can be quantified.

Parr (2010) explains that in “managerial understandings of professional development” (p. 187), professional learning tends to be considered a ‘one-size-fits-all’ entity, and so variations in context or setting or teacher identity are rendered either trivial or irrelevant. In fact, while the Charter begins by arguing that professional learning should be “matched to the experiences, strengths, current knowledge, career stage and goals of the adult learner” (p. 4), there is no direction as to how these variables will be accounted for in the generic directions that characterise the Charter. Rather, it simply states that teacher learning should be “aimed at specific and relevant goals that relate to the learning needs of students” (p. 3). Again, it is unclear as to who determines what the needs of students are, how those needs are determined and what kinds of needs are recognised. It is also unclear whether the reference to needs applies to individual students, groups of students, entire school bodies or Australian students in general.

Readers of the Charter are assured that its contents are based in “evidence” (p. 7), and this evidence appears to be in the form of mainly large-scale literature reviews, government reports and AITSL sponsored publications. The understandings of ‘evidence’ and ‘evidence based’ research underpinning the Charter is such that evidence “provides guidance on what effective professional learning looks like” (p. 3). And yet as mentioned earlier, the research literature shows that discussions about what constitutes evidence of professional learning remain lively, with a high degree of contestation about what constitutes valid evidence or indeed valid research. Large bodies

of literature exploring small-scale situated inquiries into professional learning are therefore overlooked or dismissed by the Charter as, presumably, not sufficiently “evidence based” (see King, 2014). Similarly, the Charter appears to assume that the impact of teacher professional learning should be easily is measured and firmly connected to teacher accountability: “sophisticated, robust, multi-method ways of evaluating professional learning are required to identify the impact and effect size of PL activities” (p. 3). As described earlier, many studies have argued that limiting the evaluation of teacher learning to quantitative, measurable factors like test scores, leads to a very narrow conceptualisation of teacher learning and inevitably overlooks research that explores the value of professional learning in, for instance, developing teacher identity and teacher well-being.

The Charter is clearly focused on ‘effective’ professional learning; indeed the word ‘effective’ or ‘effectiveness’ appears 19 times in the 12 page document. It joins the plethora of scholarly writings and policy papers described above which list characteristics of ‘effective’ professional learning (e.g. Blank, 2013; Cordingley, 2015; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Labone & Long, 2016). It pinpoints three major characteristics of effective professional learning: it must be relevant, collaborative and future focused. Most of these documents which discuss ‘effective’ professional learning are concerned with measuring impact on student learning despite the aforementioned difficulty in assessing the impact of teacher learning on student outcomes (Barrera-Pedemonte, 2016).

The Charter recommends teachers “reflect on, receive feedback on and improve their pedagogical practice” (p. 3), and it quotes OECD literature which recommends “individual and collaborative research, qualification programs and informal dialogue” (p. 4). It advocates learning which “provides opportunities to receive feedback on practice, and observe the practice of others; offers support to change practice through coaching, mentoring and reflection; provides opportunities to access and learn from experts” (p. 5). In addition, the Charter “promotes action research and inquiry and develops teachers as researchers” (p. 5). While the focus of learning here is not necessarily technical or skilled based, which Kennedy (2014) describes as managerial approaches, it does not neatly align with what she sees as the democratic “acknowledgement and articulation of values and beliefs that inform, support or inhibit acquisition and application of knowledge and skills” (Kennedy, 2014, p. 695). Although the Charter’s rhetoric suggests that many of the processes are encouraging of professional autonomy and academic independence, when

juxtaposing them with the standards based context in which teacher learning in Australia takes place and the narrow emphasis on student learning outcomes as the main incentive for learning, it appears that there are some tensions within the document.

The Charter is written in seemingly simple, straightforward language that avoids specialist terms or research based discourses, and this is part of the repeated reassurance that the explanations being given to readers is straightforward and that “there is *clear* evidence...” (my emphasis, p. 6) for all of the claims being made in the document. Nonetheless, there are few specific references to studies or sources in the literature that might support these claims. The reader is encouraged to think that if the directions contained in the Charter are carefully adhered to, the desired goals will be attained. Although there is a disclaimer, midway through the Charter that “changing culture and professional practices is not easy” (p. 6), the clear message appears to be that “the results [of following the Charter’s advice] will be worth the effort” (p. 6).

### **2.8.2 Standard for teachers’ professional development (Department for Education, 2016a, 2016b).**

In July 2016, the UK Department for Education issued a brief single page declaration of professional learning policy titled “*Standard for Teachers’ Professional Development*” (Department for Education, 2016a). The standard was accompanied by a 14 page implementation guide for all involved in the facilitation of and participation in teacher professional learning (Department for Education, 2016b). In many ways, this document echoes the rhetoric of the Australian ‘Charter’ through the use of simple and straightforward (non-specialist) language and its confident claims and forceful directives, avoiding at all costs any acknowledgement of the high level of contestation about any of the issues touched upon in the document. It is significant, in this regard, that the UK Department for Education has chosen the term ‘professional development’ for the ongoing learning of teachers, and no explanation for the choice of terminology is offered.

The rhetoric of this policy document, like the AITSL Charter (AITSL, 2012), suggests its main aim is improving the learning of school students. A diagram on page 5 illustrates, in a strictly linear fashion, progression from ‘explicit professional development’ to improved teacher practice and then to improved pupil outcomes. No other options or variations are available in the flow chart.

The central aims of the “Standard” are to “raise expectations for professional development, to focus on achieving the greatest improvement in pupil outcomes, and to develop our teachers as respected members of the profession” (p. 4). This last aim might appear to be broadening the scope of the standard but this possibility is diluted when it is made clear the professional development must be shown to improve pupil achievement levels. The document stresses the importance of teachers at the outset, as part of the warrant for the standard: “the most important profession for our nation’s future” (p. 3); and again “teachers make the education of their pupils their first concern” (p. 3). The complexity of teachers’ work is also recognised through the stressing of, for example, “the thousands of professional decisions that must be made every day...” (p. 3). Despite this appreciation, or perhaps because of it, it is argued that teacher professional development must be externally mandated in the form of a ‘standard’. The word ‘standard’ appears in close proximity with the word ‘expectation’ six times in the document along with the requirement that teachers “fully commit to effective professional development practices” (p. 11). The nature of the ‘full commitment’ is difficult to determine, but what is clear that teachers must “take responsibility for their own professional development” (p. 11).

Teacher development is presented in some rhetoric, as a collaborative process. Teachers are encouraged and perhaps even required to work together and give and receive feedback. The document suggests that teachers are capable of this but they are presumed to need expert involvement from some ‘other’ to challenge and improve their practice. Like the AITSL document, the guidelines are imposed centrally from the government body that is publishing the standard, and yet the rhetoric of the Standard is such that the management and responsibility for professional learning will be controlled at the school level. Again, in a gesture perhaps intended to value and respect the individual needs of teachers and their classrooms, teachers are required to “translate ideas into relevant practice and knowledge for specific classes and pupils, making time for ongoing practice and review” (p. 10).

Teacher learning, as it is conceptualised in the Standard, “develops practice and theory together; links pedagogical knowledge with subject/specialist knowledge” (p. 8). Although it is unclear as to how this knowledge is to be developed, there are some features of social learning mentioned in the document. For example we read that teacher learning “builds-in peer support for problem solving; includes focussed discussion about practice” (p. 9).

This Standard policy is firmly grounded in the widely documented approaches to standards based teacher accountability. Thus school leaders, teachers and providers of professional development are all urged to take individual responsibility for identifying desired outcomes of professional development before the learning takes place, and then for demonstrating that the desired outcomes have been achieved after the learning has taken place. The warrant for the Standard is claimed as “the best available research” (p. 3). Similarly, it is explained that “the expert group which developed the standard and guidance drew extensively on the most recent review of evidence on effective teacher professional development” (p. 12).

Discourses of ‘effectiveness’ as mentioned earlier pervade the document. The word ‘effective’/‘effectiveness’ appears 28 times in the main body of the document. It is argued that “not all professional development is equally effective” (p. 3) and that “the best available research shows that the most effective professional development practices share similar characteristics” (p. 3). ‘Effective’, in the Standard, is unproblematically defined in terms of visible and measurable outcomes: – for example, “professional development is most effective when activities have a clear purpose and link to pupil outcomes” (p. 7).

In this last section of my literature review chapter, I have chosen to critically engage with the discourse of professional learning in two recent policy documents from different places in the world. I have restricted my discussion here to two documents because of restrictions of space in this chapter, but in Chapter 3, I go on to scrutinise recent Israeli policy documents in similar ways in order to understand the ways in which various teacher learning discourses are employed in the national site for this PhD study.

## **2.9 Provisional conclusion**

My PhD thesis joins the substantial body of literature arguing the importance of teachers continuing to learn in dialogic, collaborative ways throughout their careers. In this chapter, I have shown the consensus around the view that teacher learning is imperative in the challenging work that teachers do every single day in their classrooms. Professional learning, when it is significant and relevant, can indeed keep teachers up-to-date and equip them with the knowledge they need

in our rapidly changing world, can strengthen teacher identity and thereby is likely to empower them in their practice. Following on from my critical review of a diverse range of literature about teacher learning, I have articulated the conceptual standpoint of this PhD: that it conceptualises teacher learning as social and dialogic, flexible and dynamic in nature, a complex and intricate process which cannot always be measured in immediately visible and quantitatively measurable ways. I have drawn attention to the ways in which teacher learning can occur in both formal and informal settings – in planned, predefined programs, in academic post-graduate courses, and also in the complex day-to-day dialogue teachers maintain with their students and their communities, with colleagues and with other professional bodies. The characteristics of ‘effective’ teacher learning mentioned here can be useful when investigating the learning process and the critical reflection of teachers, school leaders and policy makers that I will go on to do in the analysis chapters of the thesis. The discourse of ‘effectiveness’ discussed in this chapter provides one form of language, although not without its drawbacks, which enables me to discuss professional learning and to grapple with the diversity of perspectives. I have provided and critically scrutinised various lists of characteristics of teacher learning and considered the value of such lists. I have also cautioned against taking such lists as a totally reliable framework to evaluate any learning program for any teachers in any professional settings. Any discussion on professional learning for teachers must take into account the complexity of learning, knowledge, power, and professional identity.

In Chapter three, I critically explore the immediate policy context in which this study is grounded. I focus on Israeli educational policy and examine how it frames the professional learning of teachers in schools in general and the WDLT professional learning program investigated in this thesis in particular.

## Chapter 3 – Professional learning for primary school teachers: The Israeli policy context

Significant changes in Israeli educational policy and practice in the field of professional development or professional learning<sup>10</sup> for teachers have occurred since the publication of a significant policy document in 2003 by the Ministry of Education, Director General Code of By-Law (Ministry of Education, 2003a).<sup>11</sup> At that time, detailed instructions were released for the pooling of all resources directed towards professional development. *Pisga* centres were established<sup>12</sup> throughout regions of Israel for the support and management of teacher learning in different geographical areas. Today, in 2017, there are 56 *Pisga* teachers' centres in Israel, under the control of the Ministry of Education and the particular departments responsible for the implementation and the application of professional development in the various districts. At the same time, teachers' colleges and educational faculties in universities were given a central position in the running of special programs for teacher professional development (Avidor & Avidov-Ungar, 2010<sup>13</sup>).

### 3.1 The "*Ofek-Chadash*" ["New Horizon"] reform in Israel

During the 2007-2008 school year, the "*Ofek-Chadash*"<sup>14</sup> ["New Horizon"] reform agreement, binding for all primary and many junior high school teachers, was signed with *Histadrut HaMorim* [The Teachers' Union]. The agreement contained a national program to advance education in Israel in primary and junior high schools. The reform included four main, complementary targets: (1) boosting the status of teachers and raising their salaries; (2) providing equal opportunities for all

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<sup>10</sup> I discussed the use of the terms: 'professional development' and 'professional learning' in the introduction of this thesis. In this chapter I have most often adhered to the term 'professional development' in order to remain consistent with the language of the Israeli policy documents under discussion here.

<sup>11</sup> For a clear overview of the Israeli education system written in English, see the introduction in Azulay, Ashkenazi, Gabriellov, Levi-Mazloum, and Ben Dov (2013).

<sup>12</sup> The name of the *Pisga* Teachers' Centres is an acronym; *Merkaz Lepituach Siglei Horaa* [Centre for the Development of Teaching Personnel]. Sometimes it is transliterated: *Pisgah*. The word '*Pisga*' can be translated as 'summit'.

<sup>13</sup> Avidov-Ungar was a leader in the *Layout for Professional Development* in the "*Ofek-Chadash*" reform, Ministry of Education" – see [http://www.achva.ac.il/sites/default/files/CV\\_Orit\\_2013\\_english.pdf](http://www.achva.ac.il/sites/default/files/CV_Orit_2013_english.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> The reform name is sometimes transliterated: "*Ofek-Hadash*"

students and raising student achievement levels; (3) improving the school social climate; and (4) empowering and expanding the authority of the school principal (Ministry of Education, 2008a). The reform defined various pedagogical and administrative issues, among them the professional development of teachers. This was the first time that a systematic national policy for the professional development of teachers was established in Israel (Avidov-Ungar, Rosner, & Rosenberg, 2013).

Policy and practices in the area of professional development for teachers in Israel changed substantially as a result of the "*Ofek-Chadash*" reform. This reform redefined the work conditions of teachers in Israel and produced significant changes in their professional lives. For instance, alongside the requirement that school teachers be on-site in schools for longer hours and spend designated time working with small groups or individual pupils, teachers were also *required* by the new policy to participate in in-service programs throughout their professional lives. The introduction to part A of "*Policy Guidelines for the Professional Development of Educational Employees*"<sup>15</sup> in '*Ofek-Chadash*' (Ministry of Education, 2010) states: "One of the conditions for the advancement of educational employees, in the "*Ofek-Chadash*" reform framework, is the fulfilment of defined criteria of professional development" (p. 6, section 1.1). The same introduction explains: "The continual acquisition of knowledge and professional skills, throughout the professional life of the educational employee (life-long learning), is crucial for the preservation of relevant and high quality teaching in the education system" (p. 6, section 1.2). Later in the document, the amount of professional development activity is prescribed: "Every educational employee is required to study 60 hours each year, as part of his/her professional advancement" (p. 14).

For some, this new reform agreement (together with the "*Oz LeTmurah*" [Courage to Change] reform in high schools) was a breakthrough in professional development policy for Israeli teachers (Avidov-Ungar et al., 2013). Avidov-Ungar et al. (2013) claim that the "*Ofek Chadash*" reform established professional development processes designed to prepare the educational system for the

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<sup>15</sup> I have translated the Hebrew term: '*oved horaa*', as educational employee. This language is one of the ways in which teachers are portrayed as technicians and is resonant with the de-skilling and de-professionalisation of educators discussed in the literature (e.g. Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006; Endacott et al., 2015; Gur, 2014; Milner, 2013).

21st century and for “creating a shared pedagogical language and a shared culture of teacher learning” (p. 166).

According to Avidov-Ungar et al. (2013), another welcome change was the redefining of what they describe as “the products of professional development” (p. 166), the assessment tasks required of teachers participating in programs. These were newly defined as inquiry based tasks, problem solving, planning and development; in most instances, the tasks aimed at connecting the learning in the professional development program to day-to-day practice in teachers’ professional environments.

Consistent with a number of regulatory regimes in the western world – e.g. in Australia, *The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL, 2012) – the “*Ofek-Chadash*” reform documents divide the careers of teachers and their corresponding professional development into stages on a continuum. According to the document, the learning process of teachers begins with pre-service “training” in faculties of education in universities or colleges, and is followed by a stage of induction and internship as graduates begin their careers in schools. Practicing Israeli teachers progress from levels 1-3 (entry level) to levels 4-6 (consolidation level), to levels 7-10 (advanced consolidation level), and, after a minimum of ten years, to levels 10+ (expert level). Throughout their career, teachers are expected to engage in a continuing education program and when they move into the higher levels, they are provided with additional opportunities for academic<sup>16</sup> professional development. Each stage is defined in the policy documents (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2008a), together with specific requirements for learning. Areas of development required for the advancement of an teacher from level to level are: disciplinary content, didactics-educational-moral content, management and organisation skills. In this chapter, I am concentrating on the professional learning of practicing teachers in levels 1-9 and those who have reached the expert stage, the levels relevant to the teachers participating in the WDLT that is the focus of this study.

A major change evident in the policy documents from this period was the requirement that teachers at all levels enrol in programs directly connected to the academic subjects that they teach, courses

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<sup>16</sup> Since the 2011-2012 school year, teachers in levels 7-9 and 10+ are required to participate in programs run by *academic* institutions (universities and colleges) recognised by the Council for Higher Education. This is in contrast with the programs for PD run in the *Pisga* centres which are not called “academic programs”.

appropriate for the teacher's level of seniority (Ministry of Education, 2010). Occasionally in the document, there are specific programs mandated for certain teacher populations (*Kav LeChinuch* team, 2011), (e.g. literacy for grade 3 and 4 teachers in the 2010-2011 school year). If they desire, those teachers participating in compulsory units are permitted to accumulate more than the usual 60 hours for advancement purposes (Ministry of Education, 2010).

The "*Ofek-Chadash*" reform document recognises the importance of professional development for teachers as part of the process of strengthening the status of the teaching profession. According to the *Kit for School Principals* (Ministry of Education, 2008a), the main objective of professional development is "to improve the status and the quality of the educational employee on the professional career continuum, by means of structured and systematic professional development, in order to utilise personal and pedagogical qualities" (p. 2). Professional development is seen as central to the development of a culture of continuing learning throughout the professional path:

Professional development of educational employees is the constant development of professional knowledge and skills throughout their professional life (Lifelong learning). As an integral part of their work, the educational employee broadens his<sup>17</sup> knowledge, deepens his understandings of teaching-learning processes, creates new teaching methods and enhances skills in order to improve the functioning and the achievement levels of pupils. (Ministry of Education, 2008a, p. 1)

Avidov-Ungar et al. (2013) endorse this policy in Israel, arguing that the purpose of these kinds of continuing education programs in Israel is to improve the quality of teaching, to improve student achievement levels in the various areas (academic, social and moral), and to cultivate teacher and student excellence. According to Avidov-Ungar et al., this process best takes place "systematically" (p. 167) through learning and classroom implementation which develops accountability and professional commitment.

Avidov-Ungar et al. (2013) identify seven premises behind the professional development policy in the "*Ofek-Chadash*" reform:

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<sup>17</sup> This statement is clearly written in the masculine gender, as required in Hebrew for mixed audiences of men and women. Interestingly, there is no note of explanation (which commonly appears), explaining that this is a grammatical choice but the authors are directing their text at both men and women equally.

1. *“Educators are professionals, possessing theoretical and experiential knowledge in both content areas and pedagogy”*. Many researchers have warned that this premise should not be taken for granted in an era when governments and media voices can be seen as attempting to reduce teachers to technicians in what is often referred to as de-skilling (see Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006; Endacott et al., 2015; Gur, 2014; Milner, 2013).
2. *“The educator, his or herself, the principal directly responsible for him or her and the subject inspectorate are responsible and committed to emphasis on professional development and its implementation”*. This premise describes a partnership between the educator, the school principal and the inspectorate overseeing the school, where all parties are obligated to work together towards achieving appropriate professional learning for the teacher. Quality professional development is assumed to be in the interest of all parties.
3. *“Personal growth, the broadening of horizons and the construction of the social-moral worldview of the educator are significant features of the professional development of the teacher along his or her career path”*. While Mahony (2009) proposes that by its “very nature educating people is a moral enterprise” (p. 985), the attention paid in this premise to the moral and social knowledge of teachers should not be taken for granted. According to Elbaz (1992), these elements are often overlooked in policy making (and, for that matter, in educational research).
4. *“Educational knowledge is based on educational philosophy, theoretical research and on educational practice”*. This broad conception of teacher knowledge incorporates both knowledge produced in research in institutions of higher education and knowledge constructed by teachers in their practice in schools (see my discussion of teacher knowledge in 2.4).
5. *“The themes in PD for educators will focus on classroom education, content area knowledge and positions maintained. Implementation is the responsibility of the educational institution”*. Here it is implied that professional learning should be appropriate for the kind of work a teacher is performing in school, taking into account that each educator fulfils different roles and teaches particular subjects at different age levels. The policy here is acknowledging the importance of schools (not governments) overseeing the transfer of learning from professional development programs to the classroom.
6. *The construction of the educator’s professional development program will be based on the subjects that the educator teaches in the classroom, on the main role that he or she fills at school and the stage he or she is at in their career*. Continuing on from the previous premise, professional

development programs and materials should be relevant and appropriate for the teacher's classroom practice, extra school responsibilities and level of seniority.

7. *Areas of development necessary for the advancement of the educator are in the area of the disciple, the area of didactics... and the area of management - organisation* (pp. 167-8). According to the policy, teachers' learning should involve a balance of content, didactics and management. The explicit point made here is that none of these areas alone is sufficient for teachers' learning and development.

Three years after the publication of the "*Ofek-Chadash*" reform, the Israeli Ministry of Education (2010) outlined eight aims of professional development for teachers<sup>18</sup> in Israel. I list them here, and provide a brief comment on each, as part of my critical presentation of the policy landscape of professional learning in Israel, in which I designed and led the WDLT programs for literacy teachers in primary schools. These aims are:

1. *The consolidation of professional identity in order to utilize the personal and professional abilities of the educational employee.* This first aim acknowledges that teachers all possess unique abilities, personal and professional, and seeks to connect those abilities to professional identity. There may indeed be an acknowledgement in this aim of the uniqueness of each and every teacher, which has the potential to lead to a different view of PD than the typical "one size fits all" approach (Lieberman, 1995, p. 19).

2. *Raising personal and professional capabilities in order to improve the achievements required in his or her role.* This statement is extremely open and it is unclear what kinds of capabilities are included and for what kinds of roles.

3. *The development and understanding of the essence of professional commitment in order to ensure quality teaching and learning for pupils.* Making a similar connection between commitment and 'effective' teaching, Day and Gu (2007) observe:

the provision of responsive and differentiated support to meet teachers' professional and personal learning needs at different times in their work and lives can help counter declining commitment trajectories, enhancing the continuity of positive

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<sup>18</sup> These aims too are clearly written in the masculine gender, as required in Hebrew for mixed audiences of men and women. Interestingly, there is no note of explanation (which commonly appears), explaining that this is a grammatical choice but the authors are referring to both men and women equally.

development of teachers' professional commitment and, thus, their effectiveness.  
(pp. 439-440)

However, other researchers have suggested that “some (PD) activities are designed... to build or renew teachers' motivation and commitment to teaching, without necessarily changing teaching practices” (Garet et al., 2001, p. 942). The Ministry of Education translates this commitment to quality and learning in the classroom, a connection which it is difficult to evaluate.

4. *Ensuring optimal performance of educators as staff members in academic institutions and as partners in the success of the institution in which he or she works.* This aim relates to teachers as part of a community; they are related to both as “staff members” and as “partners”. This statement connects to the conclusion made by Clement and Vandenberghe (2000) that teacher professional learning cannot be regarded as a solitary pursuit and raises questions of how teachers enrol in PD programs, alone or in groups, how learning from PD is transferred back to the school and how that learning connects to the school organisation.

5. *The personal-professional development of the educator as a person with an educational, social and ethical world view.* This aim returns to the content of the PD and may also be connected to the pedagogy of this PD. Kitchen (2010) suggests, for example, that undertaking ‘relational professional development’ may contribute to the way a teacher views his/her role in the classroom, regardless of the content of the PD program attended. Some professional development programs recognised by “*Ofek-Chadash*” include ethical and social topics (e.g. “Personal empowerment for teachers”; “Ethical thinking based on children’s rights in schools”; “Team work”; and “Humour and happiness for personal and social empowerment”<sup>19</sup>).

6. *Improvement of the educator's ability to effectively respond to the needs of pupils, parents and colleagues, in order to reach goals and aims, defined in accordance with personal needs and the needs of the educational framework.* Teacher response to other stakeholders in the teacher’s professional environment is highlighted in this aim. Interestingly, this is presented as a means of attending to each teacher’s personal needs alongside the needs of the educational organisation.

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<sup>19</sup> 2014-2015 school year based on the “Ofek-Chadash” mitveh (layout) retrieved from the Tiberius *Pisga* Centre website: [https://sites.google.com/a/p.tveria.tzafonet.org.il/pisga-tverya/home/courses\\_ofek2015](https://sites.google.com/a/p.tveria.tzafonet.org.il/pisga-tverya/home/courses_ofek2015)

There is no mention of what those personal needs may be, except that they may be explored in programs such as “Personal empowerment for teachers” or “Dealing with conditions of pressure and burnout”<sup>20</sup>.

7. *To allow movement and advancement on the scale of professional levels.* This aim refers to the “*Ofek-Chadash*” framework and the continuum (or “scale”) on which teachers are supposed to advance throughout their professional lives.

8. *Assimilation of Ministry of Education policy in order to achieve required objectives (p. 8).* This final aim refers to the organisational role of teacher learning, including the assimilation and implementation of Ministry of Education policies and guidelines. Here PD is understood as a means of achieving teacher compliance. An example of this was the mandating of PD in order to ensure universal uptake of the Ministry’s new policy on the teaching of reading. Following *The Shapira Report*<sup>21</sup>, a government inquiry in 2005 into the teaching of reading in schools, the Ministry of Education had published guidelines for the teaching and evaluation of reading and writing in grade 1 classrooms and provided compulsory professional development programs for all teachers in grades 1 and 2.

While these eight aims for professional development cover a wide range of issues, they are non-specific and remain seemingly open to interpretation. In part 2 of this chapter, I explore some of the differences between the sentiments expressed in these policy aims and accounts of teachers’ experiences of professional development in Israel today.

Ministry of Education documents (e.g. 2008a) make it quite clear that the school principal should be seen as the manager with responsibility for developing human resources in the school. In this role, the principal is responsible for developing a school wide PD program incorporating PD goals for teachers as individuals and as a group. Principals are required to personally discuss this program with each teacher and to oversee the execution of the program over a number of years.

Today, primary school teachers in Israel at levels 1-6 are required to undertake professional development an average of 60 hours a year in two separate continuing education programs, both

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<sup>20</sup> 2014-2015 school year based on the “*Ofek-Chadash*” *mitveh* [layout] retrieved from the Tiberius *Pisga* Centre website: [https://sites.google.com/a/p.tveria.tzafonet.org.il/pisga-tverya/home/courses\\_ofek2015](https://sites.google.com/a/p.tveria.tzafonet.org.il/pisga-tverya/home/courses_ofek2015)

<sup>21</sup> See Brosh-Vaitz (2005).

of which need to be recognised by the guidelines of the "*Ofek-Chadash*" reform. Generally, these programs are offered in the regional *Pisga* centres but there are also school-based programs, initiated and managed by school principals in conjunction with the regional centre. Most teachers are unable to achieve recognition for professional learning exceeding 60 hours. A study by Avidov-Ungar and Reingold (2012) concludes that some Ministry representatives in the various provinces are dissatisfied with this limitation. Avidov-Ungar and Reingold (2012) discuss additional increasing dissatisfaction among some Ministry representatives in the districts with the decision to situate professional development programs for teachers in the *Pisga* centres and not in academic institutions of higher education (colleges and universities)<sup>22</sup>.

In return for their participation in 60 hours of recognised professional development programs, Israeli teachers who progress from level to level on the professional continuum receive an additional sum in their monthly salary. Since the introduction of this new program, most teachers are known to participate in two professional learning programs every year. Teachers enrolled in academic study at a Masters or PhD level are not required to fulfil the 60 hour quota. They receive their raise in salary on the completion of the degree. It is reported that these financial incentives are extremely important to teachers in a country where teachers are still poorly paid compared to average incomes<sup>23</sup>. According to a study by *Hareshut Haartzit Lemedida Vehaaracha Bechinuch* [National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation] (RAMA, 2011), after three years of the "*Ofek-Chadash*" reform, over half of Israeli primary school teachers working under the reform agreements (51%) reported high levels of contentment with the salary change. This is in marked contrast to the figure of 38% satisfaction before the "*Ofek-Chadash*" reform in teacher salaries (RAMA, 2011). Nonetheless, the RAMA study reports that Israeli teachers still do not believe that their salaries are adequate considering the long work hours required.

In addition to the wide range of discipline based programs offered to teachers, there are additional PD programs of a more specialised nature run by the Israeli Ministry of Education to prepare teachers for specific roles. These include: vice principals, heads of school evaluation, road safety

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<sup>22</sup> According to Avidov-Ungar and Reingold (2012), this dissatisfaction was not present in previous studies. Those contending the present situation propose that *Pisga* centres retain administrative roles in the running of teacher PD and that the programs themselves be offered in colleges and universities.

<sup>23</sup> According to an Israeli financial newspaper, *Kalkalist*, in August 2013, teachers need to work for 10 years in order to reach the average wage in the Israeli market. <http://www.calcalist.co.il/local/articles/0,7340,L-3611313,00.html>

leaders etc. These programs often take place in universities or colleges and may be longer than the 60 hour general quota. These programs, too, are grounded in the reform policy guidelines.

Almost all of the continuing education programs in Israel today, including the WDLT program which is the focus of my study, are run under the auspices of the “*Ofek-Chadash*” policy. Most programs are delivered during the school term after school hours (usually 4pm until 7pm). Often teachers arrive straight from school. A limited number of programs are offered in the summer school break in order to allow teachers to complete their hours without interrupting their teaching time.

### **3.2 Flexibility within the “*Ofek-Chadash*” framework**

In March 2014, under the leadership of a new Minister of Education, the Ministry of Education initiated an additional, alternate mode of professional development (Ministry of Education, 2014; Rosner, 2014), following a pedagogical initiative to encourage ‘significant learning’ in schools. Alongside programs to encourage pedagogical innovation in the classroom, the Ministry opened up opportunities for flexibility in professional development. Rosner (2014) describes this ‘opening up’ in the following way:

At the base of the idea of flexibility lies the outlook that the department has full confidence in the teaching employees, leading committee and principal, who know what the pedagogical needs of the workers in the institution are. There is room to afford the teaching employees choice in methodologies, frameworks, content and dialogue circles according to their professional development needs. We see the schools as the central focus, but not the only one, for the professional development of their staff. (p. 1)

According to Rosner (2014) the expected outcomes of this “pedagogical flexibility” (p. 1) are:

1. A significant learning experience for teachers and their students
2. Discussion on moral and social issues
3. Improvement of student achievement levels

4. Relevant and high quality responses provided to the needs of the school and its teaching employees
5. The creation of a culture of professional learning communities for continual renewal
6. The dispersion and management of knowledge from professional development (p. 1)

In this program, schools are encouraged to build a program, based on teacher learning inside the school and beyond the school. The following options are available:

1. Learning frameworks circles inside the school, learning in professional organisations, personal learning, learning in PD programs at the *Pisga* centre theoretical study, viewing lessons, coaching and mentoring online learning, simulations and videoing lessons...
2. Methodologies; Peer learning, questioning, observations and feedback; Professional support groups, analysing data; Reading professional literature and discussion; Learning from success stories, action research; Seminars for the development of teaching-learning-assessment, simulations, discussion on dilemmas... (p. 1)

According to Ministry publications (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2014), schools interested in taking part in the program can receive 30 hours with an external leader of professional learning. Teachers must engage in 30 or 60 hours of professional learning in this framework in a single school year.

Jaquith et al. (2010) warn that if teachers are required to participate in a certain number of hours of PD and are not provided with high-quality learning opportunities, this can be the cause of disgruntlement. Some of the data in my study suggests that some Israeli teachers are indeed dissatisfied with the quality of professional learning programs provided. According to Jaquith et al., state initiated evaluation processes can help minimise frustration.

### 3.2.1 Guidelines for optimal continuing education programs

Following the “*Ofek-Chadash*” reform, the Ministry of Education department responsible for professional development circulated guidelines for “optimal continuing education” programs (e.g. Cohen & Rotem, 2011, p. 9-10). According to Cohen and Rotem (2011), and it needs to be understood that these authors are speaking on behalf of the Ministry, continuing education programs are high in quality and are significant when:

1. They are directed at the heart of teaching - the advancement of pupils. Programs should contribute to deepening curricular content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and thus advance pupils.
2. They are grounded in clear goals and expected outputs.
3. They are comprised of up to date and relevant theoretical elements together with practical and reflective elements. These elements should be connected and be expected to influence the work of educators.
4. They should allow time for peer learning and examining participants' attempts to incorporate new approaches in their classrooms.
5. Learning in the continuing education programs should be facilitated in a range of teaching techniques suited to the discipline, in order to provide a role model for participants. (p. 10)

While it is expected that teacher educators who run the PD programs adhere to these guidelines, apart from publication on *Pisga* centre websites<sup>24</sup>, there is little or no attempt to check that the teacher educators are familiar with the document or that their program adheres to the details in the policy. In my experience running programs in eight different *Pisga* centres, for example, there was only one centre in which this document was presented to me personally and discussed, prior to opening the program. Similarly, this requirement for “optimal” PD is backed up by policy based requirements for program evaluation. These guidelines are also utilised in different ways and at different levels by the various *Pisga* centres. Cohen and Rotem (2011) describe various tools available for *Pisga* centre staff in the Northern Province to evaluate the work of teacher educators (e.g. mid-program questionnaires, final questionnaires, observations, and telephone interviews with participants). While it is recommended that at least two of the tools are utilised, from a survey

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<sup>24</sup> e.g. <https://sites.google.com/a/p-afula.tzafonet.org.il/home/home>

of *Pisga* centre websites and from my experience as a teacher educator, there is great variety in evaluation practices from centre to centre. The guidelines for maintaining PD quality and the evaluation practices designed to complement them are present in the Israeli PD context but do not appear to be binding or enforced by the Ministry department responsible for the programs. It appears *Pisga* centres are granted a degree of freedom to develop their own evaluation frameworks and function differently in this respect. This is potentially positive, in that appears to be respecting the professionalism and integrity of the teacher educator ‘providers’. However, the apparent lack of accountability may be seen as worrying given the investment that the Ministry is making in the PD programs to transform teaching practices and cultures in Israel.

### **3.3 Israeli policy in comparison to other parts of the world**

In this section, paying close attention to the policy language, I compare Israeli professional learning policy documents with similar documents in with other western countries. Terms used in the Israeli policy include ‘*mitveh*’ [layout, route or guidelines] (Ministry of Education, 2010) and ‘*hanchayot*’ [directions or instructions] (Ministry of Education, 2010). It is significant that words such as ‘*klallim*’ [rules] or ‘*standartim*’ [standards] were not chosen. Policy presented in terms of guidelines appear to be framed as recommendations rather than as binding regulations. In this respect, the Israeli policy landscape for professional development stands in sharp contrast with the Australian policy context (e.g. AITSL, 2012) in which discussions of professional development and policy are saturated by references to ‘standards’ and ‘accountability’ (see Gannon, 2012), and where the onus is on individual teachers to demonstrate that they have acquired a particular level in order to renew their registration. Australian teachers themselves are responsible for recording the PD activities that they undertake and must then use those records as proof of fulfilling the standards. Similarly, in most US states, teaching licence renewal is dependent upon teachers demonstrating that they have achieved various PD standards (Jaquith et al., 2010). In Israel, recording participation in PD is the responsibility of the *Pisga* centre and the Ministry of Education. While teachers are rewarded, an inducement, for participation in terms of professional advancement and a boost to their wages, there is no penalty for teachers who choose not to participate.

In Israel, there are no benchmarks for the evaluation of programs delivered under the auspices of *Pisga* centres, but as mentioned earlier, guidelines have been published that allows for evaluation to take place (see Cohen & Rotem, 2011). It should be noted, however, that in my experience as a leader of government endorsed professional development activities, the evaluation process varies significantly from centre to centre (even in the same province) and in some it is minimal.

It is perhaps dangerous to make comparisons between countries based on simple numerical figures, but it is worth noting that most Australian teachers are required to participate in 100 PD hours over a five year period in order to renew their professional registration (e.g., VIT, 2015). On average, that is 20 hours per year, a lot less than the 60 hours yearly required of Israeli teachers. In Australia, professional development activities are required to address professional standards which are divided into three domains: professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement (AITSL, 2011). In some Australian states, teachers must choose programs which align with the standards in each of the three domains every year. In South Australia, for example, teachers are required to complete 60 hours of professional learning in a three year period for registration (Teacher Registration Board of South Australia)<sup>25</sup>. According to the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities<sup>26</sup>, in New South Wales, 50 of the 100 hours spent in professional learning must be in Quality Teaching Council (QTC) courses (high-quality PD courses), while in Queensland, the Queensland College of Teachers<sup>27</sup> does not require any of the required 20 hours per year to be completed in authorised frameworks. In the Northern Territory<sup>28</sup>, half of the 100 hours of professional learning over the registration period of five years, must be completed outside the school in which the teacher works. In Israel, only formal continuing education programs following the “*Ofek-Chadash*” guidelines are acceptable, although these can be school based or regional.

Another difference between Israeli professional learning policy documents and similar documents in with other western countries concerns professional advancement throughout teachers’ careers. As described earlier, the Israeli “*Ofek-Chadash*” documents divide the professional development path of teacher into four stages on a continuum. This division is however, different in nature to

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.trb.sa.edu.au/about-professional-learning>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.nswteachers.nsw.edu.au/current-teachers/>

<sup>27</sup> <http://qct.edu.au/pdf/CPDPolicyFramework.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.trb.nt.gov.au/registration/fully-registered-teachers/information-sheet-2>

that in other countries. The Australian AITSL document (2011), for example, divides a teacher's career into four stages, beginning after the initial teacher education stage: (i) graduate teachers; (ii) proficient teachers; (iii) highly accomplished teachers; and (iv) lead teachers. Whereas in this Australian policy, emphasis is on professionalisation and proficiency – measured by whether teachers have met particular standards for this stage, in the Israeli policy, any teacher's status at a particular time tends to be measured by the number of years they have served as a teacher.

It is worthwhile noting that in the US, following the development of professional standards for teaching in the 1990s, teachers in that country have been able to apply to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards for certification as "highly accomplished teachers" (Darling-Hammond, 2012, p. 143). Although the process is not mandated, certification is granted to teachers who provide evidence of their high quality performance in a practice portfolio and pass an additional assessment. Avidov-Ungar et al. (2013) describe the very different process in which Israeli teachers progress to the highest levels on the professional development continuum: level 7 - "the teacher as initiator and implementer of educational programs", level 8 - "the teacher as inquirer into his or her own practice", and level 9 - "the teacher as senior coach". This progression is a direct continuation of previous professional development but participation must be in particular designated professional development programs and an additional school evaluation must be performed by the school principal.

As discussed earlier, the range of activities considered professional learning 'that counts' differs between countries. In Australia, according to the Victorian Institute of Teaching, professional development activities may include: school based curriculum days, meetings, professional conferences, seminars, workshops and networks, research, training and professional reading (VIT, 2015). In the final report of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) BERA-RSA inquiry into the role of research in teacher education (BERA, 2014), the authors recommend British teachers having the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues from their own schools and other institutions, including teachers and researchers based in higher education. According to that report, collaborative enquiry, such as peer observations and engagement in professional dialogue around those observations, enable teachers to learn from and with each other and promote critical examination of their practice. This kind of enquiry appears to be valued less in Israel, where only formal programs recognised by the "*Ofek-Chadash*" guidelines are acceptable. The only way that

the varied kinds of professional learning which are carried out daily in schools can be counted is when the school as a whole joins the *gmishut pedagogit* [flexible pedagogy] framework mentioned earlier in 3.2 (Ministry of Education, 2014). There is no mention in other “*Ofek-Chadash*” policy documents of activities such as professional reading or membership in professional organisations, or action research carried out by teachers. Nor is there mention of the rich professional learning reported in the BERA report, when teachers work together, observe each other teaching and engage in dialogue surrounding those experiences. With the single exception of the 2014 initiative mentioned earlier (Ministry of Education, 2014; Rosner, 2014), Israeli Ministry of Education documents (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2010) otherwise relate to the formal continuing education program, as the basic unit of PD teachers can undertake.

In the final report of the British BERA-RSA inquiry into the role of research in teacher education, (BERA, 2014), the authors recommend teacher engagement with educational research as a significant form of professional development. Similarly, Doecke et al. (2008), in their large-scale inquiry into teacher professional learning in Australia, advocate strongly for the link between collaborative practitioner inquiry and teacher professional learning. A major part of both reports is devoted to the benefits of teacher practitioner research, carried out in classrooms and schools by practicing teachers. Apart from the framework offering “*gmishut pedagogit*” [“pedagogical flexibility”] (Ministry of Education, 2014), the “*Ofek-Chadash*” documents do not contain recommendations for teacher research and/or the engagement with professional literature.

### **3.3.1 Definition of professional learning in Israel**

Although, as explained earlier, there is no universally accepted definition of professional learning (e.g. Doecke et al., 2008), policy documents invariably present the specific definition guiding authors and the bodies responsible for those policies. Moti Rosner, Head of Department A for the professional development of teaching employees in the Israeli Ministry of Education, defines professional development as:

a process in which teaching employees succeed in undergoing change in learning, teaching and educating processes, along the professional pathway as a result of:

Aspects connected to his/her personal biography and characteristics in everything concerning his/her values, beliefs, hopes and dreams, and concerning his/her demand for independence, and attitude towards change.

A process which occurs in and of itself in the work of teaching and education, in conjunction with a significant ‘other’, and personal and group processes of reflection.

Involvement and participation in formal learning frameworks, assuming they are based on partnership and agreement with the learner, and enable understanding and conceptualisation in his/her work. (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 5)

This definition presents a broad and varied view of professional development, one which is comprised of both formal and informal opportunities for teacher learning. The professional learning described here is can be enacted alone and in conjunction with others; it can be personal and it can reflect the experience and personal qualities of individual teachers. This definition, which appears in the preface of a policy document directed at inspectors, *Pisga* centre principals, and heads of faculties of education in colleges and universities, relates to elements of professional development which are not highlighted in the guidelines stressed at school level and recorded and counted as professional learning. Interestingly, Points A and B of Rosner’s definition seem to have no place in the 60 hours of yearly professional development required of Israeli teachers. Despite the rhetoric in emphasis on the individual teacher, the ‘Guideline’ document (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2008a) concentrate mainly on formal professional development delivered to groups. The exception is the “*gmishut pedagogit*” [‘flexible pedagogy’] framework offered to schools since 2014 (Ministry of Education, 2014), which allows for individual kinds of professional learning to be incorporated in the school program.

As mentioned earlier, policy documents in other parts of the world, define PD differently. The Teachers Registration Board of South Australia (2017) defines professional learning as “the many planned and unplanned learning opportunities, processes and experiences in which teachers engage both within their work time and their own time to continually build their capacities as professionals”. The documents in the national regulatory body in Australia, AITSL, describe professional learning as “the formal or informal learning experiences undertaken by teachers and school leaders that improve their individual professional practice, and a school’s collective effectiveness, as measured by improved student learning, engagement with learning and wellbeing” (AITSL, 2012, p. 2). The authors explicitly connect professional learning to a measurable increase in student achievement levels, to that extent that without this

visible/measurable improvement in student learning, as a direct linear effect of the teacher learning, it would seem that learning (according to this policy) had not taken place. In some respects the inclusiveness of this AITSL definition corresponds to the goals outlined in the Israeli policy, although measurable student achievement is not mentioned in the definition presented by Rosner (Ministry of Education, 2010). In Australia, the Department of Education and Training (2005) explains that traditional professional learning is delivered in “one-off seminars, conferences and workshops” (p. 4). In Israel, since the “*Ofek-Chadash*” reform, those traditional one-off events do not contribute at all to the PD quota of primary school or junior high school teachers.

It is interesting to note that the term “learning” rarely appears in several of the Israeli “*Ofek-Chadash*” documents. In the kit for school principals (Ministry of Education, 2008a), the word ‘learning’ is only mentioned 5 times in the 13 pages. In the Ministry of Education (2008a) ‘Guideline’ document, for example, the word ‘learning’ is only mentioned in the last bullet point: “To manage the school as a learning organisation” (p. 3) but no explanation is given for this.

### **3.3.2 Collaboration between teachers**

According to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2012, p. 5), collaboration is a valuable feature of professional development which amplifies the learning achieved by teachers. This emphasis on collegial sharing was mentioned in an earlier policy document in Australia by the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) (2005), in a discussion of the organisational conditions required for teachers:

to continuously improve their teaching practice by providing encouragement and fostering an environment that values sharing, trust, risk-taking, experimentation, collaborative inquiry and self assessment. Effective leaders provide learning opportunities for teachers to develop the knowledge, practices and attitudes that are needed to achieve agreed goals and expectations. They facilitate opportunities for staff to learn from each other, provide access to specialised knowledge and model continuous learning in their own practice. (p. 7)

According to Darling-Hammond and Lieberman (2012), professional collaboration is emphasised in Finland, Singapore and other countries when teachers are provided with opportunities to visit teachers in other schools in order to share quality teaching. In both the UK and Australia, programs of collaboration and professional learning between schools have been created for literacy and

numeracy teacher learning (Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012). In Canada, an effort was made to create a system-wide system, which encouraged collaboration and the sharing of teacher practice for their professional learning (Levin, 2012). In Singapore, according to Hairon and Tan (2017), teachers are afforded considerable time to work with colleagues and action research is encouraged. The Singapore government financially supports teachers in 100 hours of PD time yearly (Lin Goodwin, 2012). In Australia, the Victorian DET (2005) discusses the importance of the development of learning communities which appreciate the unique needs of teachers from varied backgrounds working in particular contexts with unique student populations (p. 8). In Israel, the only explicit encouragement for teachers to participate in professional communities is online as part of their professional learning (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 10).

### 3.3.3 School based professional learning

In 2005, the Victorian DET (2005), in Australia, called for “Professional learning that [was]... ongoing, school-based and directly relevant to the daily work of teachers” (p. 4). In the policy document, *Professional Learning in Effective Schools: The Seven Principles of Highly Effective Professional Learning*, Victorian teachers were urged to engage in effective, ongoing professional learning to develop progressively higher levels of expertise” (Department of Education & Training, 2005, p. 4). The document envisions:

...a culture where schools are routinely and typically seen as places where both teachers and students learn, where professional learning is a normal part of every teacher’s daily routine rather than something extra that teachers are required to do. In short, they aim to embed professional learning in the daily work and culture of every school and the system as a whole. (p. 4)

In Israel, according to the reform policy documents and the update published on a union website<sup>29</sup> on 29.01.2013, primary school teachers are expected to devote two hours a week to meetings and on-site learning and in junior high school teachers are expected to devote four hours a week to these activities in their own school. In my experience as a vice-principal in an Israeli primary school and leader of professional development in Israel’s Northern Province, this varies from school to school. Practices of recording and reporting on those activities also differ. Particular

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.itu.org.il/?CategoryID=119&ArticleID=19608>

schools that joined the more flexible “*gmishut pedagogit*” [“flexible pedagogy”] framework for professional learning (Ministry of Education, 2014) were encouraged to incorporate these activities in the school’s professional learning program, but this is by no means the norm through Israel.

### 3.3.4 Goals for professional development

It is a widely recognised phenomenon that the only improvements recognised in government policy documents are those that are measured in students’ test scores. This is clearly evident in Israel, such as the professional development Guidelines policy document that clearly states: “one of the elements expressing the renewal of the educational system is the professional development of its employees, for the refinement of their practice in order to improve student achievement levels (academic, social and ethical)” (Ministry of Education, 2008a, p.1). Despite the three words written in parentheses, improving students’ achievement levels usually implies an improvement in test scores on international examinations such as PISA and the national “*Meitzav*” examinations held yearly in Israel in years 5 and 8<sup>30</sup> (Ministry of Education, 2008a, p. 1). This emphasis on student academic achievement is foregrounded in a Ministry policy document (Ministry of Education, 2010) that opens with the words of the Ministry director-general, Dr Shimshon Shoshani: “The educational system aspires to advance academic achievement and to improve the educational climate in schools” (p. 3). Another example was the short and direct statement made by Gila Nagar, vice director-general and head of administration in the Ministry: “Professional development is intended to improve [teachers’] work and advance the achievement levels of their pupils” (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 4).

Similarly, AITSL (2012, p. 4) in Australia articulates the ultimate aim of professional learning for teachers as “improving student outcomes”. In the final report of the British BERA-RSA inquiry into the role of research in teacher education (BERA, 2014), the connection between teacher learning and student outcomes is firmly secured in the foreword of the document:

Our organisations have come together to consider what contribution research can make to the development of teachers’ professional identity and practice, to the quality of teaching, to the broader project of school improvement and

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<sup>30</sup> From the 2016-2017 school year, a new internal language and literacy testing process has replaced the “*Meitzav*” examinations for year 2 student.

transformation, and, critically, to the outcomes for learners: children, young people and adults, especially those for whom the education system does not currently ‘deliver’. (p. 3)

The aims of professional development, as they are set out in the “*Ofek-Chadash*” documents, look relatively broad and open. It is only when they are read in the context of the whole document and the public debate which accompanies them, that the linear equation of ‘teacher development = student achievement’ is obviously dominant. This equation is present in various places throughout the document and also appears in the introductions.

It appears that despite mention of broad aims for teacher professional learning in the suite of “*Ofek Chadash*”, policy documents and similar documents from around the world, emphasis is clearly placed on teacher learning as a means of causing pupils to perform better in assessment tasks. This is of course connected to the centrality of concern about the poor achievement of Israeli pupils on international tests (Avidor, Reingold, & Kfir, 2010).

### **3.3.5 Policy and practice: Filling the gaps**

It is interesting to note that the “*Ofek-Chadash*” framework in Israel, in addition to its policy directives for professional development, also requires teachers to teach additional hours and to take on additional tasks at school (Ministry of Education, 2008b). In essence, teachers have received a significant salary increase (Ministry of Education, 2008b, p. 17; RAMA, 2012) but have been required to undertake longer hours and more intensive workloads in order to ‘deserve this pay rise’ (RAMA, 2008, pp.12-13; RAMA, 2011, pp. 3-4). As a result, when teachers arrive at professional learning sessions, especially those outside of school hours, many teachers are tired and angry at the long hours they have to be away from home (see also teachers interviewed by RAMA (2012, p. 27). As a teacher educator, I have witnessed this irritation at the beginning of programs, but in my experience, when teachers feel that they are achieving something and participating in a rewarding and empowering dialogue, they even appreciate the time they spend in the sessions. These experiences are often recounted in reflective writing, which is a significant part of the data I present and analyse in the chapters to come.

### 3.3.6 Choice of programs according to the *mitveh* [layout]

A prominent gap between Israeli professional development policy and practice is the ability to connect programs appearing in a list compiled centrally by representatives of the Ministry of Education to the needs of individual teachers. Ministry of Education representatives prepare a list of programs to be offered in a certain geographical area, based on information provided yearly by school principals (Ministry of Education, 2008a). This is a list of specific programs authorised and offered but they do not undergo the kind of systematic evaluation required every five years by providers of professional development in New South Wales in Australia for example (See Board of Studies: Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES). (2014, pp. 14-21). Courses offered are only evaluated once they have begun.

Most programs are publicly listed and made available to teacher populations at certain levels of seniority and yet teachers often sign up seemingly ignorant or just ignoring these criteria. Despite the emphasis made in the policy documents on dialogue between school principals and teachers surrounding choice of programs, it appears that very often, the choice of program is made by teachers alone, very often on the basis of logistics. This difference between policy and practice is apparent in some interviews with Israeli school staff (RAMA, 2012). For example, a school principal explains:

There isn't enough choice and the teacher goes to whatever works out. The teacher wants the 60 hours, there is a course about the Arabic language and it's close, it's in the village. I want him to go to learning strategies, or mathematics, but it's far away and not comfortable for the teacher, so he does what is comfortable and good for him... (p. 28)

In contrast, discussing the Australian context, Doecke et al. (2008, p. 50) conclude that school administrators are usually those responsible for PD choices.

In my experience, as teacher, school vice-principal and leader of professional development programs, many teachers choose programs for a range of reasons. From my conversations with teachers in staff rooms, in program introductions and in research interviews, I have heard reasons for program enrolment like: 'the reputation of the lecturer', 'recommendations from teachers who participated in the previous year', 'personal interest' and 'professional need'. I have also

encountered many teachers who choose programs on the basis of technical considerations such as: the day of the week the program meets, what the finishing date is (how early in the school year it concludes), what the final assignment requirements are, which other teachers from school are going, and whether the teachers can arrange a car-pool. This raises question about the significance of Ministry guidelines for program choice, if teachers, are in fact, choosing programs from other lists for totally different reasons.

### **3.3.7 Evaluation of professional development**

One of the outcomes of the “*Ofek-Chadash*” reform was supposed to be the development of an evaluation system for the PD programs offered to teachers. As a teacher educator, I am aware that in recent years, pedagogical evaluation has entered the PD scene and I have received feedback on my work in many different forms. This evaluation has usually been based on questionnaires at the conclusion of the program and an observation by a representative of the Ministry of Education. In some *Pisga* centres evaluation has been broader and additional feedback was provided following interviews with participants. Previously, evaluation was technical in nature: did the teacher educator opened the session on time?; did the lecturer actually lecture on the topic which appeared in the PD program?; did the participants of the PD arrive on time and did they actively participate in the session. I can't remember ever receiving feedback from those evaluations.

In recent years, the PD evaluations, have taken on a new character, although still the detail of these evaluations and the time spent on them are determined by the workload of the *Pisga* centre staff. For example, in one small city in the north of Israel, the *Pisga* centre is small. In such a centre, the principal and staff can pay more attention to individual teacher educators and their programs because there are fewer programs run there. In the busier centres in larger towns, the principal and staff can spend far less time on each lecturer and program. The centres which are most thorough in their approach to professional development evaluation use a range of methods to gather their data: e.g., observing PD sessions, telephone interviews of participants, and lengthy questionnaires. In these thorough centres, the lecturer typically receives detailed quantitative and qualitative feedback and in very special cases, a meeting is held between the leader of professional learning and the centre principal to discuss the evaluation/feedback of the observers and participants.

In stark contrast with Australia and the UK, in Israel, at this stage, there is little or no attempt to evaluate the outcomes of teacher learning on classroom achievement at a school or personal level. Program evaluations are based on teacher questionnaires (and occasionally interviews) which concentrate on questions like: “How helpful was the program for you in your classroom?” or “Did you apply the materials or the teaching methods presented in your own classroom?”

Later, in 7.3, I move from a more disinterested, examination of policy and practices, to provide a more personal perspective of teaching and observing this policy in action. In the next chapter, Chapter 4, I explore the research literature from the past three decades surrounding teachers as writers. I present a conceptual framework which will, I hope, enable my readers to engage in productive ways with the samples of teacher writing that I present and analyse later in this thesis.

## Chapter 4 - Teachers as writers: A review of the literature

In this chapter I critically engage with the research literature surrounding ‘teachers as writers’, highlighting texts which have significantly influenced this study and building a conceptual framework which helps make meaning of the samples of teacher writing that I present and analyse later in this thesis. I make claims here about how this study may contribute to scholarship in the field.

According to Maxwell (2013), the researcher should be wary of adopting a minimal focus by exploring published literature alone and ignoring his or her own experience, research papers in progress and ideas from other researchers. Partly in response to these views of Maxwell, I have chosen to structure this chapter differently from traditional academic literature reviews. Within my review of published research, I intertwine short quotations from the data of this study with which I engage fully and critically later in the thesis. In doing this, I use all of those sources available to me to “treat the literature not as an authority to be deferred to, but as a useful but fallible source of ideas about what’s going on, and to attempt to see alternative ways of framing the issues” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 41). Guided by the understandings of Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011), I am attempting to avoid an oversimplification of the subject

through the creation of new texts that break boundaries; that move from the center to the margins to comment on and decenter the center; that forgo closed, bounded worlds for those more open-ended and less conveniently encompassed; that transgress the boundaries of conventional social science... (p. 124)

I am attempting here to better understand what the practices of teacher writing mean to different researchers, to locate important connections between the various viewpoints, to uncover discrepancies and to highlight issues suitable for further discussion.

#### 4.1 The call for teachers to write

The role of writing in the professional lives of teachers has been explored by influential scholars for half a century since the ground-breaking Dartmouth Seminar in 1966 (Dixon, 1967/1975) and the establishment of the NWP in the US in the early 1970s (Lieberman & Wood, 2002). Since the 1990s, teachers' writing and its role in teachers' professional learning has often been a topic of discussion amongst teachers, teacher educators and researchers (e.g. Cremin & Locke, 2017; Doecke & Parr, 2005; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010; Smith & Wrigley, 2015) with a number of justifications typically given for teachers to write. In these discussions, teachers have been encouraged to write in various forms and for a range of objectives. In contrast, many studies are less enthusiastic and some question the ability of teachers to devote precious time to writing (e.g. Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010; Smiles & Short, 2006). Several studies pay attention to other disadvantages of teacher writing (e.g. Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Jost, 1990a).

I open this chapter with a section of reflective text, written by Rebecca, a participant in this PhD study and one of the teachers enrolled in the WDLT professional learning program I was leading in 2009<sup>31</sup>. Writing at the conclusion of the program, Rebecca recalled the writing she had done in the previous weeks as part of the program and reflected on the ways in which that writing was woven in and around her hectic life.

*... A regular day for me begins at 5:30 in the morning. I have half an hour to quietly get organized and then continue with an additional hour of preparing school bags, waking up and dressing children, and then accompanying them to the school bus...*

*The intensive pace of my work and my days leaves me very little time for reflection and self-study... Writing teacher narratives is an opportunity to force myself to reflect, to allocate time for deep thought on my actions, to judge my teaching taking into consideration all aspects...*

*Writing my stories taught me that reflection is looking back but it is also looking forward to my next teaching experiences. While writing I reached conclusions, and discovered what I should preserve or leave behind... (Rebecca, reflective text written in the WDLT program, June, 2009)*

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<sup>31</sup> I return to Rebecca's narrative in greater detail in 7.2.3

Rebecca is enthusiastically proclaiming the benefits of writing she had experienced in the WDLT program. Her writing shows she was becoming aware of the significant learning taking place when she made time for writing in the rush of her life and valued the sharing of ideas surrounding her written reflections. The enthusiasm displayed by Rebecca accords with a call for teachers to become involved in personal and professional writing, an appeal prominent in the literature in the past twenty five years.

In most of the literature on teacher writing, there is a clear distinction made between personal and professional writing. I join Whitney (2009) in challenging this distinction. When reading Rebecca's entire piece, for example, it is impossible to determine whether the autobiographical writing is personal or professional in nature. On the basis of Rebecca's writing, it would seem that those two spheres of a teacher's life can be seen as intricately intertwined.

As I have written elsewhere (Aharonian, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a), since the 1990s, there have periodically been calls for teachers to engage in personal and/or professional writing for a wide range of reasons. Teacher writing has been discussed in the context of teacher learning and has been encouraged for four different reasons:

- a. to improve pedagogy in general and to improve the teaching of writing in the classroom in particular
- b. to enhance the practice of teachers through the identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165) involved in the process of writing and reflecting
- c. for the generation of community
- d. to empower teachers and to heighten the status of the teaching profession through advocacy work. In this case, writing can be directed at readers within the teaching community or well beyond it.

I will proceed to address each of these reasons one at a time. But before discussing this literature that calls for teachers to engage in writing, I want to draw attention to the fact that the majority of these studies are in fact authored by teacher educator writers, many of who lead professional learning programs involving practising teachers (e.g. Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010; Locke, 2015; Parr &

Bulfin, 2015; Smith & Wrigley, 2016). In constructing this review of the literature, I'm aware of the need for caution when reading researchers' success stories, or what Swidler (2001) calls heroic tales; it is imperative to explore whether and in what ways authors are prepared to write in richly reflexive ways and to critically scrutinize their own assumptions.

#### **4.2 Teacher writing to improve writing pedagogy**

In 1991, in a special issue of the *American English Journal*, arguments were sounded for and against teachers writing for and with their students (BFN et al., 1991). Although many scholars in that issue claim that teacher writing helps to improve writing pedagogy (e.g. Beeghly Bencich, 1996; Blau, 1988; Frager, 1994; Susi, 1984), there appears to be no strong consensus in that special issue and most of the encouragement comes from teachers who themselves wrote (e.g. Roop, 1990). Roop (1990) points out that the claims centre on teachers being able to use insider knowledge of the writing process, since they themselves are writers, leading to increased sensitivity in teaching, involvement, motivation and an enhanced ability to make realistic demands of their students. In the years following the publication of Roop's article, several studies concluded that teacher writing itself is not sufficient to stimulate change. Frank, Carpenter, and Smith (2003), for example, propose that it is not enough for a teacher to develop as a writer in order for him or her to improve his or her teaching of writing. Rather, they say, teachers must write and reflect on the writing process in order to successfully bring about change in their teaching practice and in the learning outcomes of their students. Rief (2006), however, is concerned about the quality of writing that teachers produce and calls for more teacher writing to be embedded within university-based initial teacher education programs and in-service programs.

Recently, a number of studies have inquired more closely into what happens when writing teachers themselves begin to engage in writing. The focus there has been on what these teachers bring from their own experience into their classrooms and how it affects the writing of their students. Whitney et al. (2012), for example, propose that teachers who write, and write regularly, increase their authority in the teaching of writing and "expand their interaction with students beyond those roles the writing classroom commonly offers" (p. 407). Smith and Wrigley (2012) describe the dynamics of writing and teaching:

Writing, and the talk leading from and back into writing, allow the individual...to construct and reconstruct knowledge and to take ownership of how they teach... The immediate impact is upon teachers' disposition towards children writing, which translates into practice. (p. 79)

Bifuh-Ambe (2013) explains how teachers' confidence in writing positively affects their teaching practices and how this has a positive impact on student writing development. Dix and Cawkwell (2011) propose that the success that New Zealand teachers experienced through their participation in a writers' workshop framework transformed their teaching in a positive sense. Wrigley and Smith (2010) quote a primary teacher as saying:

The project has significantly changed the way I teach writing. It has provided inside knowledge of the challenges faced by a writer, as well as the tools and fortitude needed to be successful. A major change for my teaching of the subject has been the dialogue I have encouraged around the writing process. (p. 18)

For some, this change that teachers can undergo when they undertake writing in communities is potentially a "transformation that enhances the experience of and performance in the writing of their students" (Locke et al., 2011, p. 273). Other literature, though, tends to urge caution rather than building expectations of dramatic and instant metamorphosis in the improved writing of pupils. Change is usually slow and presents itself differently in different classrooms and among individual pupils.

Yagelski (2012) argues that writing is an influential process, whose value should be seen beyond the quality of the written artefact. Similarly, Cremin and Myhill (2012) see the teaching of writing as a creative process and discuss the ways in which the writing experiences of teachers positively influence the writer identities and the engagement of students in school writing. Conscious of the fact that most teachers do not engage regularly in writing, the authors express concern that "if few teachers see themselves as writers or write alongside their students then the teaching of writing may be constrained by a lack of awareness of the complexities of composition and the significance of writers' identities" (p. 126).

### **4.3 Teacher writing for professional growth**

Various studies suggest that evaluation of professional learning which may be achieved by teachers through writing should not be limited to learning connected to their writing pedagogy. These authors closely associate a form of teacher writing with professional learning which transcends the standards based professional development outcomes often prescribed for teacher (Ambler, 2012). In recent years teachers have been encouraged to write for the benefit of their professional learning and professional growth (Done, Knowler, Murphy, Rea, & Gale, 2011; Orland-Barak & Maskit, 2011; Riley, 2012; Smith & Wrigley, 2012, 2016; Stevens & Cooper, 2009). Adopting a postmodern view of writing, Elbaz-Luwisch (2010) explains that the most productive teacher writing is not a simple process of meeting externally prescribed outcomes, or forms of knowledge; it is part of a process of professional meaning making – making sense of their practices and identity. Through writing and critical dialogue around this, teachers build understandings which were previously not apparent to them. Attard (2012) discusses teacher writing as an avenue for thinking and as a method of inquiry, while others recommend writing as a means of connecting theory and practice (Choi, 2012), or linking professional knowledge and action (Ciuffetelli Parker, 2010).

### **4.4 Writing for enriching or focusing professional identity**

The notion of ‘identity work’ (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165; see also Gee, 2000), meaning the formation and consolidation of teacher professional identity, is often foregrounded in more recent studies that describe and analyse professional growth involving teachers’ writing in communities. Campbell et al. (2004), for example, discuss the possibilities for exploring teacher identity using writing, talk and reflection. They encourage teachers to examine and reflect on their professional identity by engaging in story writing and/or keeping a reflective diary. In an earlier discussion of teacher identity and teachers’ identity work, Winters (1994) contends that “the act of claiming space on the page makes a statement about who we are” (p. 84). This statement connects with the more recent words of Yagelski (2009) who explains that writing enables a person to mould his or her identity, to deeply understand who they are and their place in society and to present that identity in interactions with others. According to these authors, teachers who engage

in writing may have a more consolidated identity, which can lead to a sense of validity, direction and empowerment.

An Israeli study by Schatz-Oppenheimer and Dvir (2014) recommends narrative writing for early career teachers in particular, and demonstrates how those teachers preparing stories for publication integrate theories learned in the past with new theories and become involved in identity work. It is proposed that through this professional storytelling, these teachers probe their professional perceptions through a reflective dialogue with significant others and themselves. Additional understandings are formed when other teachers read and reflect on those narratives. For example, Australian early career teachers, Bulfin and Mathews (2003) connect their reading and dialogue around each other's writing to the building of their identities as teachers. They call for

Opportunities for beginning teachers like ourselves to critique, debate and even give vent in safe and supportive learning spaces...[Such opportunities are] critical for our learning and also for the continued development of strong professional identities in ourselves as English teachers. (p. 57)

Smith and Wrigley (2016) argue that “writing for ourselves within a community of teachers transforms our identities” (p. 4) and throughout their discussion of teacher writing groups they stress a range of connections between teacher writing and identity

Through writing, teachers arrive at a sense of themselves that directly and indirectly will inform their teaching: writing and the shaping of self, journeying in (the reflective self), out (sharing with others), back (into memory) and forward (speculatively). (p. 18)

#### **4.5 Teacher writing – alone or in collaboration with peers?**

Discussion about the purposes of teacher writing and the option of publishing this writing for others to read are common in the research literature on teacher writing. Some authors use the metaphor ‘entering a role’ and acknowledge the difficulty for teachers of adopting the role of writers (e.g. Winters, 1994). Winters encourages teachers to write alone, for their own purposes, rather than focusing on any external audience. She explains that teachers who write give themselves time for thought and reflection. In writing about their practice, Winters suggests that

teachers develop their own theories on education, theories which never remain static. Comparably, many teacher-writers have written of their enlightening experiences while writing privately, for example: “It seems that I’m not really sure what I’ve learned in my classroom until I write about it” (Five, 1992, p. 50); and “I write because I need to understand myself and others...” (Monroe, 1992, p. 69).

In contrast with the range of literature investigating and advocating for teachers to write alone, for themselves or for publication, a range of scholars encourage collaboration and team work in professional writing. Frager (1992), for example, contends that if teachers write for other teachers, it helps them ‘move into’ writing. Diaz-Maggioli (2004) encourages writing as a medium for teacher reflection and learning but warns that teachers involved in “self-directed professional development” (p. 99) also need peer collaboration. Doecke and Parr (2005) join others in the promotion of collaborative writing “as a vehicle for grappling with issues” (p. 9) relevant to the practice of teachers.

In the last thirty years, working with the theories of socio-cultural theorists such as Vygotsky (1981), there has been a growing awareness that some of the richest learning takes place through social interaction in professional as much as in student communities (e.g. Rafael et al., 2001). And yet, despite the adoption of constructivist teaching methods in many classrooms, teaching often remains an extremely solitary profession (Goldstein, 2015) with little teacher collaboration or co-planning, and this of course is a problem if they wish to collaborate in their writing. On the other hand, while many teachers create collaborative social learning environments for their students, they often ignore the fact that teacher professional learning can be based on similar principles. Teachers have few chances to see their peers in practice or to engage in significant discussion about their work (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Raphael et al., 2001). Writing collaborations, or writing in a community of writers, it would seem, may counterbalance this tendency and prevent the isolation often written about in the teaching profession (e.g. Bowers Sipe & Rosewarne, 2005).

In contrast with those who urged teachers to write individually in the 1990s, Bulfin (2005) emphasizes the importance of communicative writing with others. He explains that collaboration stimulates reflexive processes and that the artefacts/products generated through these processes are often deeper than those each individual writer would have achieved alone. While Bulfin admits

that his dialogue with his year 8 students in Melbourne, Australia, has been positively influenced by his writing with significant English teaching colleagues, his main interest is professional learning for teachers. Unlike much of the literature from the 1990s in which teacher-writing is recommended as a direct means of understanding student difficulties and improving instruction, Bulfin is referring to a less technicist concept of teacher learning. Writing with a fellow graduate teacher two years earlier, Bulfin and Mathews (2003) had argued the value of creative and intellectual dialogue for all teachers, when they wrote about their experience in their first year of full time teaching:

we have undertaken a collaborative and dialogic approach to our own professional learning. We have... actively listened, talked, read, written and theorized our experiences, we have come to know and see them differently and more powerfully” (p. 49).

Bulfin and Mathews conclude “we stretched the boundaries of our understanding, challenging each other to look further than we could see alone (2003, p.52).

The exploration of teacher writing in groups or communities is becoming more prominent in the literature (e.g. Gooda, 2016; Smith & Wrigley, 2016), most importantly, the activity of the NWP in the US and the UK version of this project. Bifuh-Ambe (2013) and Locke et al. (2013) recommend professional learning on writing and writing pedagogy which incorporates teacher writing as a central part of the program. Parr and Bulfin (2015) critically discuss an innovative collaborative writing and storytelling project for Australian teachers, in which the participants negotiate their practice in the context of their particular standards-based professional environment (see 1.4 and 2.4).

Several studies have shown that learning is enhanced when teacher-writers receive written responses from their peers (e.g. Ciuffetelli Parker, 2004; Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). Altrichter et al. (1993), invoking the earlier work of Stenhouse (1975) and Schön (1986), suggest that teachers rise to a more significant level of professionalism, when they are able to reflect on their practice and present the products of that reflection in public forums or spaces. This kind of writing alongside peers is similar in nature to the professional learning at the heart of my research (see also

Aharonian, 2016). Other voluntary writing groups have been enthusiastically represented in the literature (e.g. Dawson et al., 2013; Robbins, Seaman, & Yancey, 2006).

Many of the examples here are exploring teacher writing as a means of generating community, a concept far more significant and complex than teacher collaboration. The work of the NWP in the United States (e.g. Kaplan, 2008; Lieberman & Wood, 2002; Tedrow, 2016) and similar projects in England (e.g. Andrews, 2008; Cremin & Myhill, 2012; Gooda, 2016; Smith & Wrigley, 2016), New Zealand (e.g. Locke, 2015; Locke et al., 2013) and Australia (e.g. Parr & Bulfin, 2015) has shown that when teachers engage in writing and in the sharing of that writing, the activity and the bonds that are formed can be generative in many different ways. The learning experience is often so powerful that it extends beyond the formal learning frameworks in which it was initiated; it can manifest itself in a variety of unexpected ways. The connections forged in these communities, both formal and informal, often give teacher members a renewed or deeper sense of confidence which allows them to develop new knowledge and skills. It is interesting to see how leadership potential is nurtured and promoted in these communities and how communities can breed new communities as participation flourishes. The significant learning being realised in these social contexts aligns quite nicely with Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of 'communities of practice'. According to these authors, learning can be, and should be, far more than the absorption of new knowledge; when it is enacted in a 'community of practice', learners expand their participation, and share "understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities" (p. 98). Needless to say, this type of learning, generated in group dynamics cannot always be pre-planned, with outcomes identified in advance, and measured after the professional learning experience.

#### **4.6 'Speaking back' through writing**

An additional asset of teacher writing discussed in the literature relates to writing as a means of teacher engagement and advocacy. It may, for instance, enable teachers to 'speak back' to current forces working to de-professionalise the teaching profession and marginalize their voice as teachers (Locke & Goodwyn, 2004; Milner, 2013; Parr, 2010).

Whitney et al. (2012) describe the dilemmas teachers face both before and after deciding to position themselves as an educational authority through writing and publication. Riley (2012) explains the importance of teacher writing in this sense by reminding the reader:

While a group of white middle class teachers in the United States may not seem marginalized in the greater world context, federal and local policies position teachers as passive consumers, rather than generators, of knowledge. Therefore, within the current context of United States, teachers' voices have been marginalized from policy and research discussions. (p. 43)

In this sense, teacher writing may be a means of encouraging more teachers to enter the wider conversation on teaching and learning, allowing teacher knowledge to be disseminated alongside research generated in the academy.

Smith and Wrigley (2012) propose a range of programs of professional development for teachers based on writing; they suggest that discussion about texts produced by teachers in such programs and shared reflection can help them reclaim their sense of “professional authority” (p. 80) traditionally attributed to teachers and to support their “well-being” (p. 81). Yancey, Robbins, Yow, and Seaman (2006) use the term “model for teacher professionalization” (p. 5) when discussing the writing groups they recommend. Similarly, Doecke (2013) demonstrates how teachers tell professional stories in their writing enables them to grapple openly with the complexities of teaching and learning at a time when much policy making seems determined to simplify teaching into a set of one-size-fits-all standards and procedures. This activity can restore focus on the distinctive work that teachers do in specific, local educational contexts. Such a view of teaching sits sharply in contrast with the sameness and standardization emphasized and promoted in standards based policy. Presenting another teacher writing study, known as the *Editorial Project*, Perrillo (2010) describes how

... holding both intellectual work and education advocacy at its center, the *Editorial Project* pushed the fellows to investigate their ideas and account for their beliefs. This was a different model of professionalism than many were used to, particularly in a political climate that often requires teachers to subsume both their ideas and beliefs to following the program. (p. 12)

Parr (2010) take this a few steps further and describes a form of robust or “transgressive professional learning” (p. 195) based in writing and professional conversation. He suggests this conversation

involves discursive and social practices that explicitly or implicitly, potentially or actionally, inquire into, question and destabilise prevailing norms of professional knowledge, discursive or social practices in teachers’ professional lives. This inquiring, questioning and destabilising may end in a resolve to affirm what exists or it may prompt change. (p. 195)

Similarly, in the stella2.0 project mentioned earlier, Parr and Bulfin (2015), construct a space for teacher conversation and writing which are explicitly linked to questioning, creative and perhaps destabilising thinking as part of the search for viable alternatives to the standards based discourses of education dominant today.

#### **4.7 Writing for publication**

An additional question raised in the literature is whether teacher writing should be directed towards publication or whether it should remain private in nature, with the emphasis placed on the writing process rather than on the product. This question brings us back to the four reasons for encouraging teacher writing which I presented in 4.1. Authors encouraging teacher-writers to publish their texts are interested in:

- teachers’ identity work associated with deep reflection and the sense of community achieved when that reflection is shared with others (e.g. Eyres, 2017; Schatz-Oppenheimer & Dvir, 2014; Smith & Wrigley, 2016)
- teacher professional learning in general and professional learning in the field of writing pedagogy in particular (e.g. Cremin & Myhill, 2012; Locke et al., 2011; Smith & Wrigley, 2016)
- advocacy for teachers and the advancement of teacher professionalism (e.g. Smith & Wrigley, 2012; Parr, 2010; Whitney, 2017; Yancey et al., 2006)

- improvement of teaching practice and enrichment of the knowledge of teaching through publication in educational research journals (e.g. Locke, 2015; Shteiman, Gidron, Eilon, & Katz, 2010; Whitney, 2017; Wong, 2014).

In the experience of Gorell (1992), writing has stimulated both identity work and a sense of belonging to a community. She uses the words “personal renewal” (p. 20) and “self-discovery” (p. 20) to describe her initial experiences writing for a professional journal about her teaching. She says she enjoyed reflection and mental planning and describes writing as a process of enabling her to find her “inner voice” (p. 21). There is a poignant moment in Gorell’s work, when she describes her feelings of excitement and fear before the exposure of her writing to a wider public readership: “My writing had put me in touch with my community. I had a voice, and I was reaching an audience” (p. 25). Similarly, Monroe (1992) claims that teachers can feel like “insiders” and can gain professional satisfaction through writing and publication. This writing by Gorell, Monroe, and other teachers and teacher educators, came together and was published by Dahl (1992), in a book devoted entirely to the empowerment of teachers through writing for publication.

Extending the discussion on teacher writing as a valuable means of professional learning and for generating understandings about the teaching of writing, Crowe (1994) concludes that these processes can be enhanced when teachers take an additional step and write for others. He encourages teachers to write for publication, focusing on the improvement it can bring to one’s writing pedagogy and deepening teacher learning. Crowe contends that teachers better appreciate what the teaching of writing involves when they engage in writing themselves and they understand the inherent challenge and difficulty for some students. In addition, he contends that teachers who write for publication engage in reflection and deep professional thinking and they tend to read more professional literature as a consequence of their own work appearing in these journals. Similar connections between writing for publication and professional learning are made by scholars in different parts of the world: Shteiman et al. (2010), for example, inquire into the learning of teacher educators in Israel, and Parr, Bulfin, Harlowe and Stock (2014) discuss their shared writing experiences in Australia. In these studies and others, the professional learning emerging from teacher writing and publication becomes the subject of additional scholarly texts, written by the same authors or by others.

Several studies focus on the role of publication by teachers in the promotion of the professional status of teachers. Smiles and Short (2006), for example, are interested in the advocacy work connected to teacher writing and discuss the importance of teachers contributing to the production of scholarship in the field of education. They contend that as teachers write for journals, they are involved in significant reflection on the “beliefs, values, and images that guide their work” (p. 134). In a Chinese case study by Wong (2014), he explores the consequences of providing a financial incentive for teachers to write and publish articles connected to their classroom practice. According to Wong, this ‘bottom-up’ form of professional development can enhance the professionalism of teachers and reframe teacher learning and reflection. Exploring additional questions surrounding publication, Crowe (1994) argues that teachers writing for publication can improve the relevance and connectedness of educational journals and foster belief in teachers as full or extended professionals.

Smiles and Short (2006) acknowledge that the process of writing for publication is frightening for teachers new to the practice and they admit that teacher research does not have to be published in order for it to be worthwhile. Their study presents a range of difficulties faced by teachers trying to publish their professional writing including being unaware of appropriate journals and not understanding the peer review process. Smiles and Short suggest that close mentoring relationships, such as between teachers and teacher educators, can support teachers on the long and difficult road to publication. My own experience (Aharonian, 2009a) supports this finding; without patient mentoring from an experienced writer who believed in my ability to reach publication, I would never have attempted to share my writing.

Even today, it would seem that relatively few teachers are writing for publication. How is this encouraged and in which frameworks? Productive assistance provided by mentors and editors, may be useful but Smiles and Short (2006) conclude that all involved must recognize that writing for publication is time consuming and that often teachers need to learn to write in a genre suitable for research articles. They raise additional issues concerning teachers writing for publication:

We recognize the difficulty of returning to a context of full-time teaching where there is no time, expectation, incentive, or support for writing, and being able to resist those pressures to work on a draft to submit, especially when the chances of that draft being rejected remain so high for most peer-reviewed journals. (p.141)

#### 4.8 Teacher writing – dilemmas and difficulties

Despite the advantages of teacher writing highlighted in the first part of this chapter, it is essential for this study to acknowledge and seek to understand the dilemmas and difficulties facing teachers considering writing as part of their personal and professional lives.

Joining the debate on teacher writing in the *English Journal*, Jost (1990a, 1990b) adamantly argues against the call for teachers to turn to writing. Jost, a teacher, points out that school teachers, in contrast with higher education teachers, do not gain any advancement or professional promotion for their writing. She stresses that time pressures imposed on high school teachers make writing impossible for most. Jost (1990a) concludes that teachers are already required to do a large quantity of “technical writing” (p.66) and does not see writing as a viable or worthwhile investment in teachers’ valuable professional learning time.

Responding to the literature encouraging teachers to write with their students in order to improve their writing pedagogy, Adam (1992) confesses that she was unsuccessful in solving her students’ writing problems by simply sharing her own writing experience with them. And Frager (1994), despite his call for teachers to write, admits that teachers who write too competently can threaten students. Gleeson and Prain (1996) inquire into the differences between writing teachers who write and those who do not. Examining the practice of seven Australian writing teachers, the authors find no consistent differences in the writing pedagogy of teachers from the two groups. Indeed, the authors report that all participants viewed teacher writing and the teaching of writing to be two completely separate fields. All of these authors examine teacher writing in terms of an artefact to be brought into the classroom and discussed with students or as an experience encouraged in order to change the way teachers relate to writing in the classroom. The relationship with the main focus of my study, which is teacher writing for professional learning, is tenuous here, because the focus of the studies mentioned in this study is on a form of knowledge about writing which can be simply transferred to students.

Despite continuing enthusiasm for teacher writing, a number of recent studies raise additional problems associated with this form of teacher learning. Scholars in different parts of the world remind us that teacher confidence in writing cannot be assumed. Cremin and Myhill (2012) and Murphy (2012) report on the fear experienced by many teachers when they are expected to write,

particularly if invited to engage in creative writing. Done et al. (2011), Murphy (2012), Cremin and Baker (2010, 2014), Cremin and Oliver (2016), and Whitney (2009) all describe the reluctance of many teachers to engage in writing, although Locke (2015) illustrates how it is possible to move beyond this. My own career as a teacher, and the emerging role of writing in that career, is strong evidence in support of Locke's argument. I have published a creative and critical narrative describing my own reluctance to write as an early career teacher (Aharonian, 2009a):

When I began teaching, I was a young Australian trying to make my way in the Israeli education system. My Hebrew, the official language, was anything but perfect and I am extremely grateful to the principal of the small desert school who employed me. In my grade 4 classroom I worked hard to prevent my writing difficulties from interfering with my teaching. To say that I worked hard is an understatement. I laboured day and night. Any text to be written on the blackboard was prepared at home, checked, and looked up in the dictionary. I remember talking to my pupils about my difficulty but as far as staff and parents were concerned, I did everything possible to hide my weakness. Report card time was always stressful in those years – mainly because of my composition skills. Although I knew my pupils inside out and had no trouble deciding what to write, I struggled endlessly on how to write it. Apart from reports, other administrative texts were required of me in my role of teacher. Writing letters to parents was a threatening, exhausting and nerve wrecking experience. I had no word processor to aid in revision and I either had to cover my mistakes in correction fluid or copy my text over and over again. Each time I asked myself: “What are you doing here? How can you be a good teacher if you can't even write a normal letter? Sooner or later someone is going to complain...” I knew I was a good teacher but I couldn't come to terms with myself writing at a low standard. I kept my writing to a minimum and made every effort to hide my texts. If I went to a professional learning session, I kept my notes covered so others wouldn't see my ghastly mistakes or chose to translate the lecture points into English. Lesson plans for my own use were well documented but kept private. If my colleagues asked for help or to look at my work, I agreed but always apologized about my writing skills. (p. 46)

Several studies discuss the lack of experience and confidence that I was writing about then in their examination of teachers attempting to embrace professional writing. Locke et al. (2013) point to teachers' lack of feelings of self-efficacy both in their own writing and in their writing pedagogy. Wong (2014) argues that teachers find academic genres and the grappling with theory difficult in their writing. Attard (2012, p. 166) discusses the solitariness experienced by many teacher-writers, and additional problems associated with teacher writing are raised by Elbaz-Luwisch (2010) and

Perrillo (2010). Bulfin (2005) makes the point that “In order to reflect on and write about their interests and concerns, many teachers require active support, encouragement and opportunities... otherwise they might not ever speak or write ‘out’” (p. 55). He is joined by others in the literature (e.g. Doecke et al., 2008) who recommend a variety of ways of supporting teacher-writers through mentoring and communities. Gardner (2014) discusses a body of literature which identifies the lack of confidence attributed to teachers in writing and the way this adversely impacts their teaching of writing. He concludes that there should be major adjustments made in the way teachers are prepared for the teaching of writing. In the introduction to Dahl (1992), Newkirk proposes that a major factor in empowering teachers is convincing them that they have something to say, that the knowledge they gain in their classroom is worthwhile for others.

In this chapter I have presented some of the diverse literature exploring writing as a means of professional learning for teachers in general and for teachers of writing in particular. Some studies relate to teachers writing as individuals and others describe teachers writing in collaboration, in the form of groups or communities; some research suggests that reflective writing should be kept private and others promote writing of a more public nature.

One of the particular questions in the literature that relates strongly to my study is the ways in which teachers’ professional learning needs as emerging writers might be better supported and resourced after they complete some organised professional learning program that required them to write as part of a community. While Bifuh-Ambe (2013) places the blame on teachers for not understanding the complex relationship between teacher writing and classroom pedagogy, it appears that the reasons many teachers do not continue to incorporate writing in their professional lives after such programs are more complex. Exploration of these critical questions must take into account the policy environment in which teachers work including work-place conditions, work-load and time limitations. In addition, issues of professional identity, and attitudes towards teachers as legitimate partners in the production of professional knowledge, must be considered.

These questions which arise clearly in the literature surrounding teacher writing and professional learning arise throughout the data in this PhD study. Despite the enjoyment and satisfaction many teachers often feel when engaging in writing while they are participating in the WDLT program, and/or despite the contribution of the writing to their classroom teaching practices, most of the

teachers who participated in this study, reported that they did not continue writing after the conclusion of the program. Most failed to mention writing as significant for them when asked about their own professional learning beyond the program.

My engagement with the literature in this chapter makes it clear that there is indeed a lot of discussion about teacher writing but that interest is reflected by different practices in schools, different levels of support by school leadership and different policy positions. It appears that there is no clear consensus about the value of teachers engaging in writing. Even among authors who explicitly advocate teachers writing, a variety of reasons for recommending the practice exists and there is no agreement on the kinds of writing advocated. Some authors focus on the contribution teacher writing makes to the professional learning of the teacher and others focus more specifically on the improvement teacher writing can make to the teaching of writing in the classroom. Other studies are interested in the impact of teacher writing in the building and strengthening of teacher identity or the sense of community which can be generated through this kind of activity. Another area of interest concerns the advocacy work which can be achieved through teacher writing. This involves the strengthening of the status of teaching as a profession and the cultivation of a body of literature based on teacher knowledge. In addition, among those recommending teacher writing, there is no consensus as to whether teacher writing should be a private activity for the benefit of the writer alone or should the products of that writing be made available to benefit both the writer and others through publication.

Despite the lack of consensus surrounding the practice of teacher writing, there does however appear to be agreement on the difficulty facing teachers who are interested in engaging in forms of professional and/or personal writing as a regular part of their professional lives. The main difficulties facing these teachers are lack of time, lack of support and lack of sense that the activity is valued by the educational system in which they work. In addition, many teachers are unused to seeing themselves as writers and therefore feel threatened or insecure when they begin to engage in writing.

This study takes the view that teacher writing can play an important role in teacher professional learning. It is an activity which can strengthen the individual teacher through deep reflective thinking and the identity work stimulated. In addition, this study advocates that teachers who teach

writing can learn to deeply comprehend the writing process they are urging on their students and can be conscious of the challenge that some students face when they are asked to write by their teachers.

In Part Three, I recount the conceptual and methodological work I have done in undertaking the research and creating the thesis artefact. This involves presenting what happened “behind the scenes’ of this study over the last eight years. In Chapter 5, I describe the epistemological understandings which are the infrastructure on which the study was enacted, the research traditions I drew upon, the paradigms of the study, and the methodological choices I made on the way to completing this project.

**PART 3 –  
APPROACHES TO EPISTEMOLOGY AND  
METHODOLOGY**

## **Chapter 5 – Epistemology: Behind the scenes of this PhD study**

This chapter explores the ways in which this study understands the nature of knowledge and it focuses on my methodological choices to engage in practitioner inquiry and narrative inquiry. I devote a significant part of the chapter to grappling with the role of writing in the generation of knowledge in the study and with the unique bi-lingual nature of my research.

### **5.1 A Metaphor for this study: A kaleidoscope**

Metaphors, often generated through journal writing, enable researchers to articulate some of their affective responses to the research journey and to connect those feelings with research insights (Etherington, 2004). A metaphor I have found useful in conceptualising the knowledge I have generated in this study is that of a kaleidoscope. I have always been attracted to this simple toy which creates endless unique colourful patterns in a mirrored cylinder. Each time one looks into the eye-piece the pattern changes. Each movement causes the tiny coloured fragments to rearrange, regroup and thus create a fresh design. The change can be gradual or quick. At times it might be expected; at other times it is almost too sudden or surprising. When each of the little chips moves, it joins others, influencing the entire picture.

The kaleidoscope metaphor has been invoked and used by a range of researchers operating in different paradigms. Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg and Coleman (2000), for example, used the metaphor to navigate their way through qualitative data analysis. Spade and Valentine (2016) employ the kaleidoscope metaphor to discuss the multitude of opportunities available for social change in areas of gender, power and discrimination, and Brown (2016) chooses it to explore the myriad perspectives on MOOCs (massive open online courses). Ramírez (2003), using the metaphor, as I have, as a helpful means of considering epistemology, reflects on the host of perspectives available when exploring the impact of new technologies. In my case, the kaleidoscope is helpful in describing the way I have developed this interpretive, constructivist study and the ways it changed repeatedly as my understandings developed and as the study progressed. Some changes involved the embracing of a new concept or theory, and the knowledge I was generating joined and influenced my existing knowledge and was then reflected in the way I saw the separate parts of the thesis and indeed the whole study. Each interaction I had with my participants, supervisors, doctoral writing group members, and other significant colleagues, challenged me to see the whole

picture differently. Colours, directions and shapes were continually emerging, merging and then re-emerging in different contexts.

In addition, I can see how this research has been coloured and fashioned by the various roles and identities I adopted. Each facet of my identity caused me to view patterns presented before me differently. While exploring my research context as a teacher, concepts like ‘learning’, ‘writing’, ‘understanding’ and ‘knowledge’ fell together in a particular pattern. When I reflected as a teacher educator they settled differently and differently again when I contemplated my study as a student, a researcher and a writer.

A kaleidoscope is a toy which needs someone to hold and turn it; the joy is dependent on external manipulation of the instrument. In research, that manipulation, it seems, is associated with the researcher who makes a decision as to when it is time to stop looking at a particular constellation and move on. It is also his or her role to decide how quickly the instrument should be rotated. Just as it is often hard for a child to put down a toy and move on to other activities, so too for me as the researcher it was frequently difficult to determine when I had "looked long enough" and that it was time for the project to change or move to a conclusion. Researchers though are not the only ones who have influence on a research study and decide when it is time to shift or change, so it was also often my supervisors and my doctoral writing group colleagues that gave me the supportive nudge I needed when the time came to keep moving.

I find this methodological metaphor to be more useful than that of the jigsaw puzzle, as proposed by Koro-Ljungberg (2001), Kuhn (1970), and Kretchmar (2005), because a puzzle is pre-planned and pre-cut. With a kaleidoscope, the picture is different every time and there are endless possibilities. In both cases a picture is constructed time and time again, but in the case of a puzzle, once assembled it can be described as a finished product. The images created in a kaleidoscope, remind us of the Bakhtinian concept of ‘unfinalizability’ (Bakhtin, 1984), in that they can never be considered finalised as they remain in place only until the next movement causes the pattern to change again and again. The unfinalized quality of a kaleidoscope image describes the nature of this study and others like it. As soon as this thesis artefact is completed and submitted, it will be changed and transformed each time an additional reader makes meaning of my words. In addition, the context and the conclusions I have described will continue to develop and change in my own

understandings as a researcher and as a practitioner as I continue to learn and function in my professional environment. Knowledge of the professional learning of teachers and writers and knowledge of teacher professional learning, as I conceive them in this thesis, are always unfolding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), dynamic entities, socially constructed (Mishler, 1990), ever changing and never finite.

An additional use for the kaleidoscope metaphor is to describe my work as one grain of colour in the kaleidoscope of the academic world. I am now able to see my work as a link in the succession of dialogue described by Bakhtin (1986) as a “chain of speech communication” (p. 91), touching (and maybe even influencing) the work of like-minded scholars the world over. Sometimes my writing joins other studies on professional learning or enters into dialogue with research similar in epistemology or methods. I hope my work will connect with others interested in similar theories and practices, and at times will join the writing of other teachers and teacher educators.

In this chapter I describe the epistemological understandings which are the intellectual foundation for this thesis, the research paradigms in which I worked, and the methodological decisions I made on the way to completing this project. Alongside conventional methodological writing, I occasionally quote from and discuss writing I have generated in order to make my epistemological understandings clearer to the reader. I am hoping that this departure from traditional academic writing adds to the multivoicedness and trustworthiness of this study. In the next section I present my decision to use qualitative research in my exploration of the professional learning of teachers.

## **5.2 Why qualitative research?**

As an early career researcher and as an experienced teacher and school leader, I am aware that the kind of research I prefer reading is qualitative in nature. I enjoy making some kind of connection with the thinking, working and feelings of people behind the study; I am curious to hear what the writer and the participants have to say in their own words. I am interested in how people live their lives, how they make meaning in and from them and how they communicate those understandings to others.

In all research, the knowledge, experience, and expectations of the researcher come into play in the planning, process and interpretation of data. In qualitative research, and interpretive inquiry in particular, the researcher and their background and beliefs are often placed centre stage. In qualitative research I am not required as a researcher to be distanced from my participants and my research context (Mishler, 1986). The personal involvement I have with this study is built in to my qualitative world view; through my decision to write in the first person, for instance, I signal my intention to play an integral role in the meaning-making process of research writing.

My particular approach to qualitative research allows me as a researcher to be open with my readers, to show them the rough edges of my research journey, the problems, the deliberations, the changes both planned and unplanned. My research study isn't searching for final answers to closed questions; rather it is seeking to problematise my everyday practice and everyday life itself (Smith, 1987). According to Mishler (1986) this can be the case with other forms of research as well but the processes and the messy bits are often hidden from view of the reader. Hamilton (2005) explains provocatively how these messy bits of research planning are often disguised or airbrushed out of conventional methodological writing:

In practice, I suggest, research is always a fumbling act of discovery, where researchers only know what they are doing when they have done it; and only know what they are looking for after they have found it. Put another way, it is only after the event – when they have finished their thesis, article or reports – that researchers can maintain they had a ‘good-quality and well-framed research question’. (p. 288)

I have always been especially intrigued by scholars who allow the reader to witness the messiness of their research. I am indeed interested in hearing about the changes in direction, the misconceptions which were revealed and reflections on the research process. Readers who are presented with the complications of designing and then implementing research are more able to fully understand the research context and the meanings made by both participants and the researcher. This academic and representational ‘honesty’ is indeed connected to questions of trustworthiness and intellectual rigour.

The type of qualitative research I am presenting in this thesis does not hold generalisability as a central aim (Williams, 2004). Rather it zooms in and explores the specific, the local, and the

situated. I cannot claim to make generalisations about what teachers everywhere, or even those in Israel, think about professional learning and in-service programs, but I can look at a particular group of teachers (heterogeneous in itself) and examine what they have to share. I am not interested in portraying a universal picture of how teachers conceptualise their learning. Rather, I show how certain teachers, who have at least one learning experience in common (the WDLT program I was teaching), make meaning of their own learning and the place of that learning in their professional lives. Their experiences and thoughts will contribute to a growing body of literature that grapples with critically situated forms of professional learning. Through my search for teacher stories, I was seeking the unique and the personal and not just what teachers have in common.

Through engaging with this carefully situated study and reflecting on the stories of my participants and my conversations with them, I am hoping that teachers of writing in any part of the world will be able to draw these stories and conversations into their own “chains of utterance” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 69), helping to animate and focus their own professional learning. In addition, teacher educators in other parts in the world may well be able to examine their own practice through looking through the lens that I present. I am hoping that they, leaders in schools and policy makers may learn more about the way some teachers prioritise and view their professional learning and the various ways in which teacher learning can be enacted and realised.

Exploring the qualitative research paradigm I have chosen, I identify the research in this study as associated with interpretive and constructivist approaches. In the next two sections I briefly outline this affiliation and discuss additional perspectives on epistemology as it relates to this study.

### **5.3 Interpretive and constructivist approaches to qualitative research**

Humans understand themselves and the world around them through the interpretation of interactions and events and the attribution of significance to them; these are both subjective, culturally mediated processes (Spector-Mersel, 2010a). Wellington (2000), proposes that the interpretive approach to qualitative research adopts the view that behaviour can only be explained "by referring to the subjective states of the people acting in it" (p. 198). He explains that this mode of inquiry is suitable for exploring both human activity and written texts and is antithetical to

positivism which explains behaviour "by the examination of observable entities" (p. 198). McCormack (2004) demonstrates that this approach to inquiry relates to knowledge generated as "situated, transient, partial and provisional; characterized by multiple voices, perspectives, truths and meanings. This is inquiry which values transformation at a personal level, individual subjectivity and the researcher's voice" (p. 220).

As a study grounded in the interpretive approach to qualitative research, it is not helpful to search for some elusive objective truth in the stories I collected in interviews with my teacher participants, or in narratives and reflective texts written by these teachers as part of the WDLT program I taught. Carter (1993) reminds us that "stories, including those told by teachers, are constructions that give a meaning to events and convey a particular sense of experience" (p. 8). They are not the events themselves. The teachers in this study conveyed their reconstructions of events and experiences in a spoken or written story; through reconstructing and telling these stories they were doing more than just transmitting a finite and inert story. The stories that were most meaningful to my hearing were almost alive, and they were a crucial part of these teachers' efforts to make sense of their professional reality. It is likely that the stories and answers the teachers offered on the particular day of the interview were coloured by experiences both in school and out of school at the time of our conversation. It is to be expected that the particular professional learning frameworks – including the WDLT program I was leading – and the teaching contexts in which the teachers were situated or embedded at the time of the interview also had a role in the choice and generation of narratives told. As King and Horrocks (2010) argue, the subjectivity of a narrator is always reflected in their language choices. As a researcher listening to interview recordings, transcribing and searching for connections and meanings in the words of my participants and this study, I was, according to McCormack (2004), continuing the reconstruction process. This continues as the researcher transcribes and makes sense of the stories told and then continues further as the reader reads and processes the research text (McCormack, 2004).

These ideas are crucial dimensions of the kinds of contextualised research that I value. This study is both interpretive and constructivist; the personal and professional context in which my participants and I are grounded cannot be ignored. My research zooms in on the thoughts and understandings of particular teachers at a particular point in time and takes into account that this context is not a stable entity; it is unstable and ever changing.

#### 5.4 Epistemology and knowledge generation in this study

As a teacher, researcher and writer, through the process of delving deeper into the epistemological groundings of my study, exploring the beliefs and values guiding me, I became aware that there are no simple answers to questions regarding the nature of knowledge in educational research. The following excerpt from my research journal points to this complexity:

*Identity is indeed connected to my methodology and to the epistemology of this study.*

*Who am I?*

*If I am a literacy teacher, I am writing as an equal to my participants, a colleague. I teach and take part in professional learning programs run by others. I, like the participants, am a teacher busy in the endless race to educate Israeli children despite the high expectations of teachers and the uncondusive conditions.*

*If I am a teacher educator, in part responsible for the professional learning of these very teachers, my viewpoint is very different to those of the teacher participants.*

*Am I looking at two different sides of the same coin when I am discussing professional learning for teachers? If so, how does it change things that I am striving to achieve a PhD degree? It's true that I am not faculty, I don't have a "home" in the academic world but the title "doctorantit" [doctoral candidate] must have some distancing effect between the teachers and I.*

*My need to examine my practice as a teacher educator and to reflect on it in a critical way for research purposes is different from the way I reflect on my work as a school teacher ... (Journal entry, February 26, 2013)*

Reflectively exploring my own research practice, I became more acutely aware of the dialogic nature of my work. My readings of the literature on dialogism, by the likes of Bakhtin (1981, 1984, 1986), Holquist (1990) and Morson and Emerson (1990) helped me make sense of my own experiences of professional learning and to gain understandings from the data I collected. When reading dense and complex theoretical texts, both my professional experience and the literature I had studied previously, made the reading easier. Later readings threw light on earlier readings and on additional interactions and past experiences. To me, working dialogically means constantly

shuffling between texts, conversations, my developing understandings, and my experiences. In a very real way, everything makes sense in terms of my interactions with the ideas of others. After a particularly helpful conversation with one of my supervisors, I wrote in my research journal:

*I read Bakhtin (1981) - it was dense and extremely challenging. Then I read Mishler (1986) who has similar ideas about making sense and writes about the joint construction of knowledge, referring to Bakhtin. Now I will return to Bakhtin and it will be easier to comprehend; I will be able to read him differently as a result of reading Mishler. It appears I am making sense of the term 'dialogical' by working dialogically. (Journal entry, February 1, 2013)*

In the next section I present my methodological choices within the broad field of qualitative research. In doing so, I show how narrative inquiry and practitioner research are both methods suited to my epistemological beliefs as a researcher and to the aims and context of this study.

## **5.5 Narrative inquiry**

The role, nature and value of narrative in research and teacher professional learning continue to be a focus of scholarly debate (e.g. Doecke & Parr, 2009; Goodson, Biesta, Tedder, & Adair, 2010; Parr, 2007). The writing and sharing of teacher narratives, a focus of my inquiry, is also a central feature of my methodology. In this study, I conducted all interviews in a way designed to draw out the narrative dimensions and nuances of participants' experiences and views. This interview data tended to be narrative in nature, as were program reflections and teaching narratives written by the teachers in the WDLT program. This was not surprising since I had been explicitly encouraging teacher participants in the program to make use of narrative structures to reflect on their work and identities.

Since the 1970s, many educational researchers have looked to qualitative research approaches due to dissatisfaction with the way quantitative methods have proven incapable of examining the relational and human dimensions of complex educational questions (see Lather, 2004), and in response to the growing awareness that teachers should be directly involved in the production of knowledge about teaching and learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005;

Fenstermacher, 1994; Groundwater-Smith, Mitchell, Mockler, Ponte, & Ronnerman, 2013). Gudmundsdottir (1995) remarks that narratives are used in qualitative research, both as a method of inquiry and as a means of communicating results. Although the use of narrative inquiry in educational research has significantly increased in the past two decades (e.g. Clandinin et al., 2006; Doyle & Carter, 2003; Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013; Kamler, 2003; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002; Shank, 2006), narrative research are still not always an accepted form of inquiry (Thomas, 2012). Despite this, narrative inquiry has come to be seen, not merely as an attempt to gather and explore stories from lives, but as a concentrated effort to understand the storied nature of life as it is lived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Many researchers using the term 'narrative inquiry' are signalling that they employ an interpretive approach to all stages of their research (Josselson, 2006). They acknowledge that in our everyday lives, narratives are a means through which we interpret our world (Gudmundsdottir, 1995). Doecke and Parr (2009) describe the centrality of narrative in the construction of personal and communal identity. Narrative research, they argue, allows us to explore the unique ways in which teachers experience their world; narrative approaches enable us to generate valuable understandings about the identity, beliefs and practices of teachers. Kamler (2003) explains that: "stories do not tell single truths, but rather represent a truth, a perspective, a particular way of seeing experience and naming it. Stories are partial; they are located rather than universal" (p. 38). Similarly, recognising this understanding that stories are a complex representation of reality, Carter (1993) explores the range of meanings embedded within narrative and proposes that "story is a distinctive mode of explanation characterised by an intrinsic multiplicity of meanings" (p. 6). By exploring a variety of voices through a range of teacher perspectives, I am searching for complex understandings of the way that professional learning is experienced by individuals and groups in a particular professional learning environment.

Spector-Mersel (2010a), an Israeli scholar, describes narrative inquiry as a paradigm and focuses on narrative epistemology, closely exploring the processes in which stories are generated and the contexts in which this occurs. She and other scholars highlight the choices made by a narrator while relating their story. For example, Spector-Mersel explains that narratives told are set in the current situation of the narrator and that all events, past and future are told from present

perspective. In addition, Rosenthal (1993) points out that the narrator is continually involved in a process of selection when telling a story, as it is impossible to include all story details.

Spector-Mersel (2010b, p. 57), outlines four different contexts which influence the creation of narratives: (1) the macro context - the external forces in society (e.g. the economy and the political situation); (2) the micro context – events in the life of the narrator close to the time the story is created; (3) the immediate context – the situation in which the story is told (e.g. an interview or counselling session) including the place and audience; and (4) the "key plots of culture" (p. 57) – that is, narratives pervasive in society at the time of narration. The following quotations from Rebecca, one of the teachers I interviewed for this study, reflect and demonstrate Spector-Mersel's four contexts:

#### **5.5.1 The macro context**

*Look, there were years in which we were... it was all a lot less centralised, the system. In the years of Yossi Sarid<sup>32</sup>, of Shulamit Aloni, whole language... there was so much creativity in those years! So much creativity! And development. And then along came Limor Livnat - club on the head! (Rebecca, interview, April 3, 2013)*

#### **5.5.2 The micro context**

*Last year we participated at school in a professional learning program as part of the National Program for the Implementation of 21st Century Skills<sup>33</sup>. In my eyes it was simply an insult! I was simply insulted by that program. By the waste of time, the low level with absolutely no depth. To teach me how to open Google Docs with absolutely no pedagogy ... those programs I can't stand. I am more a person who needs the principles, the theories. With the worksheets I can manage! (Rebecca, interview, April 3, 2013)*

#### **5.5.3 The immediate context**

*You know, I feel now, I have to say, towards the end of the interview, that in what I am saying there are heaps of contradictions... (Rebecca, interview, April 3, 2013)*

#### **5.5.4 Narratives pervasive in society**

*Not all of us need to be forced to study! Didn't we learn beforehand? Didn't we learn previously? (Rebecca, interview, April 3, 2013)*

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<sup>32</sup> Rebecca mentions three former Israeli Ministers of Education: Yossi Sarid (in office July 1999 – June 2000), Shulamit Aloni (in office July 1992 – May 1993), and Limor Livnat (in office March 2001 – January 2006)

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Education (2011)

Narrative has been described as a suitable way to explore connections between personal and public affairs (Bathmaker & Harnett, 2010; Doecke, 2001). Professional learning, too, is indeed both a public concern (policy issues, teacher evaluation and student outcomes, for example) and an extremely personal matter (individual needs and difficulties and issues of professional environment and interest, for example). Bathmaker and Harnett (2010), echoing the epistemology of Mishler (1986), explain that narratives are "collaborative deconstructions" (p. 2) created by the research participant, the researcher, interested others involved in the process and in turn the reader. Lincoln and Denzin (2005) call this "engaged social science" (p. 1117). This study takes into account the social contexts in which the teacher narratives were generated and shared. My own role as researcher in the interview situation is also openly discussed.

Kohler-Riessman (2008) explains that narrative research enables us to move in closer in order to examine the lives and thoughts of those who often are unheard and unseen, those who lead 'normal' lives, perhaps, but on the periphery. The voices of teachers are frequently absent from academic and political discussions on the professional development of educators (Carl, 2005). Bathmaker (2010) explains "rich accounts of the complexities of real life and an emphasis on the particular, may call into question dominant narratives that do not match the experience of life as lived" (p. 3). The dominant narratives on professional learning for teachers are presented and discussed in Chapter 2. For these reasons, I have chosen narrative inquiry as a means of bringing teachers and their learning to the forefront of the debate on professional learning for teachers. In the following section, I discuss the particular form of practitioner inquiry I engage in for this PhD study.

## **5.6 Practitioner inquiry**

In this study I explore my own professional context as a site of professional learning for my teacher-learner<sup>34</sup> participants and for myself. Practitioner research is not a new concept, (e.g. Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Stenhouse, 1975) and has become increasingly popular in school settings across the world. The importance of research conducted by teachers has been recognised in the literature

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<sup>34</sup> I use the term 'teacher-learner' to denote that professional teachers were participating in the WDLT program as students.

from many parts of the world, including: BERA (2014) and Campbell et al. (2004) in Great Britain; Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) and Craig (2009) in the United States; Doecke et al. (2008) in Australia, and Robinson (2006) in New Zealand. Although published reports and collections of practitioner research by teachers and teacher educators working in in-service settings are becoming more common (e.g. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Doecke, Parr, & Sawyer, 2014; Kitchen, 2016; Leider, 2015; Newman & Mowbray, 2012; Tanaka, 2015; Wells, 2001; White, 2016), I have learned the hard way that practitioner inquiry, like other forms of qualitative research (Denzin, 2009), is still not a universally accepted approach. This is one of the reasons that both the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) and the Israeli Chief Scientist's office in the Ministry of Education required extended dialogue with me before they were able to grant ethics approval for this study<sup>35</sup>. Details about the challenging conversations I engaged in with these bodies appears in 6.1.

While negotiating the nature and content of my professional learning programs, I have come to understand that this study could not be apolitical. Teacher education is involved in politics and as I have discovered through my readings (e.g. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Kincheloe, 2003; McWilliam, 2004; Price-Dennis, 2010) teacher practitioner research is in essence a political practice, even if its participants do not intend it that way at the outset. Teachers who critically explore their professional environment and their practice, teachers who reach out to their peers and share experience in search of collaborative learning, are making a statement about who they are as professionals and how they wish to be seen by others. In a society which "does not hold an image of teachers which is characterized by individuals engaged in reflection, research, sharing their work with others, constructing their workplace, producing curriculum materials, and publishing their research for other teachers and community members in general" (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 46), this engagement in critical inquiry inevitably involves teachers in a "political struggle" (p. 45). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe this kind of teacher inquiry as "quintessentially political and transformative research" (p. 337). They argue that a combination of theory, teacher activism, and teacher knowledge created in a particular context can be directed towards improving educational practice and thus changing and hopefully ameliorating social problems and challenges. At a personal level, practitioner inquiry allows me to challenge some widely held views in my own

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<sup>35</sup> See Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

professional environment and contexts. More broadly, it raises fundamental questions about issues in educational research and educational practice that are so often taken for granted. I sense that practitioner inquiry makes me a more critical and sensitive educator.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) outline several methodological issues which must be kept in mind when engaging in practitioner inquiry or attempting to locate practitioner research with respect to other research approaches: “teacher research as personal” (pp. 337-8), “teacher research as an ongoing process” (p. 338), “teacher research as a process of intersubjective knowledge production” (pp. 338-9), “teacher research methods as arising organically out of the interactive and relational context” (p. 339), and “teacher research as a form of prefigurative pedagogy” (p. 339). In the next section of this chapter I briefly discuss these issues.

### **5.6.1 Teacher research as personal**

Teachers involved in practitioner inquiry are required to share the way that their background, beliefs and values pervade the work they are producing. In this study I attempt to make explicit my personal and professional identities; suppositions, expectations, cultural circumstances, and sensitivities throughout the thesis. In particular, excerpts from journal entries, email communications and blog posts highlight these dimensions.

### **5.6.2 Teacher research as an ongoing process**

Although this research project is an independent entity with well-defined starting and finishing points, it is part of a continuing process through which I began to adopt an "inquiry stance" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 338) in the years before this study, as a Master's student (see Aharonian, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a), and which has continued in my professional practice and in the writing of this study. In addition, I believe it will continue to colour the way I teach and explore my professional environment in the future.

### **5.6.3 Teacher research as a process of intersubjective knowledge production**

This study attempts to give voice to a range of teachers reflecting on their professional learning in their own words (i.e., in texts they have written and in interviews). In addition, the conventional distinctions between the researcher and the participants in the generation of knowledge were partly disturbed. My interviews and correspondence with these teachers can be seen as a collaborative attempt on my part to generate knowledge about professional learning.

#### **5.6.4 Teacher research methods as arising organically out of the interactive and relational context**

In many ways, this study is a continuation of the work I did with my teacher participants in the WDLT professional learning program I taught. As explained earlier, written artefacts, teaching narratives and reflective pieces, responses in online conversations and my own blog posts have re-appeared as data in this research. Relationships with teachers previously created in the WDLT program have been rekindled during research interviews for this PhD study and other communications.

#### **5.6.5 Teacher research as a form of prefigurative pedagogy**

One of my central aims in attempting to gain a deeper understanding of professional learning as it is conceptualised by teachers in my own professional environment is to improve my own practice as a teacher educator and maybe even influence school leaders and policy makers responsible for professional learning in a local or wider context.

I am hoping that this study will pave the way for others interested in joining the conversation on teacher learning and knowledge. I have been encouraged and challenged to further my own research by teacher educators around the world who believe in the value of their work, appreciate the knowledge teachers produce when appropriate learning conditions are created and comprehend the importance of having teacher voices clearly heard in the research and policy arenas.

Now that I have outlined my position vis-à-vis practitioner inquiry as a research methodology and some of the reasons I have chosen to research my own professional context in this study, in the following section, I explore the role of writing in this PhD thesis as an epistemological issue rather than as a mere technical exercise, as thesis writing is often presented.

### **5.7 The role of writing in this research**

In this study, writing has been a ‘mode of inquiry’ (Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) from the outset, a means of organising my practical knowledge, generating ideas and reaching understandings of central concepts and theories. Much of the text presented in this final thesis document originated in freewriting sessions (in a notebook, Microsoft Word files, and on a

website called "750 words"<sup>36</sup>, in reflective blog posts and journal entries. While most of the texts were written in my mother tongue, English, some of the texts were produced in Hebrew or in a mix of the two languages. Writing has been an integral part of the thinking process in this project and at no stage was seen as simply a tool for "writing up" and presenting my work to others. Kamler and Thomson (2006) explain that in this way I am situating writing "centre stage" (p. 3) in the research process.

Writing has also been a means of communication with my supervisors located in another part of the world and of reaching out to others in the academic world whose research touches mine (preparing and presenting conference papers, for example). My engagement with my research was deepened and challenged in the writing of journal articles and participating in the peer review process (e.g. Aharonian, 2016). At times my writing is highly personal, inquiry based, often tentative and provisional. I make no attempt to simplify issues or portray a single truth.

Just as the role of writing is central to the formation of this research, so are questions of language and the bilingual nature of my work. The following section which explores these issues opens with a short extract from my research journal.

## 5.8 Language matters

*Last night while driving home and engaging in a family discussion on dreams, my children asked me: "Imma, beizo safa at cholemet?" [Mummy, in which language do you dream?]. I answered immediately that I have no idea. I explained that I really can't remember my dreams but that I do know that there are areas in which I think entirely in Hebrew (shopping, home life, pedagogy, literacy, school-life...) and areas in which I think exclusively in English (everything connected to research, methodology, theory, technical instructions, numbers...). (Journal entry, February 2, 2013)*

After more than 25 years living in Israel, I experience my life in two languages which are now fairly equal in terms of my competence in each of them. This PhD study is an interesting hybrid

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<sup>36</sup> <http://750words.com>

of the two, demonstrating that my hasty answer to my children, describing clear boundaries between the languages wasn't completely accurate. According to Temple (2006) every bi-lingual person is bi-lingual in a special way. In this section, I explore the way in which the English and Hebrew languages meet in the design and enactment of my study.

In researching professional learning and research paradigms, I made a conscious decision to read Hebrew research alongside the English language research I was more accustomed to from previous periods of formal study. Reading complex theoretical articles in Hebrew, my second language, was not easy but gave me a chance to develop additional understandings. This slower reading, contemplating words and trying to make sense of them with respect to familiar English terminology was a gradual but rewarding process. Hearing similar ideas in different ways in two languages, and understanding each of them slightly differently because of cultural and linguistic nuances, added to my comprehension and in turn helped me describe the Israeli context more clearly in my writing. I understand this process more deeply when I contemplate the words of Bakhtin (1981) which emphasise the way in which all language is inherently culturally and contextually drenched:

There are no "neutral" words and forms; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. (p. 293)

This thesis needs to be appreciated as inherently a bi-lingual artefact, even though, despite a few translations into Hebrew, English appears to be by far the dominant language in the writing. The thesis describes a professional learning context which functions entirely in Israel in Hebrew language and culture. All communication with my teacher participants took place in Hebrew while they were learning about written literacy in mother tongue Hebrew. All written texts from the WDLT program (including the teacher narratives, emails, online communication and reflections) which have been utilised as data in this inquiry, were produced in Hebrew and consequently translated by me for use in this thesis. All interviews were conducted in Hebrew, transcribed and

then translated into English by me (usually the entire interview but in a few cases, only relevant sections were translated).

Table 5.1 presents the research texts connected to the study and the language in which they were originally written.

**Table 5.1: Research texts in the study and their languages**

<b>Texts originally generated in Hebrew</b>	<b>Texts originally generated in English</b>	<b>Texts originally generated in Hebrew or English or a combination of the two languages</b>
Interviews and interview transcripts	Research proposal	
	Literature reviews and other chapters written	
Teacher narratives		My own reflective narratives
Reflective writing by the teachers in the WDLT program	Professional blog, <i>thesisthoughts</i> <sup>37</sup>	Reflective research journal
	Journal articles for publication	Conference presentations
Ethics documents for the Israeli Chief Scientist's Office	Ethics documents for MUHREC, Monash University	
Ongoing dialogue with critical friends (see Costa & Kallick, 1993) – doctoral writing group members	Ongoing dialogue with my supervisors (written and oral)	

When I was initially planning my research, I saw translation as a technical issue only. I deliberated over the question of whether I should have someone else transcribe my interviews or translate the transcribed materials. It seemed obvious to me that the whole study would be ‘conducted’ in Hebrew and that the transition to English was for sharing the thesis document with my supervisors and thesis examiners alone. In time, I realised that this approach was simplistic. I discovered that many of the texts were in various versions that blurred linguistic boundaries. I found that the materials I had created were in four different linguistic forms: Hebrew; English; Hebrew containing English words, concepts and even full sentences; and English texts with Hebrew scattered within them. Each text represents the context in which it was constructed and reflects some of the processes I underwent as a researcher in exploring its meaning.

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<sup>37</sup> *thesisthoughts* - <http://naha1.edublogs.org>

During my research journey, I was faced with additional dilemmas concerning language. For example: Who should translate the materials from Hebrew into English? Should I act as a ‘researcher-translator’ (Temple & Young, 2004) or should I employ a professional translator? At what stage should the materials be translated - immediately after interview transcription, following initial data analysis or at the conclusion of analysis? Other questions I asked were: What and how much should I translate? Should I translate whole interviews or should I translate only the sections which appear in the analysis or sections to appear in the finished thesis? How should I translate? Should I completely transfer the text into “clean” or “transparent” English as recommended by Venuti (1995), or should I leave certain concepts and sections in Hebrew, accompanied by the translation? If so, should this Hebrew be in Hebrew letters or transliterated into English letters?

Translating oral and written texts required me to focus in on the languages which inform and mediate this study. This focus prompted me to grapple with the way language is always saturated in cultural connotations in the way that Raymond Williams (1958/1989) talks about in his essay, *Culture is ordinary*. Williams concludes that “every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, and its own meanings. Every human society expresses these in institutions and in arts and learning” (p. 4). In critically exploring the language of the narratives and the interview transcripts in this study, I attempted to be sensitive to these cultural influences, shapes, purposes and meanings, to notice them and not take them for granted. Zooming in on the responses from my participants (and my own) enabled me to reach richer understandings of content and context, and of language and culture. This process sensitised me to the ways in which this study and my own professional practice are deeply situated in the Israeli educational and cultural context. Preparing this thesis for readers from other parts of the world required more than literal translation; it required a critical examination of the local and specific characteristics of the context which influence the way that the teacher participants (and I) make meaning of professional learning.

Quite early on in the research process, I had to make decisions about these issues. I decided to translate the materials myself, but not entirely. I decided to translate sections of text at the time of data analysis. I identified and translated “key moments” (Madill & Sullivan, 2010, p. 2196); utterances of significance which according to Madill and Sullivan are parts of the text which were told with emotional involvement or aroused an emotional response in me as the researcher.

I undertook an initial analysis of my data in Hebrew and then decided to translate the analytic text into English. During my engagement with the text, I discovered that the translation process, slow and focused, allowed me an additional or different entry point into the texts before me. The deliberation over words and concepts allowed me a far deeper and more nuanced dialogue with the research texts I had created than I had experienced beforehand. Furthermore, I discovered that the deliberation surrounding which parts of the text should be translated and which not was also a process of textual interpretation that directly influenced the knowledge claims generated through this study.

Certain decisions produced further methodological dilemmas. My decision to translate the texts early on in the study, for example, may have prevented some of my participants, those who could not read research materials in English, from reading my interpretations and responding to them. Taking this into account, I offered them the option of receiving my writing in either English or Hebrew and was sincerely prepared to translate materials back to Hebrew if necessary. As discussed in chapter 6, continuing participant involvement during text analysis was important to me as a qualitative researcher striving to achieve critical rigour and trustworthiness in this PhD study.

In the course of translating texts associated with my study, several Bakhtinian concepts helped me to better understand the process of translation and its significance. Continual rereading of the text, together with recurrent transitions between languages allowed me to identify the dialogic quality of the text. As I have explained earlier, dialogism, according to Bakhtin (1981) is a useful concept that attempts to convey a sense of the struggle between different voices and world views in a text. The contradictions embodied within were revealed when I reread interview transcriptions. I came to understand that during translation, I was even more sensitive to this phenomenon. These complexities lead me back to the original text and again to the work of ‘translation’. According to Bakhtin (1981), the words used by a person are not his or her own, they are always adaptations of the utterances of others. He explains:

All words have the “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293)

The challenges of translation sharpened my awareness and my sensitivity to these traces within the words in my data.

My own experiences with coming to know and understand the complexities of translation in research, or at least the limited way in which I initially saw these tasks as technical only are mirrored in the research in the topic. Translation is an ever growing area in the globalising academic world where researchers from different national and linguistic spaces are interested in researching various issues, globally or in a multi-cultural society and engaging in critical dialogue across the boundaries that separate those spaces. Xian (2008) explains that researchers from all over the world are interested in publishing their work in English in order to reach a wider audience. Koutsogiannis (2004), discussing the Greek context, makes the distinction between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ languages. Hebrew is, in this sense, a ‘lesser used language’ (Koutsogiannis, 2004, p. 163) and this has social, cultural, political and economic implications for the research and the researcher.

According to Xian (2008), despite the fact that there is an increase in the amount of research being done in multi-cultural and global contexts, there is little reference to the place of translation in these studies. According to Xian, “the dilemmas and problems of the process remain in some sort of ‘black box’” (p. 232). The issue of translation appears mainly in discussions on the precision of the translation of questionnaires and cross-language interviewing with the aid of a bi-lingual translator. Translation is usually referred to as a technicality which stands ‘behind’ the research and is not presented explicitly. I decided early on to leave signs of this translation process here in the thesis artefact. As mentioned earlier, concepts and certain terms have been left in the original Hebrew. There are also a number of quotations and texts presented in the original tongue in order to maintain the feel of the interaction. I have included the original Hebrew word or phrase used by my participants or by other researchers and have immediately included the translation into English in square brackets. As with other elements of this thesis, I see no value in attempting to hide or ignore the cultural, linguistic and epistemological complexity inherent in the bilingual construction of this elaborate transcultural project. I am interested in sharing the bumpy road I travelled with my readers.

Part of the challenge with respect to simplistic understandings of translation in research, according to Angelelli and Baer (2016), is that the field of translation continues to be influenced by positivist understandings of representation “which promote an essentially mimetic model that posits the existence of a priori meaning expressed in one language which is then transferred, with a greater or lesser degree of fidelity, from that language to another” (p. 7). Angelelli and Baer argue that in these positivist approaches, translation is likely to be viewed as an attempt to grasp the single significance of an utterance. This describes a neutral and technical action which aims for a proper conversion, a correct, exact translation; the only possible translation of a specific text. In the literature, various techniques are mentioned which are aimed at assuring quality and precision in translation. ‘Back translation’, for example, is a two directional translation technique moving back and forth between the languages in order to assure the ‘trustworthiness’ of the translation. The fear of ‘inaccurate’ translation or ‘unreliable’ translation is significant for researchers like Peña (2007) for whom there is a “distinct threat to validity in ... cross cultural research” (p. 1255).

In contrast with these traditional approaches, when viewing translation and interpreting from post-structuralist approaches, they are often seen as “highly dynamic, socially constructed endeavors” (Angelelli & Baer, 2016, p. 3). In this way, the translator can be identified as a partner in the construction of knowledge in the study. Angelelli and Baer (2016) describe translators as “agents and cultural mediators, co-creators of meaning” (p. 7). Just as the researcher contributes in the interview situation and in the analysis of materials, the contribution of the translator in the understandings reached in the study is significant and should not be ignored. Thus, the translator, like the researcher, is a partner in the reconstruction of the experiences of the interviewee. This approach to the translator in research, reminds us of Mishler’s (1986) approach to the transcriber. Mishler explains that different transcribers are likely to transcribe interviews in very different ways. He encourages the transcriber to write and interpret words, sounds and silences. In this study, language should be seen as a key mediating force in the meaning-making process; thus translation is an integral part of the generation of knowledge.

Xian (2008) provides an account of the methodological challenges which arise when a researcher recognises that speakers of different languages are likely to understand life in society differently. Other poststructuralist researchers, like Simon (1996), point to the fact that there is no one correct translation, and that meaning is made through understanding of the dialogue between different

texts. Simon explains that “the solution to many of the translator’s dilemmas are not to be found in dictionaries, but rather in an understanding of the way language is tied to local realities, to literary forms and to changing identities” (p. 130).

I conclude this section with a quotation from my blog, *thesisthoughts*, which reflects the way in which language and translation have been woven into this study from the outset, helping me to read and understand the literature, think about the implications of my practice and to generate meaning from the words, both written and oral, of my teacher participants. Understanding the mediating role of language in the creation of this PhD thesis is crucial in the discussion of its epistemology.

*There are many cultural messages playing in my ears as I make decisions about which references to read and their status in the academic world. One of the questions I will need to explore is the place of Israeli researchers in my work. This morning, I decided to try to clarify my thoughts on the epistemology of my research by rereading a book in Hebrew: Mechkar Narrativi: Teoria, Yetzira Veparshanut [Narrative Research: Theory, Creation and Interpretation](Tuval-Mashiach & Spector-Mersel, 2010).*

*I decided to start with this reference as I have heard Gabriella Spector-Mersel explain the theories in many different forums and found them to be clear and accessible. I must be honest in saying that although I have no trouble reading academic texts in Hebrew, I usually do it only when I have to. I read in Hebrew as a member of my doctoral writing group and read articles and book chapters as preparation for the sessions of the qualitative research interest group meetings at the Mofet Institute. Other than those occasions, I will usually choose English references. I am now becoming aware that this is not only because reading academic texts is still easier and quicker in English, it is also because of the cultural messages prominent in the academic world (and indeed in Israel as well), that Hebrew references are less important and influential than those written in English.*

*Embarking on the task, I was hoping that reading what I have heard Gabriella explain (in person) and translating the material slowly from Hebrew into English would help me understand more. I expected this exercise would give me ideas for entry points into writing about my own understandings of epistemology. As a result of this reading I found translation to be an interesting way of approaching a text. It slows down my reading and forces me to grapple with the dense carpet of terms involved. I cannot write a sentence until I reach some degree of understanding. Hearing things said (as familiar as they may be) in a different language, does indeed shed light on the ideas expressed. (Aharonian, 2013)*

Having described the epistemological grounding of this study, Chapter 6 describes the methods I adopted to enlist and engage with my study participants and to collect and critically analyse the data generated through my interactions with them.

## **Chapter 6 - Research methods: Behind the scenes of this PhD**

In this chapter I describe the methods I adopted in this PhD study. I explain my choice of participants, the way in which I invited them to take part in this project and the seven forms of data collected over a period of eight years. I also explain the approaches I used for data analysis. The final section of the chapter focuses on the importance of reflexivity in this study, and discusses reflexive rigour and trustworthiness in the form of interpretive research I have conducted. In various ways, like the previous chapters, this chapter departs from the traditional structure of the typical ‘methodology chapter’ by combining illustrative excerpts from my data in an effort to allow readers a better understanding of this study and complex research journey.

At the outset, I wish to make clear that I have continually deliberated how to conduct this research ethically and in ways which respect the teachers who have taken an active role. Following Kostogriz and Doecke (2007), I went to great pains to act and respond ethically towards participants as part of my ongoing ethical responsibility to them as a researcher and colleague. This is indeed in alignment with the way I always strive to build respectful and ethical relationships in my role as a teacher educator. Far exceeding my obligation to fulfil ethics guidelines set by external review bodies, as a researcher I am accountable for my actions and am fully committed to protect and empower my participants. I sincerely hope my readers will be able to discern my “dialogical ethics”, my ongoing “responsibility for the Other” (Kostogriz & Doecke, 2007, p. 11) throughout this PhD.

### **6.1 Recruiting participants**

As outlined earlier, this PhD study is situated in the long running WDLT professional learning programs which I have provided for over 500 Israeli teachers since 2008 (see 1.3 and 1.4). Participants in this study were all teachers who were previously enrolled in one of the WDLT programs taught by me during 2008-2015. As mentioned earlier, the programs took place in

regional *Pisga* teachers' centres in northern Israel<sup>38</sup>. Teachers were approached to participate in this research months or, in some cases, years after the WDLT program assessments were completed and processed by Israel's Ministry of Education. These teachers were invited to participate in the study through an email message and an explanatory statement describing the study sent by the principal of the *Pisga* centre in a way that was designed to avoid any coercion to participate. Invitations were sent to all teachers who had participated in these programs, and teachers who were willing to be involved in the study were invited to reply directly to me. I addressed potential ethical issues associated with informed consent by employing a third party to manage the conversation about consent with prospective participants. This practice was suggested by Bournot-Trites and Belanger (2005) quoting additional studies which employed non-coercive methods of obtaining consent (e.g. Shi, Wen, & Wang, 2003).

It is important to note that this method of recruiting participants was the only process authorised by the Israeli Chief Scientist's Office, the body responsible in Israel for granting permission for research with teachers as participants. In addition, I was instructed to exclude from the study all teachers teaching at my own primary school, in order to avoid coercion resulting from my role as vice-principal in the school. This precaution is in line with other practitioner inquiry studies of a similar nature, including Parr and Chan (2015).

Earlier research plans, authorised by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC), included having the principal of the *Pisga* teachers' centre inform teachers of the study in the early stages of the program and to keep the consent forms and the names of those that agreed to participate unknown to me until the conclusion of my formal attachment to those teachers.

Principals in four *Pisga* centres sent the invitation letter to teachers in the relevant groups. Fewer teachers than I expected responded to my invitation to take part in this study. Of those who responded, four teachers were not included in the study because of a lack of time available on their part. An additional two teachers were eventually not interviewed but were interested in their

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<sup>38</sup> According to the directions from the managing director of the Ministry of Education (2007), *Pisga* teachers' centres are centres aimed at providing professional development for Israeli teachers throughout their careers. There are presently 56 *Pisga* centres in Israel, operated by the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the educational departments of the local councils.

writing being used as data in the study. In summary, in this study I interviewed seven teachers who also shared their writing and there were an additional two teachers who only contributed their written texts. All were working in primary schools in northern Israel<sup>39</sup>.

## 6.2 Participants<sup>40</sup>

The teachers who participated in this study took part in different iterations of the WDLT program over a number years. Although the program repetitions were very similar in content, each cohort was unique because they met at different times in different cities. In addition to variation in geographical area, group dynamics were also diverse. The dynamics of teaching and learning in each program are influenced by the time of year in which the sessions took place (beginning/end of the school year, or during periods of pressure at school, for example). The varied physical characteristics of the different *Pisga* centres also influenced the teaching and learning in the programs (overcrowding, technological advancement, and even coffee facilities, for example), as did the management style of centre staff (how strict the adherence to rules and regulations is, for example).

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<sup>39</sup> One of the participants, Hava, an early career teacher has since chosen a new career path.

<sup>40</sup> Although I have chosen to refer to the teachers who played a significant role in the creation of this thesis as ‘participants’, I do indeed see them, as do John Yandell (2013) and others, as collaborators, partners in the generation of understandings in this research.

The following table presents details of the WDLT program from 2008 to 2015, including geographic location and numbers of program participants.

**Table 6.1: WDLT program cohorts and locations 2008-2015**

Academic Year <sup>41</sup>	City <sup>42</sup>	Number of teachers <sup>43</sup>
2008-2009	Kiryat Shmoneh	30
2008-2009	Nazareth Elite	14
2009-2010	Mt. Gilon (In-school program)	22
2009-2010	Beit She'an	17
2009-2010	Zafed	30
2009-2010	Afula	33
2010-2011	Acre	27
2010-2011	Tiberius	12
2010-2011	Afula	46
2010-2011	Zafed	16
2011-2012	Afula	14
2011-2012	Tiberius	38
2011-2012	Zafed	47
2012-2013	Zafed	22
2012-2013	Tiberius	34
2012-2013	Afula	26
2013-2014	Afula	12
2013-2014	Nazareth Elite	21
2013-2014	Zafed	15
2014-2015	Naharia	25
		501

Despite some common characteristics, the program participants were not an homogeneous group. They worked in a variety of different schools and belonged to different cultural and religious groups (Jewish/Arab/Circassian; Israeli born/immigrants; secular/traditional/religious/ultra-orthodox). The teachers who responded to my invitation and chose to participate in this study were all Israeli born secular Jews. Their ages ranged from 33 to 65, and their years of teaching experience ranged from 5 years to 40 years. They were employed in a variety of teaching roles. Some of the teachers had extra responsibilities at school (e.g. subject coordinator) and two had previous experience as leaders of professional development.

<sup>41</sup> The Israeli school year opens on September 1 and closes in primary schools on June 30.

<sup>42</sup> In order to protect the anonymity of my study participants, I have not mentioned which program/s they participated in or the name of the city.

<sup>43</sup> Number, retrieved from *Pisga* centre information posted on the *Campus Virtuali* [virtual campus] or Moodle denotes the number of teachers pre-enrolled (in several cases there were less participants in the program).

When I was ready for the principals of the *Pisga* centres to send out the email inviting teachers to participate in my study, I experienced great excitement together with apprehension and a degree of stress. My reflective writing at that time reveals the different directions in which my mind was racing.

*This morning I sat down to organise the addresses and a number of thoughts entered my mind: Firstly I was aware of a sense of excitement: Who will reply? Who will be interested in meeting me? How will the teachers respond to my invitation?*

*Secondly I was aware that I reacted differently to the different names on the list as I met them. For some I was reminded of a particularly good final assignment or a particularly interesting teaching narrative. With others I was reminded of impolite behaviour or poor attendance. There was one teacher who used to arrive at 18:00 when we were supposed to finish at 18:30 or 18:45. She used to slide in hoping I wouldn't recognise her entrance. For an instance I thought: why send her an email? What could she contribute to my study? Immediately I was reminded of the need for an equal opportunity for all teachers to participate in the study. After deeper thought, I realised that it would be fascinating to sit down and talk to a teacher like that.*

*Another issue that interested me was the kind of teachers who would respond. Will the ultra-orthodox teachers be interested? Do they check their email? Will the younger teachers or the older ones be more responsive? Will the teachers who had a more active relationship and more personal dialogue with me be those who join in the study? I am anxious to find out. (November 16, 2012)*

The following table presents the teachers who replied to the invitation sent by the *Pisga* centre principals, made contact with me and participated in the study.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> All information was relevant to 2015.

**Table 6.2: Participant details**

Name	Year of birth	Academic qualification	Years teaching	Role in school	Additional role outside the school
<b>Efrat<sup>45</sup></b>	1979	B.Ed. in special education; Certificate of animal assisted therapy	6	Grade 3-4 class teacher Runs a unique self-initiated project in the school	--
<b>Hava</b>	1982	Bachelor of criminology; Dip.Ed in special education	5	Grade 1-2 class teacher and music teacher. Since our interview has left teaching and begun nursing studies	--
<b>Osnat</b>	1950	B.Ed. in special education and psychology; M.Ed. in school counselling	40	Special education teacher	Previously leader of PD in schools (literacy)
<b>Rebecca</b>	1968	B.Ed. in literature and special education for junior high school; M.Ed. in school development; Principal training program	24	Head of teaching and pedagogy. Vice-principal	Previously leader of PD in schools (literacy)
<b>Ophira</b>	1964	Bachelor of Arts; Dip.Ed for academics in other fields; Master's degree in leadership	12	Classroom teacher; Head of literacy	--
<b>Nilli</b>	1955	B.Ed. in early childhood education; M.A. in history and social studies; Principal training program	34	Head of literacy; Vice principal. Previously principal for 2 years	--
<b>Rona</b>	1969	B.A. in philosophy and classical studies; Dip.Ed for academics in other fields	13	Class teacher in grades 5-6; Writing teacher in other classes	--
<b>Orly</b>	1961	Dip. Ed. in primary education	28	Class teacher in grades 3-4. Teacher of writing in other classes. Editor of school newsletter.	--
<b>Aya</b>	1973	B.Ed. in primary education	21	Class teacher in grades 4-6	--
<b>Veronica</b>	1969	B.Ed. in early childhood education	21	Class teacher in grades 1-2	--

<sup>45</sup> Efrat and Rona participated in the WDLT program twice.

Seven different forms of data were collected in the course of this study. Some of these were produced earlier as part of the learning and teaching which occurred in the WDLT program. Other data sources were generated after formal communication in the professional learning program was completed. In the next section I explain and justify the decisions I took in the generating and analysing of data for the study.

### **6.3 Data collection**

Narratives and reflective texts written by the teachers were an integral part of the learning and assessment in the WDLT program. It was fundamental to my work as a teacher educator that I responded to all of my teacher-learners' work. In my other role as researcher, I was only able to utilise texts produced by teacher-learners who accepted the invitation to participate in the study and signed a consent form. I want to make very clear, that I discarded all materials written by teachers who were not interested in participating in the research, as I was obliged to do by the MUHREC and Ministry of Education ethics approvals. In the WDLT programs I taught, I routinely instructed all teachers to use pseudonyms for the names of their pupils, colleagues, school names and places when they were talking about or writing about their teaching experiences. In representing participants and their geographical location in this research I have adopted pseudonyms.

According to Seidman (2006) several sources propose that using a variety of data forms is "one of the intrinsic characteristics of qualitative research" (pp. 5-6). The different forms of data that were utilised in this study are presented in Table 6.3.

**Table 6.3: Data forms in this PhD study**

<b>Data form</b>	<b>Stage collected</b>	<b>Additional information</b>
1) Teaching narratives produced by teachers	During the WDLT program	
2) Reflective texts produced by teachers	During the WDLT program	
3) Online interaction between the teachers and myself	During both the program and the research process	
4) Email correspondence between the teachers and myself	During both the WDLT program and the research process	
5) My own research journal and study blog	During both the WDLT program and the research process	Used for reflection on my practice as a teacher educator and researcher
6) Semi-structured narrative interviews.	After the formal completion of the WDLT program and assessment processes.	Interviews focus on the participants' experience in professional learning frameworks and ways in which learning may influence practice and ongoing professional learning.
7) My own narratives	During both the WDLT program and the research process	Narratives exploring teaching and learning processes.

### **6.3.1 Teaching narratives**

Teaching narratives are reflective stories written by educators. In the writing of these texts, teachers are portraying their professional selves (Locke, 2015) and engaging in “a way of 'knowing' - a method of discovery and analysis” (Richardson, 2000, p. 923). Johnson and Golombek (2002) explain that the construction of teaching narratives enables teachers

to organize, articulate, and communicate what they know and believe about teaching and who they have become as teachers. Their stories reveal the knowledge, ideas, perspectives, understandings, and experiences that guide their work. Their stories describe the complexities of their practice, trace professional development over time, and reveal the ways in which they make sense of and reconfigure their work. Their stories reflect the struggles, tensions, triumphs, and rewards of their lives as teachers. (p. 7)

Acknowledging the significant contribution of studies, such as those mentioned here, I am wary of accounts which present teacher narrative in romanticised or over simplistic ways, claiming that stories mirror classroom events and teachers' professional lives. Jalongo and Isenberg (1995), for example, argue that teaching stories are "classroom incidents and situations that are completely honest, deeply personal, carefully considered, and conscientiously evaluated" (pp. xv-xvi). I join Doecke and Parr (2009) in their concern surrounding discussions of narrative which do not recognise the ways in which storytelling is a fundamentally social activity, inherently mediated by context and language. The reader should keep in mind that teacher stories, including those that made their way into this thesis, were inevitably influenced by the time and setting in which they were created and by teacher identity and knowledge, both dynamic, ever changing entities.

In my role as teacher educator, I used narrative as a means of generating and transmitting teacher knowledge on writing instruction. I invited the teachers enrolled in the professional learning programs to share their experiences and their knowledge on the teaching of writing through stories they shared online in the *campus virtuali* [virtual campus]<sup>46</sup>.

The following is an example of a writing activity undertaken by teachers in many of the WDLT programs described in this study.

*1. Choose an event connected to the teaching of writing. The event can be recent or from the distant past. You may discuss success, failure, indecision, a dream ... The aim is to share a story and to awaken thought and learning among the members of the group.*

*2. Tell your story in writing and include background details. Describe the time and place but change the names of pupils and colleagues to maintain anonymity.*

*While you are writing, pay attention to the writing process. How are you planning, drafting and revising the text that you are generating?*

*3. Post your story on the campus virtuali [virtual campus] as an attachment.*

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<sup>46</sup> The *campus virtuali* [virtual campus], was the "Highlearn" platform located at: <http://top.cet.ac.il>. It is a closed online site for collaboration and learning. Each program for professional development run in the *Pisga* teacher's centre must be accompanied by an online presence. Teachers participating in a program can enter the platform with their identity number and can then be active in group discussions, access program materials, submit assignments and take part in online sessions. Today this platform has largely been replaced by Moodle.

*4. Read a number of stories written by other teachers in the group and respond on the forum.*

*If you have concerns or difficulties, contact me by phone or email in order to receive support.*

*Fascinating learning for all of us,*

*Good luck, Nikki (Program task, November 14, 2012)*

In this study, I returned to the stories my research participants had to tell about their own learning. As the teachers recalled experiences they had had with formal and informal learning, they had an opportunity to reflect on their experiences. The following examples from teaching narratives produced by teachers during the WDLT program show that these stories typically describe:

### **6.3.1.1 Significant teaching experiences**

*After the New Year ceremony, the pupils began to ask me about the school choir and asked me to sing for them each lesson. I took advantage of their request and gave each of them a small piece of paper. I sang “Cmo Notza” [“Like a Feather”] and asked them to write a list of words from the song. I then asked them to write a story with the words from their list. I promised that if all the pupils did the writing I would sing another song. To my surprise, the classroom fell silent and everybody became engrossed in writing. (Hava, December, 2013)*

### **6.3.1.2 Pedagogic dilemmas**

*A. came to our school at the beginning of the year... In the first few months she was very restrained in her writing. Despite it being obvious that she expressed herself well orally and in writing, it was clear that she didn't think so. Every time she had to submit a writing task, she would say: “It's not good enough!” and hide her work from other pupils. (Ophira, March, 2010)*

### **6.3.1.3 Teacher's own experiences writing**

*The idea that the notebook is open throughout the lesson and you leave it and go back to it as necessary fascinated me. Suddenly I understood the real purpose of the notebook: it's not a collection of pages which document tasks but a means of organising and raising the level of thinking. (Efrat, June, 2012)*

### **6.3.1.4 Learning undergone by the teacher**

*I understand that the children have to keep getting stronger. Even if today they are accomplished writers and there really has been enormous improvement in their*

*writing and in their attitude towards writing, they still must continue to practice and that is how they will progress. (Rona, teaching narrative, June, 2014)*

As is characteristic of narrative inquiry (e.g. Beattie, 2000; Ciuffetelli Parker, 2010; Kooy, 2006) this study contains sections of the original narratives alongside retellings or representations of experiences and analytical discussions of these. As teacher and researcher I have strived to listen carefully to the different voices present in the narratives gathered. In line with Bruner (1987), Spector-Mersel (2014), Sullivan (2012) and many other scholars, I have made a significant effort to pay attention to both the content and the form of the narratives and in the process to notice what is said and what is omitted and neglected, what is more significant and what is less. The teaching narratives produced during the WDLT program and those told in interview situations are ways of representing life itself (Bruner, 1991; Kamler & Thompson, 2006). I am ever conscious that any attempt to represent experience in writing is always mediated by language and by the reading and writing process. As a researcher, I am not interested in answering the question whether the stories that the teachers wrote or told in an interview setting or the answers they offered to my questions are definitively ‘true’ or not (see Seidman, 2006). Their responses are representations of events recounted through filters of time, experience, and local and situational influences. In addition, I am aware that my own understandings and interpretations of the stories are filtered through my personal and professional lenses. Readers of this thesis will themselves make meaning from those same texts, mediated by these same kinds of considerations.

### **6.3.2 Reflective texts produced by teachers during the WDLT program**

As part of WDLT program requirements, the teachers were obliged to write short reflective pieces describing their learning, their experiences writing, their feelings surrounding both the writing and the sharing of teaching narratives in the WDLT program, and about connections made between their classroom practice and interactions in the program. In one task, for example, I invited the teachers to reflect on their own writing and their own lives as writers. After explaining the aim of the task, I presented a PowerPoint slide with various questions which could be used as directions for writing or rather could be ignored altogether. The title of the text to be written was “*Ani*

*Cacotev*” [“*Myself as a Writer*”]. The supportive questions I provided for the teachers interested were:

*What do I write? What do I prefer to write? Am I pleased with my writing? What is a significant text that I have created? What helps me to write? What are the tools that help me to write? What do others say about my writing? When do I prefer to write? Where do I prefer to write? (Program task, November 24, 2012)*

Some teachers chose to relate to some of the questions or to all of them, others completely ignored them as they preferred to write about their writing in a different manner. Many of the teachers later adopted this exercise, which originated in my own primary school classroom, as an exercise for their students.

As an example of some of the reflective writing I invited the teachers to engage in as part of the WDLT program, I have chosen the following section of text which appeared in Efrat’s final assignment in the program:

*In summary, as I began to write the draft of the reflection, I didn’t know exactly what I would write. I didn’t have an idea. I started by reading the summaries, the notes and the feelings I had written during the sessions. From reading to reading I saw that the parts which spoke to me most were the practical parts. I am a practical person by nature, and in my mind, good learning is usually learning which I can implement afterwards. As I read I saw how many applicable tools I received in this professional learning program. I have already begun to apply some of them and others I am hoping to apply in the next school year. What I mainly understand in the writing of this reflection, is the fact that there is no end to learning and that it is critical in my work as a teacher. It is clear to me that there is still a long and impressive repertoire of tools which I haven’t been exposed to yet (and some of them haven’t been created yet, but that is only a matter of time) and that the need for a place like this program to introduce those tools in a systematic and measured fashion, is critical. (Efrat, reflective writing, April, 2014)*

Each teacher participating in the WDLT program made the connection between her learning in the sessions and the professional context in which she worked. Many, like Efrat, chose to theorise about learning itself or about professional development for teachers, but others remained within the confines of the program and commented on session content and presentation. As part of this PhD study, I reexplored these texts, written a long time before my study participants were

interviewed, in order to gain additional understandings into the professional contexts in which they work, their views on learning, changes in point of view, contradictions, etc. In-depth discussions of the understandings I reached from analysing these reflective writings appear in Chapters 7-9.

### **6.3.3 Online interaction between the teachers and myself**

As described above, teachers ‘published’ their stories on the *campus virtuali* [virtual campus] and discussed them online with their fellow teachers. Each teacher received both informal feedback from other teachers and a written response from me as the program leader as part of their dialogic professional learning. In many of these exchanges, teachers became aware of their earlier understandings and were then often able to reflect on and discuss their developing insights. Lambert et al. (2002) explain that conversation is a platform for the shared processes which enable participants to generate meaning for mutual benefit. An important dimension of my study is the representation of and inquiry into the nature of the original understandings which were generated in the midst of these rich conversations in this collaborative process. This written dialogue was open to all members of the group to read and reread.

### **6.3.4 Correspondence between the teachers and myself**

An additional source of data were the letters that the teachers wrote to me at the beginning (and occasionally again at the end) of the program. These letters were produced in response to an introductory letter I composed and distributed in the opening session of the program. In my letter, inspired by the work of Kitchen (2005a), I introduced myself personally and professionally and explained the program. In doing this, I was reaching out to create a significant dialogic relationship with the teachers enrolled in the program, something which much literature advocates as an important part of the pedagogy of learning in professional learning communities (e.g. Dawson et al., 2013; Kitchen, 2005a; Parr, 2010; Renshaw, 2004). In response, the teachers wrote letters to me about themselves, their expectations of me and the curriculum, their reasons for choosing the program etc. In essence, these letters provided significantly more information than the questionnaires I had previously used to gather information and feedback from teachers.

Additional correspondence in the form of emails between the teachers and myself, shed light on the special relationships formed during professional learning experiences, as well as dilemmas and thoughts on learning. While these email exchanges often reflected similar sentiments to those

expressed in other data sources, at times additional situations and concerns were raised. Comparing these texts helped me pedagogically as the leader of the WDLT program. I was able to respond in nuanced ways to the particular and contrasting contexts and complexities with which the teachers were grappling, and provide more targeted professional learning feedback to them. And for me too, as the researcher in this PhD study, it helped me to provide more carefully situated and calibrated analysis of the teachers' writing with an increased awareness of particular institutional and contextual factors that mediated their writing and their experiences in the WDLT program.

Additional correspondence via email enabled me to verify information about the participants (date of birth, academic degrees etc.) and to invite them to continue to play an active role in my study by reading parts of my transcripts, data analysis and chapters. I offered the opportunity to read in either Hebrew or English and was pleasantly surprised that all but one participant replied that she was willing and even interested to read some of my materials. Several teachers wrote that they were willing to make the effort and read in English, even though it is difficult in their second language. Unfortunately, despite their intention to do so, none of my study participants provided me with substantial feedback following the reading of those texts. This is discussed further in 10.8.

### **6.3.5 My own research diary and study blog**

Research journal writing is considered common practice for qualitative researchers. It has been used in practitioner inquiry for writing about the way research connects to practitioners' personal and professional lives, their dialogue with participants, emotional aspects of the research journey and other elements in the research process (Etherington, 2004). Journal writing has also been considered a means for stimulating critical thinking, reflection and learning (Boud, 2001; Hiemstra, 2001) and improving writing abilities (Moon, 2006). In my own case, texts which originated as jottings or rough freewriting in my research journal were often reworked and polished to re-appear in conference papers or journal articles, and some of that reworked text appears in this thesis. My study blog *thesisthoughts* accompanied my growth as a researcher from my early days as a Master's student and a number of blog posts have found their way into this PhD thesis. The generation of text in these two different platforms was always dialogic, responding to literature I was reading and conversations I was having. Bakhtin (1981) describes this fundamentally dialogic nature of our utterances, both oral and written and draws our attention to the addressivity inherent

in language. He says, “the word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer’s direction” (p. 280).

Although, in this sense, there is always an anticipated reader in mind, even in the most private of journal notes, one of the main differences between writing in my journal and online blog posting was the influence of a real and immediate audience on the blog.

### **6.3.6 Semi-structured narrative interviews**

My choice of in-depth interviewing as one of the most significant sources of data in this study lies in my basic desire to make sense of the personal and professional experience of teachers in my professional world and to understand the way that they themselves comprehend that experience (see Seidman, 2006, p. 9). Interviews conducted in this research were narrative in nature, inviting participants to share their stories and experiences of professional learning in extended responses. Mishler (1986) proposes that this form of interviewing elicits complexities and issues often hidden in interviews directed at the sounding of short questions and answers.

Before, during and following these in-depth conversations with participants, I was acutely aware of the context in which we were meeting, our previous and present relationships, and other social forces influencing our interaction. In representing those conversations, I take seriously the advice of scholars such as Mishler (1986) who argue that it is imperative to explore the interview context, my role as interviewer and the way in which it influences responses elicited (see Beuthin, 2014; Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 2006). These are not questions hidden in the background of this study, this awareness is central to the methodology in this project. My participants and I are jointly generating knowledge in a highly defined social context. This collaborative view of the relationship between the participants and myself is the basis for my choice to name them "participants" (Seidman, 2006) rather than "interviewees" or "respondents" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or "subjects" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000).

In this study the seven semi-structured interviews, which each lasted approximately 90 minutes, occurred in homes, coffee shops, schools and *Pisga* teachers' centres, according to the preference of the participant. The conversations were recorded on two different digital devices in order to be completely sure they would be audible and accessible. All interviews took place after school hours

or in the school holidays. In all cases, this was the first time I had met the teachers face-to-face since the conclusion of the WDLT program.

Before commencing the interview stage and during the period in which I met the participants, I was acutely aware that as a researcher, I could not completely avoid issues of power in this unique interview setting (Kvale, 2006; Olson, 2011). In the past I was the teacher educator of these very teachers and responsible for the 30 hour (or 60 hour) WDLT program they took part in. It was difficult to alter roles and identities that had already been established, to some extent. In reality, interviewers and participants are never equal in an interview situation (Seidman, 2006; Mishler, 1986). I myself initiated the meeting and took responsibility for setting the interview up, even though I was sensitive to the needs of the participant and tried to make a time and place as convenient for them as possible. Each of us arrived at the interview scene with different expectations and purposes (Seidman, 2006). Acutely aware of these significant differences, I arrived at the location of the interview, eager to hear what these teachers had to say. I sincerely strived to comprehend the unique way they understood professional learning, how they conceptualised their own learning as teachers and how they understood the significance of learning in their professional lives. During the 90 minutes or so that we were together, I allowed as much time as possible for the teacher to articulate her story and to describe her experiences of professional learning. In the opening of the interview, I explained that I was keen to hear about their particular experiences and their particular views, I pointed out that in this conversation, I was there to learn from them. Throughout the interview I went to great pains to concentrate on listening hard and generating questions aimed at deepening the dialogue between us. At times I had to struggle to remain focused on the story being told and to refrain from attempting to make sense of the conversation in light of other interviews or theoretical concepts I had been exploring. At times I was aware that, instead of being totally attentive to the story unfolding, I was being drawn towards the analytical questions arising in my mind (e.g. Why is she choosing this example? Is this going to be a central issue in all of my interviews?).

In the process of conducting this study, I was continually inquiring into the multitude of ways in which I was exploring the interview context and process. Many of my reflective writings related to my previous relationships with my participants and the influence that may have had on the dialogue between us in the interview:

*I am reading the Mishler book (1986) and thinking about interviews and context. My past relations with the teachers must in some way influence the flow of the interview, the way they understand my questions and the ways in which they respond. (Journal entry, January 11, 2013)*

Other writings scrutinise my own actions as interviewer and the way that may influence the responses of my participants:

*The way I ask each question is very different, even when I have them written down as part of my interview protocols<sup>47</sup>. I believe this is directed, in addition to other reasons, to my expectation of their responses. I am anticipating them to understand a question in particular way and am anticipating their responses. This is based on previous answers and a range of other contextual factors. (Journal entry, January 13, 2013)*

Between interviews, I was troubled by my ability to elicit understandings from the stories I had heard and the answers I had received to my questions. An example of this was my deliberation following my interview conversation with Hava. I was frustrated and questioning whether the early career teacher had really understood my questions about professional learning. Only when I read Gilligan (1982) discussing what may happen in an interview when differences are not resolved between an interviewer and participant in their respective understandings of a question's meaning, did I understand Hava's responses differently. I wrote in my research journal:

*Maybe this is what happened with Hava - I was frustrated that she wasn't talking about learning but in fact her understanding of learning was just different. Only when I started transcribing did I see that she was indeed talking about a lot of learning – just not academic learning. (Journal entry, January 13, 2013)*

In my first two interviews with Efrat and Hava, I found it difficult to maintain the narrative structure of the interview and found myself talking too much. In several cases I responded to the teacher's response in order to allow my thoughts and understandings to be recorded as I wasn't taking any notes. Seidman (2006) explains that listening without interrupting is the most difficult

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<sup>47</sup> See appendix 1

challenge for interviewers. The first interview with Efrat had a conversational quality to it. After reflecting on the first two transcripts I wrote in an email to one of my supervisors:

*One of the questions I am dealing with at the moment is the relationship between conversation and narrative in an interview context. In your email you refer to the interview as a professional conversation or dialogue where both interviewer and interviewee gain something from the interaction and where new knowledge is being generated as a result. When I review the two interviews I have done, they are both very conversational in nature and I can see my effort to make our time spent together productive and worthwhile for each of the participants. In one of the interviews the teacher expresses a kind of intellectual loneliness in her school environment, a desire to engage in professional conversations with significant others...*

*I am aware that looking at the various roles I take on while sitting in the interviewer chair and the different voices I use will be significant in the analysis of my data. It worries me that the terms "conversation" and "narrative" still seem to clash in my mind. Nonetheless, in my next interviews I will be striving to maintain that conversational flow while allowing my teacher participant to generate longer stretches of uninterrupted talk. (Personal communication, January 26, 2013)*

Later I decided to adopt the suggestion made by Seidman (2006) and made a few notes during the interview (regardless of the tape recording), in order to allow the teachers to tell their stories uninterrupted. In subsequent interviews my aim was to begin with a general question about the teacher's experience with professional learning and to invite longer narrative style responses.

Approximately two years into my PhD study, in order to confirm my postgraduate candidacy, I was required by Monash University to present my research plans and progression to a faculty based panel. At that stage, I included pre-program questionnaires and post-program questionnaires which I thought would provide more information on the WDLT program and potential participants. As explained earlier, in order to distribute these surveys, I would have had to have the principal of the *Pisga* teachers' centre describe the study to all the teachers in the group and have the consent forms signed (and then locked away) until the conclusion of the program. The plan to use those questionnaires was eventually abandoned for two reasons:

1. Refusal of the Chief Scientist's office in Israel to allow me to begin recruiting participants before program conclusion (even when a third party was involved) and

2. It became apparent to me that other data sources (the letters mentioned in 6.3.4, for example) had replaced these questionnaires in terms of the quality of their content.

A reason for concern in the planning of this PhD thesis was the number of interviews suitable for this kind of practitioner inquiry. After deciding to concentrate on teachers who had participated in the WDLT program, I understood that I would not be dealing with large numbers of participants. Turning to the literature to understand more about desirable numbers of participants in qualitative studies, I encountered Seidman (2006) explaining that efforts to determine how many interviews are ‘enough’ are invaluable. Exploring the same dilemma, Baker and Edwards (2012) present a wide range of responses to the question of how many interviews are sufficient in qualitative research. The answer reached in the conclusion of their publication is ‘it depends’ (p. 42). In this study, I have joined experienced scholars (e.g. Yandell, 2013) and doctoral candidates in Education in Israel and in other parts of the world who see the value of concentrating on a relatively small number of participants (see Kitchen, 2005b; Leider, 2015; Manara, 2012; McIver, 2001; Riley, 2012; Sela, 2006). This focus on a relatively small number of teachers, allowed me to examine the varied data in far greater detail than I could have achieved with larger numbers. It is my hope that my epistemological and methodological descriptions, together with the transparency of my research aims, variety of data sources and theoretical framework have satisfactorily supported my focus on ten participants.

### **6.3.7 My own narratives**

The reading and writing of teacher narratives and responding to texts produced by others have been central in my own learning and in the learning of the teachers in the WDLT program. This is textual work that I see as central to my pedagogy in this program. At times I write narratives of my own which tell of my own experiences, deliberations, successes and frustrations connected to teaching and professional learning in these programs and in broader educational contexts. Sections of these narratives have been woven into this thesis in order to highlight points or to add an additional voice to the conversation. These stories, like those told by my participants, are dialogic representations of reality and I do not intend them to function as objective representations or reflections of life (Bruner, 1991; Kamler & Thompson, 2006). This blend of my own writings and reflexive texts are central to the way I conceive of this practitioner inquiry. My roles as teacher educator and researcher are intertwined and are in no way presented as an add-on in this thesis

artefact. My learning lies alongside the learning of my teacher participants, both in the professional learning program in which we met, and in the process of generating the understandings emerging in this study. It is my intention that my own narratives and reflective writing offer additional perspectives on and entry points into the data I am presenting and thereby add to the reflexive rigour of my inquiry. I am aware that the inclusion of these texts adds to the messiness of this study but sincerely hope that they reflect the richness and complexity in the research relationships formed and embodied in my work.

In this section of the chapter I have presented the seven forms of data used in this study to explore the professional learning of Israeli literacy teachers. While each form of data is presented as a separate entity, in practice they overlap one another and were often analysed in tandem. For example, in most of the interviews, I handed the teacher a teaching narrative she wrote as a participant in the WDLT program. I asked her to read the text and to respond to it. When analysing that section of the interview data together with the analysis of the narrative written previously, important dialogical connections between different dimensions of experience emerged. In the next section I discuss the approaches used to explore data and explain the way in which data was analysed in this study.

#### **6.4 Data analysis**

In order to make sense of the data collected in this study, I chose various methods of narrative based analysis and forms of discourse analysis.

Consistent with the study's standpoint on narrative inquiry, as articulated in 5.5, I collected and generated a range of stories, written and oral 'field texts' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 4) from my teacher participants and embarked on a process of reading, rereading and restorying (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). According to Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) this process involves the exploration of central features of the story (time, place, plot etc.) and then the retelling of the story with emphasis on chronology and contextual elements apparent in the text. I adopted a 'three dimensional approach' to the analysis of narratives and interview texts, which, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), involves the reading and rereading of texts and exploring them through lenses of interaction, continuity and situation. This required me to examine texts from a

personal (inward) and social (outward) perspective, to grapple with concepts of time forward and backward, and to explore the context in which the narrative is grounded. This approach to data analysis involved a close study of language and narrative strategies, consistent with that proposed by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (2010). Through this concentration on language, for example, I became aware of the way that Efrat repeatedly describes learning as an eye opening experience, a powerful process of wonderful discovery. In her interview (November 30, 2012) she returned to this image several times: *“And then I discovered that world, which is magical in the way I see it, a world like that opened up to me...”*; *“It opened a world for me...it opened something up for me...”*; *“I tell you, Nikki! A whole world opened up before me!”* and *“... I really have a passion for... the discovery surrounding these things”*. In the same interview, when describing reading, Efrat, remarked: *“Here I am discovering, now. It’s immense! ... I simply enrich myself with these things”*. Later in the interview, when discussing her work with literary texts together with a mentor, Efrat explains: *“I felt she was opening a skylight for me, she really did open (it) up for me, a sort of window, which I didn’t even know existed for me”*.

Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) recommend the use of dialogical listening (Bakhtin, 1981) for engagement with narrative texts. They explain that the researcher must be attentive

to three voices (at least): the voice of the narrator, as represented by the tape or the text; the theoretical framework, which provides the concepts and tools for interpretation; and a reflexive monitoring of the act of reading and interpretation, that is, self-awareness of the decision process of drawing conclusions from the material. (p. 10)

Indeed, such a principle for conducting and making meaning from data is consistent with the dialogic epistemological position of this study (see Chapter 5). In the next section of this chapter, I demonstrate this kind of dialogical listening to what Osnat had to say in her interview (July 17, 2013) about the behaviour of teachers at in-service professional learning sessions. She remarked: *“And what? The population, the teachers! Ohh ... it’s terrible! The attitude and the chatter which never ends”* Later in the same interview, Osnat discussed the learning which takes place at her own school: *“There are the same problems ... (laughs) of chatter, despite the fact that we do have serious teachers on our staff ... and it’s a loss”*. Later in the interview, Osnat returns to the same topic but mentions her past as a leader of professional learning:

*Look, I remember as a leader of professional learning, in a professional learning program – it was terrible! ... the constant chattering ... they are unfocused all the time. And you know now, with mobile phones all the time, all the time busy with other things. (Osnat, interview, July 17, 2013)*

Towards the end of the interview, Osnat returned to this subject of teacher behaviour in learning situations:

*I understand why they come, they have to and they need the hours. But, OK, you're already there! .... A group enrolls together and it ... it turns into a social issue. Instead of focusing on the learning ... it really bothers me. (Osnat, interview, July 17, 2013)*

Exploring Osnat's words, according to the method suggested by Lieblich et al. (1998), I first scrutinised the voice of the narrator. It became apparent that her narrative builds boundaries between herself and other teachers in her professional context. She is critical of the teachers she meets at professional learning programs and also of teachers at her school, particularly in relation to their behaviour in these learning situations and meetings. She continually jumps between the personal pronouns 'I' and 'they'. She doesn't include herself or talk about 'we'. In other parts of these quotations, Osnat speaks as a former leader of professional learning, again differentiating between her and other teachers. Often in this sense, relating to my role as leader of professional learning, she attempts to connect her experience with my own: "*I don't know how you experience this ...*" for example.

Returning to the work of Lieblich et al. (1998), I explore the theoretical framework which provides the concepts and tools for analysis. This theoretical framework incorporates different understandings of professional learning, but also makes optimal use of Bakhtinian concepts (Bakhtin, 1981) like dialogism and addressivity. Osnat is directly trying to sharpen my listening in our conversation when she remarks: "*I tell you ...*" and "*Now listen ...*". Introducing herself as a leader of professional learning, her words are exposing Bakhtinian double voicedness: "*Look, I remember as a leader of professional learning, in a professional learning program – it was terrible!*" and 'interruption by reservations' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 205) when she remarks: "*It's because the majority spoke matter-of-factly, and not all the time*"; "*despite the fact that we do*

*have serious teachers on our staff*“ and *”it’s not nice to say but”*. These hesitations allow a glimpse at the multiple voices and additional layers present in the experience behind her words.

As part of the reflexive monitoring suggested by Lieblich et al. (1998), I question remarks made and the motives behind them. When Osnat refers to the WDLT program, she is careful to remark that the situation was different and that the teachers behaved more appropriately: *”By the way, I want to tell you that in your professional learning program it didn’t happen”*. Was the behaviour of the teachers really different in my programs? Would Osnat have felt comfortable describing me being challenged by teachers’ behavioural problems? Is she trying to address the issue without offending me or making me feel embarrassed? How would she have told this if she was talking to another uninvolved interviewer? Is she making an effort to position herself alongside me as a former leader of professional learning? How does this reference, to the context in which we previously met, alter our present relationship of researcher and interview participant? Another question I asked is why Osnat raised the question of teacher behaviour in professional learning settings three times in the course of the interview. This issue is apparently firmly connected to her experience of professional learning.

This approach to data analysis suggested by Israeli scholars Lieblich et al. (1998; 2010) and adopted by me in this inquiry is in harmony with the Bakhtinian theoretical grounding of this study. Focusing on these connections, I was encouraged to adopt a dialogical approach to data analysis as proposed by Sullivan (2012). This kind of analysis is firmly based in the awareness that there is more than a single truth and more than one possible interpretation of text. According to this approach to analysis, nobody, not even the speaker/writer, necessarily knows what was intended. In this way, the purpose of analysis is not to uncover a particular interpretation, rather to “make sense of the different and ambiguous ways in which a meaning may be experienced” (p. 14). Sullivan uses the work of Bakhtin to construct a means of analysis which attempts to identify in discourse and narrative the ways in which language is both internally intended for self and externally directed at others. The process of analysis aims at exploring the way the speaker/writer makes sense of experience to his or herself and to others.

Following this dialogical approach to data analysis (Sullivan, 2012), I read and reread my research texts, searching for sections which raised interesting questions, significant moments and “nuances

and additions” (Sullivan, 2012, p. 87) to what the data embodies. I was particularly interested in those instances in which the voices of others were present in the words of my participants, where there were spoken and unspoken points of indecisiveness or ‘reservations’ (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 205), in which the speaker was addressing the anticipated antagonism of the other. In this way, the Bakhtinian concept that “the word with a sideward glance” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 196) affords me an additional entry into the way my participants make meaning of their experiences.

## **6.5 Questions of reflexive rigour and trustworthiness**

Questions of validity are considered a central issue in the presentation of research in the academic world and are connected to the ways in which the researcher establishes his or her claim to knowledge. According to Kvale (1995), in the social sciences, among "mainstream researchers" (p. 20), it is customary to assess the value of research with what the author calls "the trinity of reliability, validity, and generalization" (p. 20). According to the Kvale, the reaction of qualitative researchers to these concepts is varied. Some scholars choose to ignore them and refuse to embrace positivist criteria to evaluate their work, while others, such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) adopt terms such as ‘trustworthiness’ (p. 289), ‘credibility’ (p. 213), ‘dependability’ (p. 219), and ‘confirmability’ (p. 323). I find these concepts far more relevant and appropriate in the kind of interpretive research embodied in this PhD thesis.

Lather (1993) relates to validity as an “incitement to discourse” (p. 673) and Kvale (1995) connects to this concept of dialogue and argues that "truth is constituted through a dialogue; valid knowledge claims emerge as conflicting interpretations and action possibilities are discussed and negotiated among the members of a community" (p. 21). For Kvale, to validate is to check, question and theorise. These understandings of validity are representative of the ideas presented in this thesis – in which nothing is seen as simple, clear cut, black or white. In this thesis, methodological processes have been presented, as they occurred, as a messy and ever changing chain of decisions and actions. The ‘discourse’ described by Lather (1993) and the ‘dialogue’ outlined by Kvale (1995) are indeed visible to the reader in my writing. Throughout this study, I have made all effort to make my decisions transparent and open for discussion in the ways suggested here. In my writing I am constantly questioning and scrutinising my practice and the assumptions and biases

which lie behind my actions. Lather (1993) explains that this is becoming aware of “what frames our seeing” (p. 675) in our search for understandings. According to Berger (2015) this kind of critical appraisal by the researcher means,

Turning of the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one’s own situatedness within the research and the effect it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation. As such, the idea of reflexivity challenges the view of knowledge production as independent of the researcher producing it and of knowledge as objective. (p. 220)

Like Berger (2015), Aull Davies (1998) places emphasis on this process of introspection by the researcher which may occur in a variety of forms. She stresses that the influence of the researcher is significant throughout all stages of the study. In this PhD, for example, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, I have paid close attention to my own role as teacher educator and practitioner researcher in the generation of the data in this study. The teacher narratives and reflective texts, for example, were authored by the teachers in the professional learning setting in which we met and were designed by me as a compulsory part of the WDLT program. In this kind of interpretive research, connections such as these cannot be methodologically taken for granted or ignored. This close scrutiny of my actions, together with my efforts to theorise have enabled me to contemplate the familiar in new ways (Anfara & Mertz, 2015; Atkinson & Morriss, 2016).

Pillow (2003) argues that the use of the reflexive ‘I’ in academic writing has long become an accepted practice. She discusses the adoption of reflexivity in interpretive research paradigms as a methodological instrument to improve representation and to add legitimacy to the study. Horsburgh (2003) concludes that this kind of ‘honest’ writing affords the reader the opportunity to evaluate “whether the analytical comments, or claims, made by the researcher appear to be justifiable” (p. 309), thereby contributing to the “plausibility and trustworthiness” (p. 308) of the study.

O’Connor (2007) proposes a framework for reflective questioning which enables researchers to critically explore the way in which they are unfolding and negotiating their data in the process of constructing new knowledge. He/she relates to the temporal, dialogic, subjective and reflexive

sides of the researcher's identity. As part of the reflexive process in the writing of this thesis, I have utilised these concepts presented by O'Connor as a springboard for significant freewriting as an additional means of self-checking whether I have achieved "authenticity and plausibility" (O'Connor, 2007, p. 261) through sufficient clarity in describing the methods chosen in this research, and in disclosing precisely what occurred in the research process.

Berger (2015) provides a list of strategies for researchers attempting to maintain reflexivity in their work. Strategies from that list which I myself have utilised in this PhD study are "prolonged engagement with participants ... triangulation, peer review, forming a peer network and backtalk groups, keeping a diary or journal for 'self-supervision', and creating an 'audit trail' of researcher's reasoning, judgement, and emotional reactions" (p. 222). The regular presentation of my research in a doctoral writing group, receiving feedback and being required to answer challenging questions was also an important part of this process. In addition, I adopted a means of critically questioning practice, suggested by O'Connor (2007) and towards completion of this study I sent an email to all participants, inviting them to read and respond to some of the texts relevant to their participation in the study (interview transcripts, text analysis etc.). As mentioned earlier (see 6.3.4) I was surprised by the enthusiasm with which all but one of my participants expressed her willingness to maintain our dialogue, and her ongoing interest in this PhD study. As a result, I presented some of my participants with copies of interview transcripts and analytical writings and invited them to respond. This process of sharing my understandings with my participants and listening closely to their thoughts is central to my understanding of reflexivity.

In conclusion, I return to the words of Kvale (1995):

The quality of the craftsmanship results in products with knowledge claims that are so powerful and convincing in their own right that they carry the validation with them, such as a strong piece of art. Ideally, the research procedures are transparent and the results evident, the conclusions of a study are intrinsically convincing as true, beautiful, and good ... In this sense, valid research would be research that makes questions of validity superfluous. (p. 38)

In this chapter I have made a genuine effort to afford my readers a candid glimpse behind the scenes of my PhD study. Questions surrounding the rigour and credibility of my research have

been a cause of apprehension for me since the planning stages of this study. It is my honest hope that readers recognise my commitment to affording this PhD research with methodological candour and find my study reflexively rigorous and trustworthy.

**PART 4 –**

**REPRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND**

**DISCUSSION**

## Chapter 7 - Constructing a dialogic space for the professional learning of Israeli teachers

Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched, we cannot know ourselves.

(Rich, 1972, p. 18)

As explained earlier, in this practitioner inquiry I aspire to scrutinize my own practice as a teacher educator as one means of exploring the nature and significance of professional learning for Israeli literacy teachers. In this chapter, I use Bakhtinian theory to discuss the dialogic nature of the kind of learning that I have led for Israeli teachers in the WDLT program, by inquiring into the stories (and the writing) of three teachers in the program: Aya, Osnat and Rebecca. I conclude the chapter with a reflexive account of the negotiation required of me as a leader of professional learning, creating dialogic spaces of different kinds for the professional learning of teachers in Israel, while fulfilling the guidelines imposed on me by the “*Ofek-Chadash*” reform policy.

### 7.1 Dialogic professional learning

In 1.7.1 of the Introduction chapter, I engaged at length with the term ‘dialogic professional learning’, a central concept in this study. Underpinning my discussion was the work of Alexander (2008), who outlines five fundamental principles in education that can be considered dialogic. These principles can be summarised as: “collective... reciprocal... supportive... cumulative, and purposeful” (p. 185). I will precede my in-depth, situated discussion of the learning of the teacher participants in the WDLT program by briefly reprising the position of this study with respect to these five principles.

This study takes the view that in any form of dialogic education teachers and learners are partners in the teaching and learning process. They are *collectively* involved in the activity of learning. *Reciprocal* learning means that both teachers and learners listen to and generate knowledge for and with others. That is, the learning takes place as a form of dialogue; teachers and learners are encouraged to speculate about ideas together in ways which enable all participants to share in the process of contributing ideas and, ultimately perhaps, in the co-construction of new knowledge. In this way, learning can be conceptualised as a *cumulative* process in which both teachers and

learners “build on their own and each other’s ideas and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry” (Alexander, 2008, p. 185). A *supportive* environment is essential for this kind of learning; teachers and learners must support one another and feel safe to participate in the process without fear of making mistakes. An additional principle of dialogic learning is that it forefronts the uniqueness of each participant in terms of prior knowledge, cultural perspectives and a range of personal and professional experiences. In this kind of education, teachers *purposefully* plan and direct classroom activities and interactions but the curriculum is never completely pre-determined, it remains constantly open to interpretation, negotiation and questioning. Teaching and learning develop according to the needs of the participants, their pace of comprehension and understandings generated in the process.

## **7.2 Exploring the dialogic nature of the WDLT program**

From the earliest planning of the WDLT program on writing pedagogy, my thinking was underpinned and driven by dialogic principles of teaching and professional learning. With each additional cohort of teachers, the program opened with direct and personal communication between myself as leader of the program and the teachers enrolled. Following the relational approach (Kitchen, 2005) discussed in 6.3.4, I began the first session with a letter I wrote to the teachers about myself, my background and my aims for the program. In that letter, I stressed the role of the teacher participants in the generation of knowledge in the program and I invited them to engage with me in further conversation. After reading the letter, the teachers responded to me in writing and those responses invariably informed the program curriculum in many ways. I was genuinely interested in the teachers who had chosen to participate and I found that the letters enabled me to begin to forge relationships with them immediately, a necessity in a 30 hour program.

In that initial letter I wrote to the program participants, seeking to acknowledge and encourage dialogue, a variety of voices emerged from my text in multiple ways. My letter was at once personal and professional. I began with some personal details:

*I was born in Australia and I moved to Israel at the age of 21 ... It is important for me to tell you that although I have lived here for many years, I still make mistakes in Hebrew...*

I quickly moved on to professional matters: *“For over 15 years I have worked as a leader of professional learning in language and literacy...”* I describe myself as a classroom practitioner – *“Nothing excites me more than a child who discovers the wealth involved in reading a terrific book or succeeds in creating a significant text...”* – and as a teacher educator – *“Writing is a complex task which involves aspects of language, cognition, environment and emotion...”* I characterize myself as a leader – *“In my teaching I will model teaching techniques which may help you cope with your pupils...”* – and as a colleague – *“I am aware that you are arriving... exhausted at the end of a long and demanding school day... I know this as I live the same reality...”* In my writing, I identify with the difficulty encountered by teachers arriving at the session after a long day at school and yet I encourage them to make the most of the time spent in the group.

As I described in 6.2, groups of teachers attending the program were usually markedly heterogeneous. There was a mix of early career teachers together with veteran teachers who had been teaching for longer than I have, and other experienced teachers who performed additional roles in their schools. Leaders of professional learning in the area of language and literacy, often enrolled in the program too. I positioned all of those teachers as partners with me in the exploration of ideas in the sessions, yet it was always clear who was leading the professional learning. In the WDLT program, there was mutual respect and an honest invitation for teachers to refer and share their teaching experiences. The message, both declared and implied, was that all the teachers in the group have stories to tell, dilemmas they face and something to learn about writing pedagogy. I explicitly included myself as a fellow learner in the group.

Although clear goals for the program were published ahead of time on the Internet, and authorized by representatives of the Ministry of Education, the curriculum was always a basis for discussion and negotiation. Changes were made according to the needs of the teacher-learners and the dynamics emerging within the group. With each cohort, over the period of seven years, I witnessed the program developing in unique ways. For example, when the program was held in a city where there was a high ultra-orthodox population in which boys and girls study separately, issues were raised that were utterly unique. When the group was made up of both Arab teachers (studying in

their second language) and Jewish teachers (studying in their mother tongue) the dynamics and the issues discussed were again very distinctive.

As described in 6.3.1, the teachers in the WDLT program wrote and shared teaching narratives surrounding their classroom practice and the teaching of writing. The context of those stories was usually the professional environment in which the teachers worked and that setting was prominent in those narratives, either in the background or in the foreground. The assumptions behind those unique narratives influenced the professional conversation in the program in many ways and teacher assumptions needed to be acknowledged in the process of generating new knowledge.

An example of this is apparent in the writing of Veronica, a teacher who participated in the WDLT program in 2014. She opened the first narrative she wrote in the sessions as follows:

*Years ago, when I began teaching, I replaced a grade 2 teacher who was on maternity leave. In the class I found a student who wasn't prepared to function as a student, which means: to take out his equipment, to be disciplined and respond to instructions, to fulfil school rules, and become connected to the other students. It is not necessary to say that that he didn't want to write... (Veronica, teaching narrative, December, 2014)*

In the introduction of her teacher narrative, Veronica presents what she believes is the role of a school student. This description may reflect her own school experience as a student, the teacher preparation she received, the conventions in her school or the message she received in another professional learning program. The connections she made in that writing between writing and discipline fascinated me and led the way to in-depth discussion with her. It is interesting to explore the very different assumptions apparent in the text produced by Aya, a grade 5 teacher in the same 2014 group.

### **7.2.1 Aya's story**

Aya concluded her first narrative in the program in this way: *"I'm not a writer and don't claim to be one, I am just a teacher trying to advance writing processes"*. The words *"just a teacher"* are an assumption, seemingly rooted in the Israeli context in which many teachers do not feel they are valued (Nachum-HaLevi, 2004). Needless to say, if a teacher works in a system in which she feels that her work is not considered important, it can influence her practice in many ways.

In order for learning in the program to be significant, those conventions and beliefs teachers brought with them had to be recognized and critically engaged with in relation to the teaching I planned to do. In my role as leader in the program, I have always seen it as important to throw light on the ways in which assumptions are entering the narratives and sometimes shadowing the teachers' practice. In the case of Aya who saw herself as "*just a teacher*", I felt obliged to react to that self-deprecation before responding to the main theme of her story. My response began:

*Dear Aya, I will begin from the end - I don't agree with you that you are "just a teacher", you are a caring and creative teacher who views her class as a group of students with differing abilities, varied strengths and weaknesses, assorted special interest areas and different knowledge... (Nikki, response to Aya's teaching narrative, December, 2014)*

Hallman (2011) employs the work of Bakhtin to describe the richness in dialogic teacher interactions such as these:

As teachers, for example, reflect on their practice in writing, their reflections become populated with many voices – voices of others, the institutions in which they work, and the jargon of teacher education itself. This multiplicity and diversity of voices, or what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia, is present in every individual's utterance. (p. 535)

These reflections draw on Bakhtin's understanding (1981) that all texts maintain a dialogue with other texts, and readers join the dialogue as they create their own understandings. I adopt the Bakhtinian term 'unfinalizability' (Bakhtin, 1986) to describe the nature of the ongoing learning generated in these dialogic settings. Throughout the years of writing this thesis, I have repeatedly returned to the texts produced by the teachers in the WDLT program and learned something new. Some of them have formed the basis of mentoring sessions I have had with teachers in totally different contexts; other texts have made their way into other writings that I have generated for journal articles and blog posts. Often back in my own school classroom, in dialogue with my own primary school students, I am reminded of teacher participants in my professional learning, their dilemmas and triumphs, their students who were highlighted in teaching narratives and the dialogue between us. The conversations and the written artefacts of the learning achieved in those professional learning sessions stay with me and continue to unfold. Similarly, they continue to be

significant for some of the teachers who later participated in my study. In the next section, I present some writing by Osnat, one of those teachers whose story is worthy of close investigation for its dialogic qualities.

### 7.2.2 Osnat's story

I present now excerpts of a narrative produced by Osnat, an experienced special education teacher and leader of professional learning who participated in my WDLT program in 2011. Some weeks into the program, via her narrative, Osnat asked her readers, fellow program participants and me, for suggestions regarding how she could deal with a difficult student, Eden,<sup>48</sup> in her school.

Osnat's strategy was to turn to her readers (plural) and explain "... *maybe you (as classroom teachers) have had children with these difficulties and will be able to contribute from your experience*". At the conclusion of her narrative, Osnat once again turned to her readers: "...*Maybe you have other suggestions as to how I can work with [Eden] on improving the content of his writing?*" As a teacher-writer, she was actively using the task I had set her in the WDLT program to dialogue with other teachers and to search for additional ways of improving her practice. It seems she did not see this task merely as an assignment to be submitted for a grade, but rather as an avenue for genuine conversation and learning. In a richly dialogic sense, Osnat was bringing her classroom experience into the professional learning program. In her narrative, she explicitly refers to knowledge she had so far gained in the sessions: "*As we have learnt, writing demands a lot of experience and this student has had little*".

Later in the program, when I asked her to revise the narrative, Osnat thought about the task and decided that she couldn't change this first section. Understanding the open-endedness of the task given and in no way fearing that she was 'getting it wrong', she wrote:

*When required to revise the teaching story, I left this section as it was, I didn't see a need to change it, and I only added an extra section which explained what happened since I did the initial writing. (Osnat, teacher narrative, November, 2010)*

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<sup>48</sup> The student's name is a pseudonym

In the second section of her narrative, Osnat crossed back and forward in time and presented her thoughts on her practice and her learning in an open manner. She mentioned the dialogue she had engaged in with her colleagues and concluded in an unfinalized dialogic way, leaving the door open for future thought, new practices and new interactions.

*Time has passed since I wrote about Eden and the meaning of that is that he is now in the middle of grade 6. I am sorry to say that I did not succeed in advancing him in writing as much as I had planned to do, as the whole computer system in the school collapsed... This brought me to ponder on the great assistance technology lends us, along with our dependence on it and our helplessness when there are problems... (Osnat, revised teacher narrative, May 13, 2011)*

Osnat continued her dialogic stance when she referred to the work she still wanted to do. Writing in the first person plural, she talked about the collaboration between herself and her student, Eden. It was not his assignment or hers; she referred to it as “ours”:

*We have written a new text, it's a book – a report about a dance performance that he went to and I typed what he told me word for word. We will revise that text in the way that we learnt. (Osnat, revised teacher narrative, May 13, 2011)*

As a reader of her narrative, I was left pondering the ambiguity of this sentence: who learnt – Eden? His teacher? Both separately and/or together? And where did the learning take place – in the special education lesson? In the professional learning program? I am less interested in the definitive or correct answer to these questions, and more interested in the possibilities that all readings may be possible and valid.

My conversation with Rebecca, an experienced classroom teacher and leader of professional learning affords me an additional perspective for exploring the dialogic nature of the learning in the WDLT program.

### **7.2.3 An ongoing conversation with Rebecca**

I return now, for different purposes, to some reflective writing submitted by Rebecca at the end of the WDLT program, which I first quoted in 4.1. I identify with Rebecca's account of the intensity of her days in school and at home and feel a great sense of accomplishment from the way that this teacher was responding to the acts of writing she had experienced in the program.

*... A regular day for me begins at 5:30 in the morning. I have half an hour to quietly get organized and then continue with an additional hour of preparing school bags, waking up and dressing children, and then accompanying them to the school bus or the preschool centre. After a fifteen minute drive, I am at school: home is forgotten, my family is left behind, and I am totally absorbed into school life. The school community draws me in. Yard duty in the morning, the first school bell and we are off on our way, see you at 14:30.*

*Last arrangements, administrative duties, a quick drive and I am on my way to pick up the kids. And then... the house, children, husband, my parents, phone calls from students' parents...*

*And after dinner, there is preparing my bag for tomorrow, and my studies (yes, professional development program and academic studies).*

*So, who has time to think? (Rebecca, reflective writing, June, 2009)*

In this first part of Rebecca's reflective text, she was recalling the extraordinary variety of tasks that she accomplishes in her finely calibrated daily routines, moving from home to school and then back home again. The rhythms of her writing conveyed the pressure and the hurriedness she experiences daily, she slowed her pace only to ask the rhetorical question: '*So, who has time to think?*'. The question stood out from the rest of the text because of its abruptness and succinctness. Actually, in the course of the whole piece, which I will quote further from below, the question signalled a change in the direction of the writing as she began to contemplate the learning experience in the WDLT program in which she had taken part.

After this rhetorical question, Rebecca began to explore the spaces available to her for reflection about her teaching and its challenges. As seen below, the rhythm of this second part of the text is already noticeably slower.

*The intensive pace of my work and my days leaves me very little time for reflection and self-study. I almost never find time for focused, planned thought. Most of the decisions I make are made instantly, while in motion, and are mainly based on quick intuition.*

*Writing teacher narratives is an opportunity to force myself to reflect, to allocate time for deep thought on my actions, to judge my teaching taking into consideration all aspects...*

*The sessions in the campus virtuali [virtual campus] forced me to do what I usually don't have time to do: to think, plan, write, revise, publish, read feedback, think again... (Rebecca, reflective writing, June, 2009)*

Admitting that time for reflection is scarce, Rebecca makes a comparison between “*focused, planned thought*” and thought “*in motion... mainly based on quick intuition*”. Despite lack of time and the rarity of these activities, Rebecca is aware of the benefits inherent in narrative writing and in engaging in professional conversation with other teachers. It is interesting that while she describes being afforded an ‘opportunity’ for writing and conversation, she still has to ‘force’ herself to take part in them. This seemingly contradictory statement is repeated when the word ‘force’ re-appears as she describes how the dialogue online in the professional learning program: “*forced me to do what I usually don't have time to do: to think, plan, write, revise, publish, read feedback, think again...*” In the next section of her written reflection, Rebecca explores the importance of conversation with others in her professional learning.

*Writing the teacher narratives showed me what I haven't seen for years: the importance of reflection and writing, and the significance of sharing that writing with others. It is essential that I remember that other teachers are deliberating over the same questions as I am. It is assuring to know that other teachers have wonderful ideas and that I can ask them for advice. I know that my colleagues have a wealth of experience that I can learn from.*

*It is so important to know that I am not alone...*

*Through my participation in the program and the writing and reading of teacher narratives, I have learnt that we are all deliberating about the teaching of writing. I learnt how much I don't know and how important it is to learn from experts and from my colleagues about effective practice... (Rebecca, reflective writing, June, 2009)*

Rebecca points out that this kind of reflective writing is “*what I haven't seen for years*”. It is not a new experience for her, but it is clearly one that has been pushed aside. In Rebecca’s words, the act of writing teacher narratives is linked with reflection, dialogue and sharing. For this teacher, the significance of the writing task is in the connection it forges with other teachers. Despite being an accomplished teacher and the only leader of professional development participating in the program that year, Rebecca was very aware of the learning which can be achieved through dialogue

with the other teachers. She understands the dialogic nature of this learning where program participants are partners in the generation of understandings in deeply dialogic ways. In her entire text (beyond the section appearing in this chapter), Rebecca makes no specific mention of the role of program leader (me in this case). Teacher and participants are, it seems, partners in the generation of knowledge in this context. This learning is indeed being presented as deeply social in nature.

In the conclusion of her text, Rebecca writes:

*Writing the teacher narratives helped me to look back on my teaching practice. It guided me to discover what I already know, and what I need to learn. It stimulated me to ask how to do things differently. Writing my stories taught me that reflection is looking back but it is also looking forward to my next teaching experiences. While writing I reached conclusions, and discovered what I should preserve or leave behind... (Rebecca, reflective writing, June, 2009)*

Reading and discussing narratives written by her peers, Rebecca is “*stimulated... to ask how to do things differently*”. The fact that the narratives the teachers produce shape the WDLT program curriculum in this way means that learning outcomes are often unanticipated.

Rebecca’s words:

*Writing my stories taught me that reflection is looking back but it is also looking forward to my next teaching experiences. While writing I reached conclusions, and discovered what I should preserve or leave behind... (Rebecca, reflective writing, June, 2009)*

reflect the Bakhtinian notion of ‘unfinalizability’ (Bakhtin, 1984), which is central to the dialogic nature of this professional learning. The WDLT program was coming to an end but Rebecca continued to ask questions and to look forward. The formal part of the program was closing but the learning, in Rebecca’s mind, would continue beyond the final session.

#### **7.2.4 Sustaining the dialogue: My conversation with Rebecca continues**

Four years later, in 2013, I met Rebecca again in an interview for this PhD study. We discussed professional learning in general and I asked her about professional learning which has been

significant for her in the past five years. Rebecca talked about programs she had experienced in institutes of higher education and in in-service programs in *Pisga* centres. One of those experiences she chose to talk about was the WDLT program in which we met.

*One of the programs which influenced me most and that I return to is the program I did with you. There was something in that in-service which met me in a very significant way, as a teacher. There was also something that I find myself developing within it all the time. It's as if it wasn't just 'learn, put into practice and that's it'. I find myself returning into those materials, as a teacher and of course as a leader of professional learning. I lead teachers with those materials that I learnt... It's as though something about that program, really was at the right time and the right place. It filled a kind of need of mine. All the time, it's as though all the time when I engage with writing, you are in my head. (Rebecca, interview, April 3, 2013)*

Rebecca is again referring to the ongoing quality of the learning and describes a process in which she continues to engage long after the program hours are over. While explicitly mentioning the materials discussed in the program sessions, she is talking about a deep engagement with the ideas and principles which mediate her interactions with her pupils and the teachers she leads.

Later in the interview, Rebecca discussed another professional learning program in which she experienced significant learning.

*It was dialogic in style and I learnt heaps because Y (the program leader) allowed me to argue with her. I mean in the positive sense of dialogue. I can say what worries me now and what is successful for me. I can say what I believe in and let's talk about it. Come on, convince me why I should try it. Tell me the principle, the sense of it, and then I'll be prepared to go with you, all the way. Don't bring me worksheets! Do me a favour! Do I need worksheets? Many people experience conflict as negative, and I really like to create conflicts. That's where I feel I learn the most. I like to argue the most. I should have been in Plato's classes. I want to argue with you why we should teach frontal lessons and not in groups, so that you convince me why we should teach in groups. I will understand. (Rebecca, interview, April 3, 2013)*

Here Rebecca spells out the importance of another aspect of dialogic learning for her as a professional. She wants to bring her ideas, her knowledge and her experience to the program, and to be able to present herself as a professional and to have the leader of the program listen, respect

her, and respond accordingly. In dialogic learning such as this, each learner is unique and the curriculum is open to questioning.

When I asked Rebecca if she had engaged in writing since the WDLT program, she responded:

*Today I write heaps and heaps at school, in my role as teaching coordinator, I find myself writing a lot... and afterward I read what I have written and I like it. I write well! (Rebecca, interview, April 3, 2013)*

Later in the interview she returned to my question about writing:

*I know how to write, but... so little, so little... in recent years... so little, so much less than I could gain enjoyment from... It's mainly because of the load, but I think I don't have that feeling that it's important that I write. Why? For myself it's not so important to me, and nobody reads what I write. So what? I don't really have a reason to write, (laugh) I'm wasted! What? Should I write a blog that nobody will read? Who reads it, Nikki? Even I don't read teacher blogs... I have to say about myself, that if I write, I really want someone to read it. (Rebecca, interview, April 3, 2013)*

Despite her earlier enthusiasm for teacher writing while participating in the WDLT program, Rebecca no longer engages in reflective professional writing. Without a social context and an interested reader, it is as if she sees no point.

At the conclusion of our interview, I asked Rebecca if she had anything else that she would like to add. She stopped to think and then, in a tone of almost yearning, she returned to the need for teachers to be offered the time, the space and the opportunity for significant dialogue.

*I think, you know, I feel now, towards the end of the interview, that my words are full of contradiction. In my imagination, if teachers had the time to sit down like this, and talk, about work, about teaching, that would be the thing that would most advance us all. And I have to say, on the other hand, from experience, it's as though it doesn't work. I don't know why... (Rebecca, interview, April 3, 2013)*

The learning experienced by Osnat, Rebecca and their colleagues reminds me of what Parr (2010) refers to as “the tendency for groups or networks of teachers to work in critical, dialogic, inquiry-based paradigms. In such paradigms, teacher-learners are knowledge builders and generators as well as sharers of knowledge and expertise” (p. 186). Parr goes on to discuss the divisions between

these kinds of dialogue and traditional understandings of professional learning in policy throughout the Western world.

In the final sections of this chapter, I focus again on the policy environment in which this study took place and discuss the kinds of negotiations which the teacher participants in the WDLT, and I as the leader of the program, needed to pursue in order to experience genuinely dialogic professional learning even while we were still fulfilling the demands of the “*Ofek-Chadash*” policy.

### **7.3 The challenges posed for dialogic professional learning under the “*Ofek-Chadash*” reform**

Over the seven years I led teachers in the WDLT program, several features of the “*Ofek-Chadash*” reform (Ministry of Education, 2008a, 2008b) challenged my efforts to achieve the dialogic professional learning that I have discussed above, and that I am committed to providing for Israeli literacy teachers. These challenges included limited time available, the requirement for teachers to participate in two 30 hour programs in the same time period, and pressure surrounding standardisation and accountability.

#### **1. Time limits**

Before the “*Ofek-Chadash*” reform in 2007-2008, the WDLT program was 56 hours and the learning was spread out throughout the school year. Teachers were linking dialogically between their classroom experiences and the program and back again, and most felt substantially immersed in the process. This sense of genuine involvement, of deep and long lasting engagement, is more difficult to develop in shorter time frames.

Since the “*Ofek-Chadash*” reform, I am only allowed to teach a 30 hour program which must be divided into 10 separate sessions, in order to allow participants a maximum of 20 percent absences. (Any more than that, and their participation is deemed inadequate, and they do not get the credit for attending.) Sessions are short and I often feel that this gives a fragmented feeling to the program. In my view, a 30 hour program is far too brief to attempt to achieve understanding of the

writing process and its pedagogical considerations for the classroom. And yet, as I report later in Chapters 8 and 9, many teachers still express deep appreciation for the program in a number of ways.

Another limitation of the time factor is that teachers registered in the 30 hour program, rather than the 56 hour program, are less likely to see themselves participating in a ‘community of practice’ (Wenger, 1998), with the potential for mutual and deep engagement and the sharing of knowledge. Forming a group with a shared identity is challenging in ten sessions. When the program was longer we spent a lot more time in dialogue – both within the whole group and in small group settings. When teachers come from different schools and sometimes different cities and different cultures, they are less likely to make an effort to get to know others when it is such a short program. I have sensed that many of the teachers in the shorter program interact with me as group leader and direct their attention, their questions and their comments to me, rather than addressing the group, despite my encouragement to engage with others. This seems to fragment the learning achieved in the program into pockets of individual learning rather the social and shared learning I was seeking to promote. This attenuated sense of community may also account for the noisy interruptions occurring when teachers reach conclusions or reach interesting thoughts about their practice. They tend to share them immediately with the other teachers from their own school sitting next to them, rather than sharing them with the whole group. This serves as a distraction<sup>49</sup> and also detracts from the learning the group could be constructing as a whole.

## 2. Participation in two 30 hour programs in the same period

Most Israeli primary school teachers are required to participate in two different 30 hour programs a year in order to obtain advancement<sup>50</sup>. This means that in the same term they are attending professional learning sessions with two groups of teachers, two program leaders, and two topics. In their classroom practice beyond the programs, they must experiment with applying ideas and practices from very different topics, the frames for reflecting on these practices are sometimes very different, and they must prepare two final assignments while continuing to commit to their day to day classroom practices. Having worked with teachers, both in schools and teaching in the WDLT

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<sup>49</sup> One of my participants, Osnat, discussed these distractions at length in her interview for this study, see 6.4.

<sup>50</sup> The exception to this is in schools taking part in the opportunities for *gmishut pedagogit* [flexible pedagogy] described in 3.2 (Ministry of Education, 2014)

program, my strong sense is that this detracts from a teacher devoting her time and energy to significantly exploring an area of professional interest or need.

These policy guidelines often prevent interested teachers from continuing the professionalisation in a particular area because they are committed to do a school based program or learn in a compulsory disciplinary area, mathematics, for example.

### 3. The pressure surrounding standardisation and accountability

As a leader of professional learning for teachers of literacy, I am acutely aware that national and international testing focuses on a narrow segment of the literacy available to Israeli pupils. Nonetheless, in harmony with the “*Ofek-Chadash*” reform aims, I find myself interested in the improvement of student achievement on those test scores while aiming to enrich the written expression of Israeli pupils in ways that test scores do not measure. Beyond that aspiration on the student level, I am working towards creating a dialogic space for teachers, a space in which personal and professional reflection and teacher growth are not just a means to improving test scores.

There are additional challenges in providing professional learning in the current policy climate. In recent years, the content of the program has been shadowed by the pressure associated with high-stakes external testing – i.e., the “*Meitzav*” examinations (see Beller, 2013). Teachers feel pressure to concentrate on these examinations and to prepare their students for them. In the WDLT program, when discussing “writing as a process” (Murray, 1980; Locke, 2010), “writing for learning” (Emig, 1977; Newell, 2006), or writing directed by pupil choice, I am sometimes confronted by questions from teachers like: “... *but that’s not what is required of them [the students] in the test, is it?*”

While striving to maintain the dialogic nature of the WDLT program, I resist being drawn into the “teach to the test” (Popham, 2001, p. 16) tunnel that some of the teachers insist on coaxing me in to. In most cases we reach an understanding that succeeding in the test is indeed important but it cannot be achieved through simply drilling the children in test tasks. I reassure them that everything we discuss in the program about writing and writing pedagogy should be relevant. For example, if a pupil knows how to brainstorm and plan the writing of a text, knows how to revise

and believes in his or her ability, he or she should be able to transfer those skills and strategies to the very different context of writing an essay under test conditions.

If one of the aims of the program is to enable teachers to understand the varied needs of their pupils in relation to writing, I provide numerous opportunities for the teachers to write and to discuss the writing process itself and how they react personally to the task. It is important, in my mind, for teachers who are competent writers to hear the about the struggle of those teachers who are not used to writing, have had unpleasant experiences writing in the past or have suffered from a sense of insecurity or diffidence when asked to write. As a bridge to the standards-based curriculum enacted in schools and in the background of the program, I bring test items from the “*Meitzav*” examinations for the teachers to perform. By doing this, I am plunging them into the experience of performing an activity that many teachers deem is important to program goals; and I am allowing teachers to critically explore the standards based tests and tasks at the same time. In the program, therefore, my teaching is constantly shifting between conceptualising writing in the narrow school standards sense, and envisioning writing as social and dialogic, and asking them to consider the multiple roles that writing plays in the lives of themselves as teachers and their pupils.

In the next section of this chapter, I turn to the writing of another teacher, Ita, as an example of the ways in which I negotiate between the national policy and the dialogic form of learning I strive to achieve.

#### **7.4 Negotiating between situated dialogic learning for Israeli literacy teachers and national policy**

It seems it is possible to find a kind of working balance between dialogic forms of professional learning and the requirements of Israeli professional development policy but this depends on flexibility, involves making various concessions and requires shifting and changing all the time as

policy is not constant or stable. In Israel, there have been eight different Ministers of Education in office since the year 2000 (The Knesset, 2016) and educational policy has changed accordingly<sup>51</sup>.

In a session of the WDLT program in 2014, one teacher whom I will call ‘Ita’ was required to perform the writing task which appeared on the grade 2 “*Meitzav*” Hebrew examinations (Beller, 2013). During that activity, it became apparent that Ita had been unknowingly “teaching to the test” (Popham, 2001, p. 16) in her literacy lessons. For several years she had been working with her grade 2 students on narrative writing following a sequence of drawings. This activity, which was used in the national examinations to assess the writing ability of students in their first years at school, had in fact become a major part of the literacy curriculum in this teacher’s classroom. In a reflective piece of writing, Ita movingly described what happened to her and to her students when she realised that the teaching of writing can indeed be a far richer and more dialogic practice than her previous “teaching to the test” (Popham, 2001, p. 16) had entailed:

*...I must point out that I have been a teacher for 20 years already... For years I have been labouring to teach the rules for writing a story, my students learnt: opening, problem, solution... character, place and time. Pictures in sequence, words you can use. And suddenly... everything was shattered. The whole doctrine, all the strictness and the details are only a means to achieve an objective assessment. This section of the “Meitzav” examination was created to enable comparison between students as easily as possible, that is really why there are pictures in sequence.*

*When I arrived in the classroom, I allowed the students to sail on their imaginations, to dive into their own worlds, to soar with their thoughts. The conventions were merely directional signposts, supports along the way.*

*I was surprised to discover how rich and varied the stories were. Even the illustrations were more colourful, full of detail and movement. And most important, the children didn't stop reminding me that we have to continue the writing. They waited for feedback and wanted to develop their stories. The simple technique of asking questions awakened wonders... even I, myself was convinced that I am indeed not criticizing, rather asking and showing interest, and that is how my comments were accepted. The children received my questions with a smile and happily went back to change and add.*

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<sup>51</sup> According to Vidislevski (2011) the political ranks in Israel often use educational reforms and changes as a means of advancing their political interests and are often insensitive to programs in process or those initiated recently by the previous minister.

*Writing moved from being a task to being a (positive) experience, a magical window opened up my children's worlds to me. The conversations between me and them about the progression of the story generated full personal mutual relationships based on listening. I am full of hope that I can include writing activities as part of the classroom routine, something daily which doesn't require outside help or special organization... (Ita, teaching narrative, December, 2014)*

Apart from the new understandings Ita had generated about the examination tasks and authentic writing in the classroom, her writing here reflects the dialogic quality of the relationships she was beginning to form with her young pupils after reading their personal writing. In this sense, the dialogic learning she had experienced through writing in the WDLT program, was beginning to find its way into her own classroom.

## **7.5 Provisional conclusion**

In this chapter, I have shown the kinds of dialogic professional learning for teachers that are still possible, despite the standards based policy climate of school education in Israel, dominated as it is by the “*Ofek-Chadash*” reform. The stories I have shared here of Aya, Osnat, Rebecca, and Ita suggest that such learning should not be taken for granted. One reading of the stories I have presented here is that reform guidelines which aim at standardising and institutionalising frameworks for professional learning have the potential to limit the flexibility and the open-endedness that I or others might wish to generate through our dialogic pedagogy. In similar ways, standards based curriculums and external testing are putting pressure on teachers and heavily influencing the way teachers are teaching literacy in their classrooms. The short examples of my work I have selected and discussed here, show how it is possible to forge productive connections between national professional development policy and dialogic forms of teacher learning. The quest for ways to blend these seemingly mutually exclusive directions has become crucial for me as a leader of professional learning. Just as I am committed to exploring the assumptions hidden in the stories written by my teacher learners, I also feel obliged to be attentive to the assumptions – both hidden and explicit – in the ever changing guidelines mandated from above by Israeli policy makers. This constant process of negotiation is a major challenge for me, one requiring a great deal of flexibility and compromise. The complex relationship between these two entities requires

innovative renegotiation for every professional learning program initiated and for each new group of teacher-learners, taking into account the background and professional needs of each participant.

In their report on professional development policy and practice in the United States, Jaquith et al., (2010) conclude that practice is often very different from the policies mandated. It appears that the context in which this study takes place is that very space, constantly being negotiated between Israeli professional development policy and the dialogic professional learning frameworks described in this thesis.

The next chapter, Chapter 8, focuses on the writing of another Israeli teacher, Orly, as a means of exploring some of the ways in which narrative writing can be significant in the context of dialogical professional learning.

## Chapter 8 - Teacher writing for dialogic professional learning

This chapter inquires further into the ways narrative writing can facilitate rich professional learning within a dialogical context. The learning depicted in this chapter is not only directed at improving student learning: it also aims to contribute to the well-being of the teacher as an individual and as a professional. This chapter focuses on the writing and learning of Orly, one Israeli primary school teacher, and portrays the kinds of rich learning, empowerment, and professional renewal which can be achieved when teachers engage in professional writing and ongoing collegial conversation. As another example of the kind of work I am doing and the variety of texts I am analysing in my research, I present in detail my engagement with one teacher narrative, one of many, which left a powerful impression on me and motivated me to continue exploring why teacher writing is such an important activity. In my experience in the WDLT program, reflective writing involves ‘identity work’ (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) and can indeed change the way teachers see themselves as professionals.

My aim in this chapter, is to achieve a deeper understanding of the dialogic nature of this kind of non-traditional professional learning. Sections 8.1 and 8.2 contain an in-depth exploration of Orly’s teacher narrative, an example of significant teacher writing for learning. Description of my ongoing dialogical engagement with Orly and her writing appear in 8.3–8.6, and 8.7 and 8.8 contain discussion of the dialogic qualities of this kind of professional learning.

### 8.1 Writing our way back from a hike to hell: Significant teacher writing

Orly is an experienced primary school teacher working in a rural area in northern Israel. She participated in the WDLT program in the 2009-2010 school year.

Late one night in 2009, in my role as a leader of professional learning, I opened Orly’s message in the WDLT *campus virtuali* [virtual campus]. As I began to read the story, I was fascinated by the drama described and immediately identified with the teacher's emotions and sense of helplessness. The teaching narrative Orly posted online links professional learning in the program with a significant experience in her own professional context, school.

*Teaching story – A hike in the north*

*On a hike in the north of the country, an 8 year old boy fell from a cliff and was slightly wounded ... This sentence which was written in the 'Walla' web site, photographs of the accident, crying and shouting all mixed with the words: 'freewriting', 'list', 'drawing' ... words which appeared in the PowerPoint presentation in our writing lesson.*

*I woke up ... it was 4:00 am, the day after ... after that terrible fall on a hike along the river. The eight year old boy is my student, my Ronny, who fell on the hike. When I read or heard about children falling on hikes, I always imagined the pictures and pitied the teacher. Now the teacher is me, the student is mine and thanks to a miracle, he is only slightly wounded. I feel so sorry for myself.*

*That same day, after the hike, I came to our professional learning program. We were asked to write about the difficulty of writing. I found it hard to write because I was 'still on the hike'. Then there was the PowerPoint presentation. The words floated past me ... what would have happened if ... I kept thinking all the time.*

*Now it is 4:00 am, everything is mixing: pictures, words, sounds. I am trying to organize my thoughts, to decide what is right for me to do. Today is the day after, the children will certainly be restless; will want to talk, to share. I need to give that time and place. What is the best way to do that? They will all want to talk together. This is an opportunity for writing; that way they will all be able to express themselves. Slowly the thoughts are beginning to make sense ...*

*At 8:00 am I am standing before my excited students. They all want to ask, tell. I ask them to write a few sentences about what they are thinking and feeling. One after the other, in turn, they share with us what they have written. I am writing headings on the board from what they have said: facts, description of events, letters to Ronny, thank you letters to the parents who accompanied us on the hike, rules and instructions for a hike ... After that I ask each child to choose a heading and to write, alone, or in a group. The children get to work enthusiastically. Pages are filling. Children are working together or apart. Writing at a desk or on the floor. Talking, telling and writing and writing. Everybody is busy.*

*Occasionally a child or a group excitedly approaches me to show me their progress. The children wrote, drew, and expressed. Most of the children wrote to Ronny, letters, drawings, words of worry and requests that he return. The lesson became two and three. At the end of the day we sent the letters to Ronny. We sent the thank you letters to the parents who helped us with the hike.*

*The next day the children arrived at school and asked to keep writing. One of the children asked to type his work. The computer room was free; I allowed the typing and that caused renewed enthusiasm. They all wanted to type. They typed a letter to those responsible for the path, voiced their opinion on the route and made suggestions for improvement. They assisted me in writing a letter describing the*

*facts, a letter I was asked to write by the school principal. They wrote a list of rules for hikes ... They wrote letters describing emotions, fear and worry ... The bell for recess didn't disturb the action, the children kept working enthusiastically. I sat, each time with a different child and checked, altered style and chatted with the children. I was especially touched to see the weaker children engaged. In this task they all had something to write.*

*I felt that the writing and the opportunity to deal with a real and significant subject helped the children regain their confidence and control. We children have influence; we can act to change the reality which harmed us. We know how to express gratitude to those that helped us and to encourage those dear to us.*

*I didn't need to pity myself any more. Together with the children I underwent a strengthening experience. I went to visit Ronny who told me excitedly that he received the letters from the class – I suggested he write them a letter thanking them and describing his feelings ... (Orly, teaching narrative, November, 2009)*

## **8.2 Looking closer at Orly's story**

It has been said that teachers live storied lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Rosen (1994) explains the important role narrative plays in thought and communication and urges the reader to probe the 'narrative possibilities' (p. 188) in educational settings. Through narrative, Orly has the opportunity to engage in deep thought and to communicate her understandings with others. As seen in the conclusion of her narrative, this teacher is not merely documenting classroom activity and practice, she is critically reflecting on the complex and messy nature of learning and teaching, processes which significantly affect the students and their teacher. Rosen (1994) claims that storied telling of events in the past holds significance for the future. As a researcher, one of my roles is to grapple with those teacher stories and to contemplate their wider significance.

Doecke, Brown, and Loughran (2000) explain that stories do not embody the reality of the classroom; they are textual constructions which can stimulate new ways of noticing and conceiving that reality. By critically exploring the voices and the stories of teachers like Orly, I am searching for complex understandings of the way that professional learning is experienced by individuals and groups in a particular professional learning environment.

When requested to produce a teaching narrative connected to the teaching of writing, Orly chose to share a traumatic event she had recently experienced. Although there is no doubt that the story

was appropriate for the task, Orly's peers and I were surprised to discover such a powerful and deeply personal piece on the online forum. Orly's narrative describes the way that 'authentic' writing helped her students process a traumatic incident and to make sense of it in a range of ways. But importantly, the writing of this narrative was also part of the teacher's own sense making and 'recovery' from the traumatic incident.

This narrative and the reflective text Orly wrote after it represent an example of the way theory and practice, which are often disconnected (Loughran & Hamilton, 2016) can meet in a supportive professional learning environment. In a richly dialogic sense (Bakhtin, 1981), Orly brought together her significant learning from the WDLT program to her classroom, and she brought her special classroom experience to her writing and for discussion in the collaborative learning framework provided by the WDLT program. These two learning environments are closely meshed in the way Orly tells her story.

When Orly has the opportunity to tell her story, her narrative stirs other stories, it becomes apparent how teacher writing and classroom composition intertwine, and how a unique dialogue involving the teacher, her students and other educators is continually unfolding. These complexities of classroom life and the intellectual resources that teachers need to understand them are often overlooked in top-down forms of professional learning and in much educational research enacted by university based researchers working from outside the learning context.

In the following sub-sections (8.2.1-8.2.5), I present some examples of the 'categorical form analysis' suggested by Lieblich et al. (1998, 2010) which I explained earlier in 6.4. Looking closer at Orly's text in this manner can "sharpen our sensitivity to the different readings which are possible" (Lieblich et al., 2010, p. 40) and provides further understandings of Orly's learning experiences, and the possibilities of this kind of writing.

### ***8.2.1 Looking closer at expressions of involvement and distance in the text***

Orly chose to open her personal teaching narrative with a quotation from 'Walla', an Internet news site that reported the incident: "*On a hike in the north of the country, an 8 year old boy fell from a cliff and was slightly wounded*". This single sentence emphasizes the brief, factual and detached style of a news item. The words '*an 8 year old boy*' seem impersonal because of the indefinite

article. The writer of the news item obviously has no connection, personal or otherwise with the child. Similarly, the title chosen by Orly, “*Teaching story – A hike in the north*” would appear to be uninvolved and non-specific. The teacher's deeply personal telling of the narrative is intensified by emphasis placed on the detached presentation of the event in the media.

### ***8.2.2 Looking closer at the writer's use of pronouns***

After this seemingly impersonal opening, Orly's language continually stresses her close relationship with the child. This connection is particularly obvious in her repeated use of first person pronouns – ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘my’, ‘mine’, and ‘myself’: “*The eight year old boy is my student, my Ronny, who fell on the hike... I read... I imagined... I pitied... Now the teacher is me, the student is mine... I feel so sorry for myself*”. (Orly, teaching narrative, November, 2009)

This personal involvement which is often absent from conventional accounts of teaching and learning continues throughout the story.

There are parts of the story where Orly is busy preparing for the charged meeting with the students or reflecting on their reactions (“*The children will certainly be restless*”) and there are parts where she puts herself in the same boat with her students (“*parents who helped us with the hike*”). In the space of two sentences, Orly uses the word 'we' three times and the word 'us' three times.

Orly's experience is so densely intertwined with that of her students that, in a sense, their activities become hers. She writes: “*We children have influence; we can act to change the reality which harmed us. We know how to express gratitude to those that helped us and to encourage those dear to us*”. In the same way, she shared her writing tasks with her students: “*They assisted me in writing a letter describing the facts, a letter I was asked to write by the school principal*”.

### ***8.2.3 Looking closer at the writer's use of verbs***

In another section, Orly concentrates on herself and her actions. In a verb-dense personalized sentence she writes: “*Ani yashavti bechol paam im yeled acher, badakti, tikanti nisuach vesochachti*” [“*I sat, each time with a different child and checked, altered style and chatted*”.] In Hebrew, the verb in past tense contains a suffix which denotes first, second or third person. The verb ‘yashavti’, for example means ‘I sat’. This further stresses Orly's central role in the classroom

activity. As explained earlier, teachers and their students are seldom represented from the inside (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) in this manner in conventional research literature. In their discussion on the work of Harold Rosen, Doecke and Parr (2009) also refer to this absence of teacher voices in educational research and debate.

#### ***8.2.4 Looking closer at the writer's use of tense***

In telling her story, Orly moves backwards and forwards in time as she relates the events of the hike, her memories from the WDLT program session that day and the following activities in her classroom. Her text constantly moves between present and past tenses:

*Now it is 4:00 am, everything is mixing: pictures, words, sounds. I am trying to organize my thoughts, to decide what is right for me to do. Today is the day after... The next day the children arrived at school and asked to keep writing. One of the children asked to type his work.*

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explain this temporality evident in Orly's writing. The authors propose that in narrative, authors are 'both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others .... A person is, at once, engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories' (p. 4).

#### ***8.2.5 Looking closer at the writer's choice of style***

Bakhtin's (1986) concept of heteroglossia is useful when exploring the heterogeneous nature of Orly's text. The story opens with the fragmented style of the news article and elements of this style appear throughout the story as her own sentences are often abrupt and sometimes appear to be left unfinished, "Now it is 4:00 am..." for example. In some instances Orly is attempting to emulate a train of thought: "The words floated past me... what would have happened if... I kept thinking all the time..." and in others she is showing the open-ended quality of the story, its incompleteness. Despite the personal tone and involvement, there is often a staccato sense of a journalistic report: "The children get to work enthusiastically. Pages are filling. Children are working together or apart... Talking, telling and writing and writing. Everybody is busy."

Orly's narrative is indeed comprised of a range of styles and voices. In the following sections (see 8.3, 8.4, 8.5 and 8.6), I discuss the continued development of the story through collegial conversation, written feedback and a process of revision and reflection. This narrative is an interesting example of the multitude of ways in which written texts, dialogic utterances, link with other texts and conversations and remain open to ongoing processes of interpretation and response.

### 8.3 Responding to Orly's story

The title of my response to Orly's narrative on the online forum was: *'Writing with tears in my eyes'*. I wrote:

*Dear Orly,*

*Thank you for sharing the difficult event you experienced with your class and the empowering process that followed. Our work as teachers demands that we cope with the burden of taking 100% responsibility in complex situations. Sometimes we find ourselves and our students in impossible positions, you described one of those...*

*I want to respond to the work you did in the classroom after your student fell. I believe you did the best thing at that time. If you had returned immediately to maths workbooks etc., you would not have provided a real opportunity to share, express anguish, and process the event. Through writing, each student consciously responded to the crisis, to personal feelings and to the conclusions which should be reached.*

*They say that the best way to deal with traumatic situations is to act, to take responsibility, to encourage others. I understand that the significant writing tasks you gave your students actually helped you as the teacher to regain control and confidence. The students, together with you, were busy with empowering projects instead of feeling sorry for themselves or the injured child.*

*Another prominent element in your story is the fact that during the writing, you were free to support your students individually ...*

*Orly, I am interested to hear what the writing of this story did for you. Did you experience a sense of relief while you were writing or afterwards? Did the writing itself help you to process the terrible events you experienced?*

*I hope your student has recovered and that the others are returning to normal.*

*Thank you again for your openness and honesty and congratulations on your excellent work.*

*Nikki (Response to teaching narrative, November, 2009)*

What am I trying to achieve in my written responses to teachers' narratives? First and foremost, I want to encourage ongoing conversation in relation to the teachers' practice, drawing on a relational approach to teacher education (Kitchen, 2005a). In addition, I aim to make connections between what teachers might perceive as practice and theory. I want to name things the teachers are talking about, or which they write about, but sometimes struggle to name directly. I see this effort to elicit clearer understandings as an important part of my work as program leader. It is interesting to explore the 'heteroglossia of voices' (Bakhtin, 1981) apparent in this short text and others like it as I speak in different roles. In this response to Orly I use the words 'our' and 'we' and write to her as an educator (one of whose roles is to lead the WDLT program) and as a colleague. In talking to her, I am trying to de-emphasize the position of authority from which I am writing as program leader and as someone who will ultimately be evaluating her work. I am consciously responding as a sympathetic colleague, understanding the many serious implications of this traumatic event. In my role as teacher educator, I am supporting her in her efforts to deal with the situation. I am presenting questions which will help her further reflect and explore her response and explicitly name the reasons why I believe she acted wisely. These reasons may be of use to her, to other teachers and to me in the future. These conclusions are the kind of 'knowledge in practice' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001) co-constructed when educators are provided the opportunity to reflect on their practice in supportive, dialogic professional relationships.

The very nature of my role as teacher educator in these teaching and learning situations must be carefully scrutinized in seeking to understand the dialogic work that constitutes my professional practice in responding to Orly's writing. There are significant tensions in and between the various positions I adopt; a sympathetic and understanding colleague on the one hand, and on the other, a leader mindful of the need to prompt my teacher participants to critically reflect on their practice in the aim of considering change. In addition, I am constantly manoeuvring my way between a carefully planned program curriculum and remaining ever responsive to the developing dialogue and emerging needs of the participants.

#### 8.4 Sharing the story: An additional opportunity for dialogue

Before the next face-to-face session of our program, I asked for Orly's permission to read her narrative aloud to the group. Many participants heard the story for the first time because they hadn't read it on the *campus virtuali* [virtual campus]. There was silence in the room; the teachers mulled over the enormous challenge described by their colleague. I opened the discussion by asking the teachers to respond to Orly's text and invited them to ask her questions. A number of teachers expressed sympathy for Orly and she received many compliments on the way she coped in such a difficult situation. Other teachers related to the writing achieved in Orly's classroom following the event and some described how they might take this learning to their own classroom settings. The exchange was both personal, directed towards Orly, as a person and a professional, probing the choices she made and the consequences of the serious incident.

#### 8.5 Revisiting the narrative: Another challenge

Approximately three months later, as part of the mandated final assessment task of the WDLT program, the teachers were required to revisit the teaching narrative they had composed and published earlier online. I asked the teachers to reread the responses they received and to revise or update their text. I was curious to read Orly's reflection on her writing experience and to 'visit' her classroom again. Orly wrote:

*Dear Nikki,*

*I have finished reading the teaching narrative I wrote. For a moment I was there again ... it was difficult ... For some reason it is hard for me to change the text. I feel that it is written as I want it to be or maybe it is just hard for me to cope with returning to those moments on the hiking trip ... I remember feeling great relief when I finished writing the story. The feeling of sharing the burden that was weighing me down, led me to process things, to think and to act. I thought to myself: What a long way I've come since the hike and since writing that narrative. For this final assessment task I have chosen to write thoughts and insights resulting from writing that narrative, to describe the long journey I have embarked on, a journey of writing for myself and for my class ... This task has given me another opportunity to process the events in the perspective of time and to see how our learning in the program has become intertwined in my teaching practice. (Orly, final assignment, March, 2010)*

While processing the events and exploring how the program had become 'entwined' in her teaching practice, Orly went on to write:

*In this program, to which it seems I didn't arrive coincidentally, I received reinforcement for everything I love and believe in ... but only when I was required to experience the writing of a teacher narrative myself, did I reach genuine understanding. (Orly, final assignment, March, 2010)*

In her final assignment, Orly identifies the significant learning she experienced when required to construct and revise a professional narrative. Through this writing and the dialogue surrounding the text, she became more aware of the demands she was making of her students and these in turn reinforced her pedagogical beliefs. According to Beattie (1997) this kind of reflective writing, with significant feedback, can lead to professional learning which is highly self-emancipatory in nature.

## **8.6 And the chain of professional dialogue goes on**

As explained earlier in this study, I adopt the Bakhtinian term 'unfinalizability' (Bakhtin, 1986) to describe the ongoing nature of my work with these teachers in these dialogical settings. The original classroom experiences of the teachers have become text and thus have been displaced, but the memories are still being reworked. I invite each member of the group to search for connections between the stories (which began as personal narratives but have since become shared) and their own practice. Each member has the potential to generate unique understandings, relevant to his or her own particular professional contexts, in a dynamic ongoing process.

Similarly, in many ways my interaction and dialogue with Orly and her writing continue to influence me as a teacher educator, a teacher, a researcher, and a writer. Her narrative keeps re-appearing in my professional writing and in my dialogue with others in surprising ways that neither of us could have planned. In 2011, in preparation for the writing of a journal article (Aharonian, 2016), I wrote an email to Orly asking permission to include her story. We hadn't been in touch for well over a year. In addition to her immediate agreement, she briefly wrote how the significant learning she experienced in the WDLT program continues to influence in her practice.

*Hi Nikki,*

*I was happy to hear from you – I haven't forgotten... I was excited to read what you wrote, there is no doubt that your program connected with me significantly and gave me a lot.*

*In the past two years I find myself dealing more and more with writing, both in my class and in other classes at school. At the beginning of this year, many students approached me and asked me to teach them because they enjoy the writing. This year, my students are always writing... stories, poems, plays, comics, letters and more... I really do believe that significant writing plays an important role in learning...*

*I am very grateful to you because you gave me a sense of legitimacy. You helped me understand that what I enjoy and how I love to teach are correct. You highlighted and stressed this form of learning and gave it an important place.*

*This week I taught my students to write a letter (what's that???...). One of the students said to me: "Orly, that's great. I hardly ever see my father and can't even talk to him. Now at least I can write him a letter..."*

*(Orly, personal email, September 24, 2011)*

As she did in her other writing, in her letter Orly again refers to writing as an 'authentic', empowering practice; writing for communication and social purposes and not merely as a tool to reach prescribed literacy standards. Significantly, when Orly writes, "*I really do believe that significant writing plays an important role in learning*", she is talking about her grade 3 or 4 students. My reading of her email, though, is that she is also demonstrating how relevant and powerful the act of writing was for her, and by extension, how relevant writing can be for the professional learning of educators more broadly. Orly is learning from the conversation with her students and the texts they are producing, just as she is learning from the conversations she has had with educators in the WDLT program, just as I am learning from my participation in these ongoing conversations.

What does Orly mean when she writes: "*you gave me a sense of legitimacy*"? I have never visited her classroom or checked her lesson plans; I don't even know how her students score on the national "*Meitzav*" examination. What happened in those professional learning writing activities and surrounding dialogue that gave Orly a feeling of validity and authority? Other data show that Orly's feelings of increased legitimacy were shared by many others in the WDLT program.

In the WDLT program I share my own practice and model a way of responding to students and motivating them to keep writing and thinking. When I write my responses on the online forum my focus is not on ‘effectiveness’ or pedagogical ‘improvement’, or at least not in the way these terms are commonly used in educational policy and practice. I am recognizing the complex layers of emotion and understanding involved in the situation. I try to give direct reinforcements for what the teachers are doing. The email I wrote Orly recently was an extra reinforcement. I wrote: “I believe that your stirring story has great potential to touch teachers all over the world and well represents the reflection and learning undertaken in the WDLT program”. I would like to think that this “legitimacy” came, at least in part, through my writing and language.

I am constantly aware that this kind of learning through conversation and writing leaves artefacts which are malleable and lasting. Orly's story still exists as a tangible, material artefact, not just as a memory of an oral retelling in class. The empowerment Orly and others draw from this kind of ongoing professional learning does not arise from a final grade or a checklist of standards; rather it may be from the sense that she shares values and beliefs with fellow educators, that she feels part of a community in which the members understand the messy and complex dynamics of emotions and aspirations, learning and teaching.

In this kind of professional learning, as the dialogue progresses, the specifics of a particular classroom incident recede into the background, becoming traces of the people and circumstances that comprised them at the moment that provided the focus for the narrative. This manner of inquiring into learning is very different from the positivist accounts of classroom practice which base conclusions on what can be seen, documented and measured in a classroom at a particular time (e.g. Hattie, 2012; O'Leary, 2013). It seems that in terms of professional learning, the potential for what *may* happen in a classroom is far more significant than what is happening at a particular moment in time.

As explained previously (see 1.6) according to Bakhtin (1986) “any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances” (p. 69). Doecke, Gill, Illesca, and van de Ven (2009) explain that literary texts maintain a dialogue with other texts and that readers join in the dialogue as they create their own understandings. In this sense writing stimulates writing; one text invites the next in a train of writing for different purposes. The dialogic potential of Orly's text is

continuing to be realised in ways which she would never have initially imagined. Orly's initial creation of her teaching narrative was the first step in a potentially ongoing train of development. After the writing of the text, meaning was restoried and further constructed when other participants read it, with some also responding in writing. When I responded as program leader, asking Orly questions relating to the context of the event and reflecting on my own understandings, the potential of the text was developed further. Each written response in fact altered or enhanced the meaning of the text. When the story was discussed in our face-to-face professional learning session, each teacher who asked a question or related a memory connected to the text, actively participated in further construction of meaning from and with this story. The story triggered varied reactions in other readers; some teachers felt the need to explore challenging events in their own professional past, some probed the pedagogical implications of Orly's choices, and others were drawn to the honesty and openness in the narrative. A sense of communal trust and risk taking was certainly an important element in the ongoing dialogue and learning.

After reading Orly's original story, I immediately wrote a text of my own on my reflective blog, *thesisthoughts*:

*Incredible teacher narrative*

*Since reading O's story she is with me all the time. I am thinking about her terrifying experience, about her coming to my program after such a traumatic event and not telling anyone, and about how she used writing to help her students recover.*

*Apart from receiving a lot of satisfaction that the materials we discuss in the program are making a real difference in the professional lives of teachers and their students, I was excited to see the process of writing itself encouraging the creation of new texts. O described how the writing done by her students encouraged her and stimulated her to write and I told her that her narrative had stimulated me to write a narrative of my own. I have no doubt that the writing of many teachers in the program will be enriched by the sharing of O's story (Aharonian, 2009e)*

I do not know who read the post (the blog is public) or how readers might have responded to it. Maybe one of my readers wrote a responsive text of their own? In this blog post, I opened the story up for wider contemplation, as I did when I included Orly's story in a journal article (Aharonian,

2016) and as I am doing here again in this thesis. This process of sharing writing enacts what Parr (2010) describes as a dynamic in which “each text articulates and promotes present and future dialogic learning” (p. 79). Orly's story is continually being created, in the sense of being engaged with anew, as it reaches new readers and is reread by others.

## **8.7 Dialogic teacher learning mediated by writing and collegial conversation**

After focusing on my interaction with Orly, her narrative and her learning, I turn, in the remainder of this chapter, to a broader discussion of dialogic learning in general, and learning in the WDLT program in particular.

Fecho and Botzakis (2007) advocate for the creation of dialogic literacy classrooms grounded in the theories of Bakhtin, and name five features of dialogic learning environments which I find useful in describing the context in which I met Orly and her colleagues. I draw on these attributes to further examine the ways in which language mediates learning in the WDLT program.

### ***8.7.1 Opportunity for all participants to ask and answer questions***

In the WDLT program, questions are raised both by me, in my role as program leader, and by the teacher participants. These questions received varied responses from me and from the teachers and most are context based, including stories of classroom practice from the teachers' own schools. Answers typically begin with the words: "In my experience...", "In my classroom..." or "I remember a time...". Often it is recognized that there are several different possible answers to a question and that the teacher who asked will have to choose the answer which best suits her own professional context. In the same way, participants are required to respond in writing to the teaching narratives posted by others online. Although I respond to each and every narrative, each teacher story receives additional comments from the other teachers, not always in agreement with mine.

This dialogue, this collaborative exploration of concepts and theories, is what makes each program strikingly different from the others, even though the formal program curriculum is identical. Each topic I raise is examined through the professional lens of each individual teacher and is then

moulded by the group to form unique understandings. Each statement, question or text produced by any one of the participants fuels the dialogue and influences the direction of learning. Orly's narrative, when posted online, changed the program significantly. Apart from the time I devoted to discussing her story in class, I sensed it had generated a new intimacy in the group. This change was of course unplanned and unexpected. The dynamics in each cohort are different as are the stories, questions and answers which arise. According to Fecho and Botzakis (2007), this connection to context, this affirmation of the temporal and the spatial is essential for significant learning.

### *8.7.2 Context is considered crucial to the learning process*

I approach my pedagogy as leader of this program with an understanding that each participant works in a unique educational environment and will react differently to the dynamic interactions which take place in the sessions. I encourage the teachers to talk about their classroom practice and experiences in language which reflects their backgrounds and communities. The following selections from my reflective blog demonstrate my intention to get to know the context in which the teachers are working.

#### *First teacher narratives are in*

*My experience in the past three weeks has proven, yet again, that writing is extremely hard work. To read narratives from 20 or so teachers and plan and write a response to each is tiring and draining. Despite being overloaded I am very happy that I gave the [writing] task so early on in the program. The narratives really do give me a good peek into the world of each of the teachers and show me where she is in terms of teaching writing. Now I have to connect each narrative with the face of the teacher who wrote it. (Aharonian, 2009b)*

#### *New group*

*This group is different from others I have worked with in that 90% of the teachers are from a very religious background and they teach in very religious schools. It will be interesting to see how they bring their school experiences to the sessions and to learn from them about their environment. I must ask them about their Internet access – often these families have limited internet experience and facilities. (Aharonian, 2009d)*

In professional learning programs such as this, religious and political filters colour all topics explored by the group. In the particular group referred to in the second of the blog entries above, I discovered that even the date an assignment was due was not neutral. I was startled when some of the ultra-orthodox teachers reacted in confusion when I gave the Gregorian date and not the Hebrew calendar date. This experience reminded me again of the culturally based sensitivity to language hovering in heterogeneous groups such as these.

### ***8.7.3 Openness to varied perspectives***

Openness to a variety of perspectives is a central feature in the WDLT program. In speaking with each new group of teachers at the beginning, as throughout the program, I continually stress the unique professional knowledge of the teachers participating. In my opening letter to teacher participants presented earlier (6.3.4 and 7.2), I write:

*... I am aware that each of you joining the group possesses a wealth of educational knowledge. Each of us learnt to write as a pupil and most of us have learnt to write in a second language. We all deal with a variety of writing tasks all the time. Most of us have arrived here with years of educational experience. Teaching writing is one of our central tasks at school. It is important to me that you bring your knowledge, your experiences and your frustrations to our meetings. I hope your stories will form a central part of our work together.*

*... I believe this program is different from others and I hope you enjoy it and meet the various challenges. In this program you will talk with your peers, write a lot and think seriously about your pupils and your classrooms. The idea is to use the short time we have at our disposal, to bring your students with their unique needs<sup>52</sup> to the program and most important, to take the program back to the classroom with you. I hope you will try the activities you meet in the program and will return with thoughts, hesitations, questions and success stories. Our goals are to learn and to improve the writing of our pupils. Teachers who are active in the sessions and try the ideas in the classroom maximise the benefits of the program. (Personal communication, October, 2010)*

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<sup>52</sup> The unique needs of teachers in professional learning are discussed by Timperley (2008).

In this initial text I try to set the stage for open and honest dialogue, both written and oral, throughout the program. There is indeed a sense that knowledge is being created as various perspectives meet. In group discussions, a range of views are articulated but this in no way means that I refrain from explaining which perspective I prefer. If I disagree with an element of classroom practice presented by one of the educators in a written narrative or group discussion, I try to begin my response with the positive points I can identify in the idea and afterwards present my hesitations. I usually begin with the words: "In my experience in the classroom...", "I tend to ..." or "Researcher X sees this in another way...". This openness is in sharp contrast to reports on top-down, prescriptive professional development frameworks which tend to relate to teachers as passive consumers of information (e.g. Lieberman & Wood, 2001).

#### *8.7.4 A disregard for traditional classroom hierarchies*

Traditional lecturer-student relationships are disturbed in this form of dialogic professional learning. I frequently emphasize that the teachers arrive with vast experience and that we are joining to learn together. As the program unfolds and the teachers, like Orly, write about their practice, the issues discussed in the sessions arise from their own unique experiences. Often I remark that I believe I am learning more than program participants, as following the stimulating interactions with and between the teachers, I find myself reading current research, discussing issues with critical friends and engaging in written reflection in both private and in online environments. A reflection on the nature of this learning appears in the following blog post:

#### *Who is learning more?*

*Just a thought I had while responding to the teachers in the program in the online forum...*

*As I read each and every teacher's narrative and reflection, think of a significant response and pose a relevant question, I am aware that I, myself, am engaging in extremely intensive professional learning. Would this be the same for classroom teachers responding to students' work if they would consider this as learning and not just a drag? (Aharonian, 2009c)*

### *8.7.5 A shared understanding that learning is developing and dynamic*

Fecho and Botzakis (2007) describe dialogic learning as “dynamic and active” (p. 554). I believe that this is an apt description of the WDLT program. When educators attempt to author teaching narratives connected to their teaching of writing, they are themselves experiencing the writing process and are creating a new and unique professional text. Often teachers adopt the language I use in the WDLT sessions as they describe their classroom practice and dilemmas. Concepts introduced during the program become shared language as each teacher in turn, brings her own classroom centre stage. In essence, a "discursive space for scholarly discussion of literacy pedagogy" (Kamler & Comber, 2003, p. 338) is established.

Fecho and Botzakis (2007) discuss the possible features of a dialogic classroom through the unique use of language by all participants. They scrutinize the critical roles language may play in a Bakhtinian conception of learning: "dialogism of language, the contextuality of language, the equitability of language, the polyphony of language, the dynamism of language, and the complexity of language" (p. 556). While these concepts have guided me in the creation and facilitation of the WDLT program, I often find myself wondering whether I devote enough time to the development of this critical dialogue. In a relatively short, 30 hour program, it is difficult to find the time for explicit reflective discussion on the ways in which language mediates learning both in the WDLT sessions and in the teachers' professional lives.

## **8.8 The unfinalizability of dialogic learning**

I am ever aware that my ongoing dialogue with Orly mirrors other conversations I am involved in. I am reminded of my sense of excitement when one of my PhD supervisors told my own narrative of learning in his PhD thesis (Parr, 2007) and book (Parr, 2010). In that instance I experienced a sense of recognition and mutual respect. That generative conversation and interest in my work motivated me and drove me to provide similar experiences for teachers, such as Orly, in my own professional environment.

Explaining Bakhtin's (1986) concept of “unfinalizability”, Dimitriadis and Kamberelis (2006) write: “life is riddled with surpluses, remainders, loopholes, and anomalies that keep things

unfinalizable and therefore always hold open the possibility of surprise, change, and transformation” (p. 50). While there are aspects of the WDLT program which are constrained by program dates, pre-set curriculum and standards, the potential dialogic professional learning described in this thesis is in no way limited by these formal aspects. It is intrinsically different from top-down prescribed forms of professional learning. Critical examination of the writing produced by Orly and myself *in and beyond* this short program shows how narrative mediates our practice, our learning and our lives. This is indeed an example of the ongoing powerful learning which can be realised with a combination of writing, narrative and collegial dialogue in a supportive environment.

In Chapter 9, I focus attention more particularly on the rich and influential teacher learning occurring in spaces beyond, outside or on the boundaries of what is typically regarded as professional learning.

## Chapter 9 - Teacher learning in liminal spaces

Throughout initial readings of the transcripts generated in the interviews with my research participants, I concentrated on the stories told of teacher learning in formal programs and in the school context. In time, in consequent readings and closer rereadings of the texts, I gradually became aware of rich descriptions of significant teacher learning occurring in other, sometimes surprising places. Searching the literature in my attempt to make meaning from that data, I encountered the term ‘liminality’.

Liminality is a concept which was originally used by van Gennep (1960) and adopted by anthropologist, Victor Turner (1967) to describe cultural rites of passage which are present in shifts in location, state, social status or age. Later the term was broadened to describe spaces “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1974, p. 233), spaces identified on the boundaries of social situations, usually signalling transition or movement. Turner (1977) discusses individuals in a state of liminality as those who “evade ordinary cognitive classification... for they are neither-this-nor-that, here-nor-there, one-thing-nor-the-other” (p. 37). According to Cook-Sather (2006), “Life is constituted by multiple liminal phases, places, and states overlapping as members of a society move from one culture, context and role to another” (p. 18). Connecting the term to learning and the sphere of education, Meyer and Land (2005) use the term, ‘liminal’, to describe a space of transformation in learning in which the learner moves from one state of understanding to another. This change is often accompanied, they say, by a change in practice and can be disconcerting or uncomfortable. In this chapter I use the concept of liminality to scrutinize teacher learning occurring in spaces outside the boundaries of traditional formal professional development and to critically explore the transitions and transformations connected to those kinds of learning. According to Wood (2012), processes of this kind are “complex, multifaceted and flexible” and “afford an opportunity for deep change and reorientation” (p. 87).

According to Woodard (2015), research on teachers and teaching has typically concentrated on teachers’ engagement within educational institutions (usually schools and formal professional learning settings). In comparison, Hardy (2012) and Hinchion and Hall (2016) relate to teacher learning as a complex culturally mediated process and Woodward, in her study of teacher writing outside school and the teaching of writing in classrooms, explores “the significance of teachers

blurring in- and out-of-school spaces” (p. 37). She asserts that teachers’ interests and activities outside of school can be useful and influential resources for teaching and ongoing professional learning. This blurring enables Woodard to comprehend teaching and learning as complex dialogic processes which emerge from a wide range of experiences and involve multiple identities (see also Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Arvaja, 2016; Fecho, Collier, Friese, & Wilson, 2010). Such a framing of professional learning is particularly appropriate for the analysis I wish to pursue in this chapter. According to Fox (2012), the personal elements of a teacher’s identity (e.g. gender, culture, beliefs, life experience) are so deeply embedded that they cannot be separated from who the teacher is professionally. Alsup (2005) also focuses on the blurring of the personal and the professional in teachers’ lives. She uses the term “borderland discourse” (p. 205) to describe the “discourse in which disparate personal and professional subjectivities are put into contact towards a point of integration. Such integration, can lead to cognitive, emotional, and corporeal changes, resulting in identity growth or increased metacognitive awareness” (p. 205). The spaces emerging between the personal and the professional in teachers’ lives are liminal in this sense, neither here nor there, essentially along the borders or boundary lines of both.

While reflecting on how participants interviewed in this study described the ways in which they learned as professionals, it struck me that many of them referred to learning that took place outside of what are typically thought of as teachers’ professional learning spaces. I encountered descriptions of teacher learning which were grounded in spaces on the periphery of or outside of traditional conceptions of professional learning. In interviews with teachers, when asking about significant learning they had experienced, I took care not to define a time or place for that learning; my questioning did not point to any specific form of learning. A number of the teachers I interviewed chose to describe learning they do or have done in the past outside formal professional learning frameworks. These teachers told stories of rich, self-motivated learning which influences their classroom practice and consolidates their teaching philosophies. In this chapter I explore some of those spaces of teacher learning which are on the periphery of or outside the boundaries of traditional or formal professional learning for teachers. I describe those spaces in which the personal and the professional meet as liminal spaces and focus on the ways in which the significant learning which can occur in those spaces challenges any attempt to define in narrow terms what counts as teacher learning.

## 9.1 Stories of teacher learning in liminal spaces

As described in 3.1, Israeli teachers are currently required to enrol in mandated professional learning programs which are authorized by the “*Ofek Chadash*” policy guidelines. At this time in which professional learning for teachers, in Israel and in other parts of the world, is becoming more and more prescribed and yoked to centrally determined professional standards (e.g. Doecke & Parr, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2015), it is important that research explores alternative spaces of teacher learning which might be personal and/or situated firmly in the lives of teachers beyond the boundaries of school. The stories discussed in this chapter present the teachers as independent, thinking individuals who seize opportunities for reflection and deep thought about teaching and learning in unexpected places; their students are in their minds when they are in the classroom and outside it. Engaging with these stories enables the reader to understand the liminal spaces in which these teachers are creating productive links between their “rich histories and experiences” (Woodard, 2015, p. 37) and their classroom teaching practice.

It is important to point out that the interviews I am referring to in this chapter took place after the teachers had completed their participation in the WDLT program (see 6.3 and 6.3.6). In these interviews, I recognized that many of the teachers now spoke about their professional learning as a concept far broader than the transmission of curriculum and pedagogical material in formal professional development activities. They described enriching experiences and relationships; they talked about significant dialogue with their pupils and about looking at the world in unique ways. Some of the teachers, like Rona, said their learning involved deep inward reflection, producing understandings about themselves and their role in the lives of their students. Others, like Osnat, looked at their relationships with others as a means of exploring life in the classroom.

When asked about significant learning experiences, some of the teachers talked about insights which emerged during activities they chose to take part in for pleasure and recreation. Nilli, for example, told me she regularly attends piano lessons; in the course of our conversation she critically reflected on herself in the role of student in that learning context. Other teachers talked about learning undertaken in the framework of leisure activities. Rona, for example, immensely enjoys yoga; she described how she uses yoga to immerse herself in a physical and intellectual state which enhances her thinking and reflection. Ophira described a unique opportunity for

learning when she was invited to take part in a community-based seminar as a community representative. For Ophira, the experience was empowering and afforded her a kind of social sensitivity, a heightened perception of the needs and motives of people around her as individuals bound together as members of a community. Another teacher, Efrat, talked about her learning acquired in a previous field of employment. During our interview on learning, Efrat described her love of nature and her positive experiences working on a farm with agriculture and animals. Describing another very different kind of learning, Osnat discussed the deeper understandings of learning that she developed while bringing up her children and grandchildren. All of these teachers described their learning experiences with passion and conviction, and critically connected them to their professional lives as educators.

All participants in the study also elaborated on significant professional learning they had experienced in traditional, formal frameworks since completing the WDLT program. Ophira, for example, moved from speaking about her learning in a community-based seminar to reflecting on a three day professional learning program:

*I think it was two years ago that I travelled to Beit Yatziv<sup>53</sup> to do a three day program on Jewish festivals and traditions. I wasn't required to but I wouldn't miss a program like that! I enjoyed it so much and the lecturers were doctors! They came to tell us about many things from different perspectives and it enriches you. You are a teacher! You must! You come in contact with children, you have to have that knowledge. (Ophira, interview, August 19, 2013)*

As I mentioned earlier, many participants took time to focus on learning experienced *outside* the boundaries of these traditional professional learning spaces. In interviews and in the professional writing of these teachers, they shared rich descriptions of self-initiated, deeply motivated learning which seemed to be far removed from the professional learning activities mandated in national education policies. The more I heard these stories the more it occurred to me that these were not merely aberrations or idiosyncratic exceptions to the norms of professional learning! This chapter is an attempt to further understand the ways in which these teachers spoke about negotiating the joining of their personal and professional identities (Alsup, 2005), while they attempted to comprehend the significance of these learning experiences in liminal spaces. Comparing and

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<sup>53</sup> *Beit Yatziv* is a centre for professional learning and guest house situated in Beer Sheva in the south of Israel.

contrasting these seemingly disparate forms of professional learning affords me additional viewpoints from which I can explore my own practice as a leader of professional learning. I have, for example, come to see the research conversations in this study as an additional space for learning for my teacher participants and for myself. As a researcher, rigorous reflection on divergent forms of learning, including learning in liminal spaces, has broadened my understandings and has prompted me to question forms of professional learning beyond traditionally mandated spaces.

In the next section, I focus in some detail on conversations I had with five teachers who had completed the WDLT months or some years earlier: Nilli, Efrat, Osnat, Ophira and Rona.

### **9.1.1 “If they knew what they were doing, they were geniuses”: From piano lessons to reading instruction**

I interviewed Nilli, a grade 3 teacher and school vice-principal, six months after the conclusion of the WDLT program in which we met. Nilli devotes time each week in her busy schedule to learning to play the piano. In addition to the significant learning experiences Nilli described in formal professional development programs and academic studies, she wanted to discuss her music lessons at length.

*I love learning, I can't not... I love learning and then afterwards I love putting it into practice, immediately! Apart from that, for my pleasure I play the piano. I have been learning piano for many many years, and that is something that I am not prepared to forgo. (Nilli, interview, November 21, 2014)*

Nilli emphasised her passion for learning, repeating the word ‘*ohevet*’ [love/like] three times. After expressing her general fondness of learning, she went on to stress that her piano lessons were for her enjoyment. Her dedication to this activity is evident when she declares with some passion “*and that is something that I am not prepared to forgo*”. Her commitment to this learning is again perceptible when she describes being totally engrossed in the lesson. She is not available for telephone calls or other distractions. The only exception is her availability for her three children, especially the two in army duty:

*I played (piano) for eight years in my childhood... towards high school I stopped and I returned to it six years ago. I can say that it has already accumulated to 14*

*years. I didn't start at the beginning, I knew (how to play) well. But, I have, six years, once a week I receive a lesson. I practice at home; I have a piano. That is my hour! And I... nothing interests me, phones are closed, no telephone! None! I have two sons in the army, so it's only if, god forbid, I... but apart from that, and my daughter of course... (Nilli, interview, November 21, 2014)*

Nilli described this learning experience as active and fully engaging. Her language in the quote above communicates the depth of her curiosity, her inquisitiveness inspired by her engagement with the composers and their work. The words “stunned”, “fascinating” and “genius” convey the power of this learning and its intensity. Learning here is experienced in the broadest sense of the word. Nilli isn't just learning notes and rehearsing pieces of music, she is being absorbed into the rich world of music, engaging with the people, the history and the sounds of classical music. She articulates her fascination at what she is discovering, continually asking her teacher questions and conveying her excitement both to the piano teacher and to me.

*I need it for my soul. I simply need it. I don't... you know, it's something different. Something... and it's not as if I just sit, she immerses me in that whole world, in all the... all the time she... I ask her: “Tell me, Bach, did he know what he was doing?” You sit stunned, because if they knew what they were doing, they were geniuses. Each and every one. Each of them, it's fascinating! Just yesterday or the day before I had a lesson and I said to her: “Listen, this... in such a way... that if Bach knew that, I take my hat off to him because he...” I always knew he was a genius, he has music... this blends with that, he begins with this note and it has to conclude, a solution from here and a solution... look it's weird. But they must have been geniuses. (Nilli, interview, November 21, 2014)*

Nilli's remark “and it's not as if I just sit” might be interpreted as a defensive rhetorical strategy signalling her anticipation that I, as listener, might view her learning negatively; she might have been concerned that may seeing her as a passive learner. Alternatively, this kind of “sideways glance” (Sullivan, 2012, p. 53) may communicate that Nilli is conscious, in a Bakhtinian sense (Bakhtin, 1981), of others understanding learning in passive terms in ways often associated with more top-down, traditional forms of professional development.

Nilli described deep ongoing, focused learning which she chooses to pursue, broadening and enriching her knowledge and skill from year to year. This investment in a particular endeavour

appears to stand in contrast with the formal professional learning mandated under the “*Ofek Chadash*” guidelines where professional learning for teachers is divided into finite 30 hour programs, usually leaving no opportunity for teachers to continue in the same program in order to deepen their learning. Nilli is aware that she is required to learn 60 hours a year in two formal professional learning programs. “*Look, as I said... from in-service programs I don’t try to escape. You know that you need hours etc*”. She is prepared to do more than the required amount of mandated learning if she finds an interesting and worthwhile program. “*I don’t look at the hours. I can do more and more*”. Nilli is adamant, however, that she will not waste her time in programs which are not worthwhile in her opinion. She explains, “*And when it doesn’t please me, I abandon it, without even looking.*” Later in our interview, she returned to stress this point:

*I go and I even go to 20 in-service programs if I derive something from them, if I can do something with it afterwards; not even put into practice necessarily but to think about it, just for the soul! For fun (I’ll go)! But I just can’t feel that I’m wasting my time, that’s not for me. (Nilli, interview, November 21, 2014)*

As an experienced teacher whose children are grown up, Nilli is seemingly able to devote more time to her learning than some of the younger, less experienced teachers participating in my study. Her piano lessons and practice take place in her free time, alongside the standardised mandated professional learning she does in in-service programs.

In our interview, I didn’t need to prompt Nilli to explain whether or not she transferred some of this learning to her professional context. She continued on to offer this connection herself as an integral part of her narrative:

*Do you know how much I take from there as a teacher to my classroom? When I see how she [the piano teacher] teaches me, piano, and I say: “Wait a minute, a child who is having difficulty reading is like I was having difficulty with the notes just now. So how do I...? And what is the trick? And how will I put it into practice? And there are so many things that I take from her. And I told her that, and she was in shock, the teacher. I said to her: “Listen, it’s similar. Because what do I teach them? It’s language. You are teaching me to read a language, you go over that do-re-me, all those octaves with all the lines to assist. That’s it! ... You can’t get stuck for a minute and ask: ‘What is written here?’ it’s exactly the same. (Nilli, interview, November 21, 2014)*

In this interview conversation, Nilli is reflectively exploring her own learning in ways I perhaps had not anticipated. She recognises her own difficulty in learning something new and challenging, and that promotes reflection on those pupils in her own class facing difficulty. It is telling, also, that Nilli characterises the reading of music as a form of literacy, a “language”, and she thereby achieves a richer appreciation of the challenge required of her pupils learning to read in her primary classroom.

Nilli is engaging in reflection as defined by Clarà (2014), grounding his definition on the work of Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983), as “spontaneous, common, real thinking that is, very much unlike the prescriptive way of thinking that some approaches have considered it to be” (p. 262). This kind of thinking, according to Clarà, “gives coherence to a situation which is initially incoherent and unclear” (2014, p. 263). This thinking process enabled Nilli to make clear connections between her own learning in the piano lesson and that of her students. She was able to create complex links between seemingly distant discipline areas like music and early literacy. She was articulating her awareness as a kind of metacognitive inquiry into the learning she herself experienced and experiences. This is consistent with the literature which proposes that this ability should not be taken for granted, that it requires teachers “to make conscious and deliberate decisions when planning and when working with students (Duffy, Miller, Parsons, & Meloth, 2009, p. 240). According to Duffy et al. (2009), some teachers are more inclined than others to utilise this kind of metacognitive capacity.

Asking reflective questions like: “What am I learning?”, “How am I learning it?” and “What is happening to me?” heightened Nilli’s learning experience and, in turn, enabled her pupils to benefit from it too. The more she was aware of the difficulties faced by her struggling readers, the more sensitive her teaching was to their needs. This is similar to the kind of reflection I, as leader of the WDLT program, hoped to prompt in the teacher-participants. In their final assignment and in writing at various stages of the program, the teachers were positioned as learners concentrating on constructing understandings from within their own practice and experience.

It is significant that Nilli asked many questions in this short section I have quoted from our interview. As if to signal her appreciation of the genuinely dialogic space I had hoped to create in those interviews, she sometimes directed questions to me, her interviewer: “*Do you know*”, she

asked me, “*how much I take from there as a teacher to my classroom?*” I got the feeling she was genuinely interested in my answer. But other questions were rhetorical in nature. Twice Nilli uses the Hebrew expression ‘*lokachat mi...*’ [to take from] to describe her learning – “*Do you know how much I take from there as a teacher to my classroom?*” and “*And there are so many things that I take from her*”. Rather than perceiving of her learning as simple transmission of knowledge determined by others, when Nilli explains that she takes from her piano teacher and gives to her students, she may be conceptualising a process similar to that proposed by Shirley Brice Heath (1982) when she describes the way individuals “take meaning” (p. 50) when engaging with written texts.

And yet adopting the role of learner in this context is very different from ‘going’ to an in-service session or ‘attending’ a PD seminar as conventional educational discourse often describes it. Genuinely becoming a learner involves placing oneself in a place of insecurity and engaging in a struggle to make sense and succeed while faced with partial knowledge, uncertainty, and doubt (see Kuhlthau, Maniotes, & Caspari, 2015). When Nilli was speaking about learning to play the piano, it was clear to me that this experience was deeply motivating and involving. She embraced the experience and the challenge, acknowledging that it required perseverance, persistence, practice, making mistakes and perhaps coping with difficulty. Nilli appreciated that she was extending her knowledge with the support of a significant mentor. This learning appears to be similar to the liminal transitions from one stage of understanding to another described by Meyer and Land (2005).

### **9.1.2 “*The language of the earth*”: From work on a farm to outdoor literacy**

Efrat, a grade 3 and 4 teacher in a rural primary school, told me she came to teaching after working on a farm with animals and with children. After completing her teacher education, she moved into formal education but retained her interest in nature and agriculture. In her interview which took place approximately six months after the WDLT program, Efrat described the discovery and the enjoyment she experienced on the farm:

*While really working on the farm, I learnt ... which agriculture is suited to this region, and how to work with vegetables, before that I didn't work with vegetables and things like that, and that is genuinely my pleasure. (Efrat, interview, November 30, 2012)*

In time, Efrat began referring to her related project in the school yard:

*In recess time, I go down to the vegetable patch, and the children, because it really excites me, it excites them. And then it excites the teachers. Suddenly the principal notices that the wheat has germinated. Do you understand? It's like going out on a tour of the sowing, meeting the farmer, and something cosmic occurs, it really does. (Efrat, interview, November 30, 2012)*

It would seem that Efrat's excitement for her own learning is infectious. It transfers to others in her professional community and this affords her an important role in the life of the school, despite her being an early career teacher. In the past, she explained to me, there were some agricultural activities in the school but they were organized by external bodies and were not an integral part of life at the school. In the course of time, Efrat convinced the school principal to make the agricultural activity a regular part of the curriculum:

*It's less than I would like. Not enough yet, but there is a sort of game. Look, in the agricultural lessons... I have to take my hat off to my principal because of the agricultural lesson. I came to her at the end of last year because it wasn't something that existed... And I went to the principal last year and said that it has to be something that you work at regularly, every week. If the farm can't manage it, it's not... then my principal... and I said: "Let's do it. Give me an hour a week and I will go out with my class an hour a week." I threw that at her and I didn't really think ... and she answered really nicely, it was on the pathway, and she said: "If you do it, then at least do it with all the grade 3 classes". I said: "Yalla!" [Arabic word used in Hebrew as slang word for Lets!]. She threw me down the glove and before I flew for the summer I sat and wrote a program for the grade 3 classes. I really did and because I was familiar with it already, I knew exactly what I needed. That meant that I would ask for a volunteer... from the farm who would come, half a class and once every fortnight the whole class, because I didn't know... And hop! I returned and she gave me the hours. I even said to her: "Write it down as hours of language studies because they will learn a lot of Hebrew terms like: 'artificially irrigated farming', 'grain', which means there really is an element of language here, I will call it 'The language of the earth'. I wrote to someone in the nature preservation organization who was involved in these kinds of processes and asked her for feedback and... And I received it and I got the hours and I teach them, as I asked, in a way that it won't harm my own class. (Efrat, interview, November 30, 2012)*

In Efrat's description she is clearly grateful to the school principal ('my principal'), for the opportunity to develop her area of expertise inside the school. Her surprise at being given the opportunity is also discernible when she comments: "Give me an hour a week and I will go out

*with my class an hour a week. ' I threw that at her and I didn't really think... ' (Efrat, interview, November 30, 2012).*

Later Efrat explained the importance she places on the teachers' own learning and enthusiasm in this kind of activity. She understood that teachers who hadn't experienced the kind of learning she had experienced would not be able to pass on ("*give the experience*") this special kind of learning to their students:

*It's clear. That's why I say it is because of the person who worked with me on the farm and that I worked there... I say, unless a teacher feels the experience herself, it can't be expected, that's why it is important to me to give the children the experience. (Efrat, interview, November 30, 2012)*

Efrat understood that her motivation to introduce her students to nature and agriculture was deeply linked to her background and to her strong personal connection to the activity. Her own learning and experience had equipped her with special knowledge and skills which she enjoyed imparting to her young students. According to Kroth and Cranton (2014), individuals generate meaning from within their own life histories; previous experiences are utilized in the construction of new learning. In her interview, Efrat was reflecting on the knowledge she had acquired in the past and used as the grounding for a new and innovative curriculum. She was continually aware of the way that her practice was influencing her pupils, her fellow teachers and indeed the whole school community. The way Efrat managed to forge a unique connection between her personal interest and her school was consistent with the framing of "eroded boundaries between personal and professional" in Olsen's study (2002):

*The emerging visibility of embedded reciprocal relationships among all aspects of life has eroded boundaries between personal and professional, between private and public, self and other, and has therefore called for a research paradigm holistic enough to consider the teacher as a whole person, over time, in context. (p. 126)*

Through her learning and activity in this liminal space beyond the boundaries of traditional professional learning and classroom practice, Efrat had, in a sense, created a curriculum which could also be characterised by liminality. The agricultural lessons she has initiated and maintained

were beyond the centralized curriculum and regular school activity. In an additional liminal space, in the course of this PhD inquiry, Efrat embraced the opportunity to continue her conversation with me and to share her learning and her practice. It appears that through telling her personal/professional story, she continued to construct metacognitive understandings of her teaching and professional learning practices.

### **9.1.3 “I didn’t imagine that something like that could happen”: Bringing challenges at home to school**

Osnat, an experienced special education teacher, surprised me in our interview when she chose to recount learning situated in another liminal space, the sphere in which her home life and her professional life powerfully intersected. When asked about significant learning she had experienced, she told me a story from her own family experience as a mother.

*I’ll tell you the biggest experience of learning (laughs) that was my middle son (laughs even more), he gave us a learning experience, I think that’s the most. He... N, is... 30... And he... ‘Gave us an education!’... he didn’t complete his schooling, like, in year 12 he stopped learning. ... He ‘gave us an education!’ He’s not... he is still a child in his experience, it’s like... for Y [her husband] and I it’s as though ... we would have a child that wouldn’t finish, that like, wouldn’t be... I didn’t imagine that something like that could happen, that a child of ours wouldn’t complete school. First of all... it’s as though, something of that size... And what can you do? It’s as though, that’s it!*

*He went to school... he went... to meet his friends and... you know he was in the group who smoked, like... so, just as an example, they had a smoking corner. Then the principal ... came... and when they all threw away their cigarettes, he stayed with the cigarette (laughs). It’s as though (laughs), ‘if I smoke I smoke!’ That’s it! And after that he didn’t go to the army<sup>54</sup>, and at a very young age he went overseas, like, immediately afterwards, that is all his friends went into the army and he travelled to Japan, Thailand, Australia ... like... a child... still a child! He was 19, 20, that’s all. And it’s as though you say: How will he manage? And how is that? And the anxiety and... (sighs). So I say, you have to trust and .... we don’t have control over everything, that not everything is in our hands, that we have to trust that it will be OK and that... is a big lesson...*

*And he continues. He is in Tel Aviv. At a certain stage he decided that he will do his matriculation, within a year he did all his matriculation exams, psychometric tests, preparation year [for academic study] ... did it. He began his postgraduate studies and within a month stopped... (laughs)... he is working as a delivery boy...*

<sup>54</sup> There is compulsory army service for 18 year old youth in Israel.

*'How much longer will you be a delivery boy?' You are already... but I understand that it doesn't help what we think... (Osnat, interview, July 17, 2013)*

Osnat is not just telling me about *a* learning experience; she chooses to describe this as the '*biggest*' experience, '*the most*'. She is foregrounding this learning ahead of the other formal professional learning experiences she had narrated earlier in the interview.

Interestingly, the story Osnat chose to tell about her own learning dealt with her son's education, in this case, his lack of learning. The Hebrew expression '*Ho usa lanu beyt sefer*' ['he gave us an education'] is used in Israel to describe someone making life difficult or challenging, forcing others to act differently to what they are accustomed. Osnat repeated this expression in order to emphasize it. Her son's unconventional behaviour may be the reason Osnat laughed when she decided that this was the story to share with me. Indeed, she laughed several times at this part of her story. Was she shy to tell me about the complexity she had faced with her sons? Was she aware of the seeming dissonance between 'learning' in the formal sense and the process of constructing understandings in her family life? Maybe the combination of personal and professional felt a little strange and even unnerving?

While Osnat was telling her story, I sensed she was continually anticipating my reaction to her words. She was constantly looking over at me in a manner that seemed like she was trying to gauge my response. In a Bakhtinian sense (Bakhtin, 1984) her words and her laughter were "saturated with the ideologically charged valuations of the social worlds in which they occur" (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 50). Osnat's story, in this research conversation, was filled with "sideways glances" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 196), as consideration of the views of others constantly entered her narrative. Our previous relationships as colleagues (on the regional professional learning team) or as program leader and participant in the WDLT program may have caused Osnat to feel a little uneasy at disclosing this family 'problem' in this way. Another possible reason for her laughter is that I live in a similar kind of community to hers, one in which it is highly expected of children that they complete their schooling, continue on to complete their compulsory army service, and eventually enrol in postgraduate study. She may have anticipated that I would disapprove of her son's 'unusual' life decisions.

Osnat continued her story by remarking that her son had recently turned to writing:

*He told me he had started writing. At first it was more of a tool for expression of, you know, problems and distress but today, he writes! So it's like (laughs briefly), as I say, 'great that you have the ability and that you have it... but on the other hand, it's like... also (laughs), from writing you have to make a living as well. But in the meantime he is maintaining himself, that means we don't have to support him... he lives his life in Tel Aviv and is getting by, working, writing and ... he has a girlfriend... a lesson!... (Osnat, interview, July 17, 2013)*

This section of the interview should be seen in the context of the whole conversation in which writing played a central role – both in the foreground and in the background. Earlier in the interview, Osnat discussed her experiences as a writing teacher and how difficult it was for her to teach her learning disabled pupils to express themselves in writing. Her written narrative from the WDLT program in which she participated years earlier discussed the pains she went to in order to support two particular struggling special education students to write. These difficulties are juxtaposed here with her ‘problem son’ who isn’t interested in learning and didn’t put the effort in at school but later discovered an enthusiasm and a natural ability for writing,

Osnat concludes this section of her story by returning to the lesson metaphor, repeating the word “shiur” [“lesson”] three times in the following short excerpt. Her son provided the lessons; he was the teacher in this case. In passing, Osnat makes reference to additional son whose choices to become an ultra-orthodox Jew were equally challenging for herself and her husband.

*So that's a lesson that a child doesn't go down the track that you expect, and that teaches you... and you still want... and you want all kinds of things for him but in the end it's what he... And (our son, V) gave us another lesson (laughs loudly) each one with his own... He with his turn to religion and that's also a lesson, that each chose his own path... so I say, maybe it's something with us, something good that each one can choose his own... path and like, we live with it, not always in peace, it's not always easy, there are often dilemmas and difficulties... (Osnat, interview, July 17, 2013)*

When I asked Osnat if some of that significant learning went with her to school, she replied:

*Listen, I think it does. I think so... I hope it does! It's like... I hope it does! , I can't say 100% but I think that the thing is that I am in grades 1 to 6, I work with young children, which in many ways we can still direct them. It's like, they are less... they*

*are still more in our hands, but... I think I have the understanding of what the parents feel when it's not what... of dealing with the problems experienced by the children; there I can understand them... (Osnat, interview, July 17, 2013)*

Later, talking again about the learning achieved through her interaction with her two sons, Osnat explained:

*I connect it to my learning when I say that sometime we really want something... we want it terribly, we try, something and something else but in the end... it is the child, it's that person, so something has to connect for him. It's like, without... something is missing, I don't know what it is, and it doesn't work... so I can't, we aren't succeeding in making progress... sometimes there are children in a terrible situation, but they want, it's like, you see, they have the desire and then you see that you have something to work with. (Osnat, interview, July 17, 2013)*

Still later in the interview, Osnat explained this further:

*That's what is the hardest to work with, with children who... I say, the most difficult are those that don't have the strength or the motivation, and you have to think how to get to them. (Osnat, interview, July 17, 2013)*

Throughout Osnat's narrative, the expectation that children will grow up with a formal education was obvious. It is expected that they will finish 12 years of school, achieve a matriculation certificate and then go on to higher education. This wasn't presented explicitly but is evident through the way Osnat presents her son going down a separate path. The surprise at having a child who chose not to finish high school was immense for Osnat and her husband. Later, despite her son completing his matriculation and higher education entry exam, Osnat expresses her impatience, breaking into a rehearsal of the conversation with him, when she says he decided to discontinue his post graduate course: "*How much longer will you be a delivery boy? You are already...*"

The fact that Osnat's son succeeded in these academic endeavours as soon as he decided that it was right for him reassured her of his abilities but also brought her to the understanding that when a learner does not have the motivation and is not interested in putting in the effort to progress it

will not happen. These challenging personal experiences enabled Osnat to better understand some of her struggling students and also to relate to their parents with empathy.

In our interview, Osnat didn't make the connection between her family story and her professional context explicit but when I asked if the deep learning she had described influenced her as a teacher, she readily linked her personal learning to her work. She enthusiastically remarked that she hoped the learning at home was contributing to her practice as a special education teacher. In this interview, as in several others, I became aware that the research conversation I was holding with these teachers was not just beneficial in the construction of this PhD thesis, it may also have been useful for them in the way that Olsen (2002) describes "learning to teach as a process of assembling a professional self out of past and present, personal and programmatic experiences" (p. 126). It appears that within the research discussions embodied in these interviews, another liminal space for professional learning emerged for some of these teachers and for myself, well beyond the WDLT professional learning program in which we originally met.

#### **9.1.4 "Where is your control?": Social responsibility in the community and beyond**

*I will tell you about something which was really significant. .. which changed my world view... We moved to live on a kibbutz and the kibbutz became a 'renewing kibbutz'. And it was absorbing new people... we absorbed a large number. The social structure changed and together with it a great many things changed: behaviour patterns, norms, standards, many things changed and there had to be a ... rebuilding of the community. And... we received a budget from the regional council for a process of social building. And two people from a project at the Oranim Academic College.... to accompany us in this process. And... it was a process that lasted a year, and we created a team. In the beginning there was a kind of pilot, they distributed questionnaires to all the kibbutz members, who had to write who they thought should be in that leading team, for the social building and... a group was constructed of 12 people and I was among them... and throughout the year we met once a month... and we actually underwent a process, in which the idea was that what we took part in would eventually get out to the community, you know, like a fan, it will spread and also... one of the aims was to create a vision statement, for the kibbutz. Through seminars and group activities in homes, we kind of, we did it first ourselves and then we led the activities in the kibbutz. And the theme focused on internal control, that's what I took from there. If I have to say one thing that I took from there, that's what I took. What is the genuine meaning of focusing on internal control? When you say 'they did that to me...' and "they didn't allow me..." and "because of them..." and "that's the reason..." ... Where are you responsible*

*for what happens to you? In your life, in your environment, in your kibbutz, in your community, in your classroom, in your school, where is the focus? And... Today I often look at the children, in grade 3, in my class, and I try to show them, that they can develop this focus on internal control. That they can be responsible for a positive atmosphere in our class, and for friendship... I think that that is the most significant learning I have done in recent years. That's it, to really understand that. To understand that you ... and then every time that someone on the kibbutz says: "Yes, the pathway..." or "and..." then "sorry, and what have you done to make the pathway pretty?" It's like: "Where is your control?" We control what happens to us. (Ophira, interview, August 19, 2013)*

The learning described here by Ophira, a grade 3 and 4 teacher who chose teaching as a second career, took place in a seminar that was seemingly disconnected from her work as a teacher. She was chosen to take part in the seminar as a representative of her community and she described this experience as one which “*which changed my world view*”, something “*really significant*” and later: “*the most significant learning I have done in recent years*”. This repetition of the word ‘*mashmauti*’ [significant] adds additional emphasis. Ophira also stresses the word ‘*understanding*’. She is explaining that it is not sufficient to hear the message that we control what happens to us; she stresses that you have to “*really understand that*”.

Some years before our interview, Ophira had chosen to make substantial changes in her life: she left a large city and joined a kibbutz, a small rural community, and began a teaching career mid-life. Community was a concept which often recurred in our interview. When Ophira rhetorically asks: “*Where are you responsible for what happens to you? In your life, in your environment, in your kibbutz, in your community, in your classroom, in your school, where is the focus?*” she is relating to some of the communities in which she is a member. It is apparent that like Casto (2008) and Greene and Mitcham (2012), she sees her classroom as a community in which every pupil plays an important role, when she says:

*Today, I often look at the children, in grade 3, in my class, and I try to show them, that they can develop this focus on internal control. That they can be responsible for a positive atmosphere in our class, and for friendship... (Ophira, interview, August 19, 2013)*

Ophira is making a direct connection here between her professional learning and the learning of her students, pointing out that her young students are capable of learning the same concepts that

she understood in the seminar. She is teaching them the same principles that she taught her peers in the kibbutz community. Ophira constructed this knowledge and leadership ability in a liminal space which was, in the words of Turner (1977) neither “here-or-there” (p. 37). A space of learning and empowerment was created between her personal and communal life and her professional context. Ophira drew insightful connections between her growing understandings and the significant communities in which she is active.

Like Osnat, Ophira is not just describing a significant learning experience when she says: *‘I think that that is the most significant learning I have done in recent years’*. In this way, she is placing this learning before the formal learning experiences she spoke of earlier in the interview. It is discernible, though, that there is some reservation in her words: *“I think that that is the most significant learning I have done in recent years”*. Does this rhetorical ‘loophole’ (Sullivan, 2012, p. 59) suggest that Ophira is not sure of the superiority of this learning in relation to the wide range of professional learning programs she has taken part in in recent years? Another reason may be that she feels strange presenting this community experience as professional learning in our interview.

#### **9.1.5 “You have to become stronger”: Lessons from yoga in the classroom**

*In summary, I want to mention something I learnt from a senior American yoga teacher. She told me about the period in which she began practicing and learning Ashtanga yoga from senior teachers in India. In the beginning she didn’t believe that she would be able to achieve the complex positions which require a lot of effort and very high physical abilities. Her teacher told her that she needs to practice all the time and not create boundaries for herself in which she believes that she isn’t able to reach that position or any other position which looks impossible to her. She really persevered and began to perform the positions successfully, even those that she once thought she wouldn’t be able to perform. Then the teacher said this sentence to her: “You have to become stronger”. That means, that the fact that you succeeded in reaching those positions you desired isn’t the end of the road, that’s why you need to practice more. And I, both as a practitioner of yoga (by the way, this year I began a two year training course to be a teacher of Ashtanga yoga) and also as a teacher of writing, I understand that with writing, children have to keep getting stronger. Even if they are experienced writers and they really have progressed enormously in writing and in their attitude towards writing, they still have to keep practicing and that’s the way they will progress. (Rona, interview, November 19, 2014)*

In her teaching narrative in the WDLT program, Rona, a grade 6 classroom teacher, wrote about her involvement with yoga and its significance in her teaching. As I reread her description of her yoga practices, it became clear to me that yoga was far more than a recreational hobby for her. Rona explained that as part of the learning process in yoga, it was common for people to feel that they would never be able to make a successful transition from one level of practice to another. Similarly in teachers' work, according to Jensen and Bennett (2016), leaving one zone of accomplishment and not feeling that the next is in sight can leave the practitioner struggling with a sense of "ambiguity" and feeling "uncomfortable (p. 51).

In our interview, Rona repeatedly made connections between her experiences in an in-between stage in yoga which involved her own ongoing practice and improvement and the experiences of the pupils in her classroom at school. She described messages which she had found significant in her yoga practice demonstrated the way she had connected them to her classroom teaching. She recognized that the need to keep working and practicing after achieving competence in a skill is as relevant to teaching yoga as it is to the teaching and learning of writing. Also, as Rona explained, she chooses to encourage her pupils in the same way that her yoga teacher encourages her.

*She encouraged me and said that with each exercise I am improving and getting stronger at my own pace. She added 'You need to get stronger and if you can come more times a week it will help'. When I asked her about a particular position that I didn't understand, she said that there is a saying in yoga – "99% practice and 1% talk". That means that the more I practice the positions on the mattress, I will gain experience and will learn them through my body. In that way I will internalize them and my body will learn. Talk less about the position and do it more. After a lesson, I reached an internal understanding that it's true for writing too. There are children who have lots of questions about writing: how to write, what to write, or 'I don't know how to write and phrase it', and they are sitting and not writing. In that light, I decided to devote more time to writing this year, that is, in the writing lesson, I need to talk less about writing and leave most of the lesson for student writing. In that way I am making writing a daily practice in the classroom, something routine. (Rona, teaching story, December 22, 2012)*

In this research interview which took place two years after Rona wrote the teaching story above, I had the strong feeling that she and I were continuing the conversation we began in the two WDLT programs in which we had originally met. Knowing that the teaching of writing was an interest she and I share may be the reason she focused on her role as a teacher of writing, one of her many

roles in the primary classroom. I should clarify that it was Rona who proposed the links between her own learning of yoga and her professional learning as a teacher to the learning of her students in the classroom. There was no need for me as researcher to prompt her to make these explicit connections.

## **9.2 Provisional conclusion**

In this chapter, I have described and explored a dimension of professional learning that occurs in liminal spaces – on the border between recognized and unrecognized, intentional and unintentional, and between consciously incorporated into teaching practice and unconsciously informing approaches in the classroom. Nilli, Efrat, Osnat, Ophira, and Rona all provided stories of the ways in which some Israeli teachers are initiating significant learning in liminal spaces and who are able to speak or write about this in articulate and insightful ways.

It is discernible in these quotes I have chosen from the stories told by these teacher participants, that teacher learning isn't necessarily a product which can be packaged, mandated from above by government policy or neatly divided into allocated times. Intensely significant professional learning for teachers is often messy and not pre-planned. According to Leitch and Day (2001), connections like these, between the personal and the professional spheres of teachers' lives, often go unrecognized as "there is a strong tendency for individuals to draw somewhat impermeable boundaries around the personal and the professional in their experience" (p. 245). Here, these teachers have shown us that when these boundaries are blurred, the learning can be powerful and the contribution to classroom practice can be significant.

Kelchtermans (1993) argues that teacher knowledge and practice can only be fully comprehended when positioned in the wider context of the teacher's career and personal background. It is clear that teachers like Osnat, Rona, Nilli, Ophira and Efrat work in particular and distinctive professional contexts. What they have in common, though, is a rich understanding of the dialogic ways in which teaching and formal professional learning can so often be enriched by and/or accompanied by rich personal learning experiences. Much of the professional learning that the teachers have identified and discussed here in this chapter isn't connected to a specific skill,

strategy or even subject. It is often the learning of a theory or a principle which is relevant to many aspects of classroom life.

Understandably, not every teacher who has a personal interest or pursues a leisure activity can or will make that activity or learning available to him or herself in their professional capacity, but the teachers appearing in this chapter all have.

I am aware that several of the teachers interviewed in this study didn't grapple with the significance of these learning experiences in their professional practice before the interview. Others grasped the potency of the learning but did not realize the ways in which they were enacting some of that learning in their professional contexts. In this sense, it suggests that the continuation of our conversation, beyond the WDLT program, may have been of value to my teacher participants.

Through the exploration of these significant, personal learning stories, I reached the understanding that my research itself has in a way created yet another liminal space beyond the professional conversation I sustained with these teachers in the WDLT program in which we met. It appears that Bakhtin's concept of *unfinalizability* (1984) permeates the dialogical professional conversations at the heart of this study in a way that they will never be complete, always open to further chains of response.

In Chapter 10, the final chapter in this thesis, I summarise the stories of teacher professional learning and the knowledge generated in this study, and I explain what I see as the contribution of this study to debates in the fields of teacher professional learning and writing as professional learning. I present suggestions for policy makers, for leaders of professional learning, and for teachers.

## Chapter 10 - Looking back, looking forward

I have an investigative mind, not an inventive one.

Investigating in order to know? No.

To inquire in order to ascertain, to probe, to the very bottom? Not that either.

Investigating, rather, in order to ask further and further questions

- Korczak, *The Warsaw ghetto memories of Janusz Korczak*, 1958/1979

### 10.1 Inquiry as ongoing dialogue

This PhD thesis can be read as a textual representation of ongoing dialogue over a period of eight years, which has, to a great degree, changed the way I comprehend teachers' professional learning and knowledge. The process of undertaking the research, including the writing that this has entailed, has no doubt shaped my understanding of my own professional practice as a teacher and teacher educator. I have titled this final section of my thesis 'Looking back, looking forward' in order to highlight the evolving, dialogic nature of my research. Calling this chapter 'conclusion' would have somehow been at odds with the theoretical framework of my study; Bakhtinian unfinalizability permeates this thesis as a whole, and this final chapter in particular.

In so many ways, this thesis artefact is part of a 'continuing chain of utterances' (Morson & Emerson, 1990) and it would be inappropriate to mark this chapter as any more than provisionally final. This study, which grew out of my professional practice as a vice-principal and a teacher educator in Israel, and out of my postgraduate Master's research, was continually enriched and mediated by my formal and informal dialogue with significant others. The teachers who joined the WDLT program, my research participants, my supervisors, and 'critical friends' (Costa & Kallick, 1993), all joined me on this PhD journey. Each dialogic interaction with those people triggered thoughts about future inquiry and writing. Amidst these thoughts of the future, I am now aware that this PhD artefact has reached a provisional point of closure and that in order to open new avenues of inquiry, new questions, in the words of Korczak in the epigraph above, I must wrap this one up. Like Korczak, I have been undertaking this research in order to continue asking questions. My research has become inseparable from my professional identity as a teacher, vice-

principal, teacher educator and writer. Critical inquiry into my practice has become central to who I am as a professional.

In this final chapter I discuss the particular contribution of this study to the fields of teacher professional learning and writing as professional learning, and the significance of the knowledge generated through the study. I re-engage with the four research questions posed in my introduction and conclude with recommendations for future research into teacher professional learning and the identity work associated with it in Israel and beyond. As I have done throughout the thesis, this chapter eschews firm conclusions and easy generalizations about teacher professional learning, literacy PD programs and the benefits of particular professional learning strategies or approaches for all teachers. Rather, I reflexively present and critically engage with the understandings which have emerged and are still emerging from this study eight years after I began my PhD in 2009.

Writing this concluding chapter, I am of course conscious of the need to draw together the key ideas and knowledge that the study has produced, but this knowledge does not exist in a realm independent of the readers who will engage with it. In this respect, I am also aware of the importance of the concept of addressivity, as described by Bakhtin (1986), as I anticipate the knowledge, experiences and identities of my anticipated readers, the ways they will make meaning from this study and the questions that their reading will prompt them to pose. Questions I constantly asked myself throughout the writing were, for example: How can I communicate years of engagement with this project in ways that may be significant and useful for others? How are the politics of teacher learning likely to mediate my representation of conclusions and recommendations from the study? In what ways are these forces mediating my writing practices and how am I negotiating them in this chapter? How can I respectfully acknowledge the professional context in which I work yet critically engage with the problems it affords? These concerns and others reflect and inform my reflexive outlook throughout the writing of these ‘final’ words of this thesis.

## 10.2 The purpose of this PhD thesis

I began this PhD study committed to inquiring into the ways in which as yet unknown Israeli language and literacy teacher participants, teachers who would enrol and participate in a government supported professional development program that I would be leading, would experience and understand their involvement and learning in that program. I was interested in the ways in which that professional learning could be understood as dialogically intertwined in/with the busy lives of those teachers in this period in an educational policy landscape underpinned by neoliberal principles, and influenced by a global movement to reform education through more extensive and intensive standardisation and increasingly rigid accountability regimes. In addition, I wanted to inquire into the ways in which dialogic forms of teacher learning, in particular those that involve writing and narrative, might be experienced, represented and theorised.

My PhD journey has been flexible and dialogic from its outset. Grappling with the challenges I encountered, for example, in obtaining ethics authorisation to approach participants who had previously participated in the WDLT program (see 6.1 and 6.3), forced me to repeatedly engage critically with my research aims and plans. As a researcher, I was constantly compelled to engage with emerging ideas and experiences rather than just fix my attention on the initial vision of what the inquiry would involve and what I thought I might learn through it. In the course of this project, it became apparent that the aims and plan I had generated at the outset were changing and moving in directions I could not have anticipated. In response to emerging ideas, teaching experiences, engagement with the literature and significant conversations, the focus of my study became broader as I understood that the teacher learning I would be exploring was both inside, outside, and along the boundaries of the WDLT program. While engaging closely with my participants, the teachers who took part in the WDLT program, and their narratives, I came to understand that all kinds of learning which sometimes occur well beyond formal educational institutions, could not be ignored. My developing investigation of the liminal spaces (Turner, 1974, 1977) on the border of teachers' participation in formal professional learning programs ended up being as important as the actual texts teachers wrote, or the experiences they had, in the program itself. My interest in this learning which occurred in a variety of liminal spaces, further influenced the study when I recognized the ways in which the concept of liminality was useful in the conceptualisation of the methodology in this thesis.

### 10.3 The significance of this study

Through the period of this PhD study, the professional learning of teachers has remained a subject of great interest in educational research. There has been an abundance of relevant studies (e.g. Desimone & Garet, 2015; Doecke et al., 2008; Edwards & Nuttall, 2016; Kennedy, 2016; Kooy & van Veen, 2012; Kyndt et al., 2016; Labone & Long, 2016; Lieberman et al., 2017; Schleicher, 2016) and policy documents (e.g. AITSL, 2012; BERA, 2014; Department for Education, 2016a; Ministry of Education, 2008a) published in recent years that have existed in various dialogic relationships with this research and policy work. My study has developed alongside the work of these studies, and those of other researchers, exploring professional learning from a wide range of methodological and contextual positions. Amidst, and in light of this plethora of scholarship, I am confident that this study is significant in many ways. Perhaps the most obvious way in which the study is distinctive is in the way it resists the lure of choosing between the dominant options of a) large-scale research into professional learning and its ‘effectiveness’, most often undertaken by academics outside the professional context of teacher learning, and b) evaluations of particular PD programs in specific sites, often led by the teacher educator researcher, him or herself. My study is located between these two poles. It critically maps the professional learning policy landscape both internationally and in Israel, and it involves a close and reflexive study of the particular and the specific dimensions and experiences of participants (and myself as leader) in the government sponsored WDLT program in a certain part of Israel, at a particular point in time. The teacher professional learning literature contains relatively few studies (e.g. Kooy, 2006; Masuda, 2010; Parr, 2010; van de Ven & Doecke, 2011; Sugrue & Mertkan, 2016) which combine these two approaches – that is, investigating a particular site of professional learning, while considering and negotiating the mediating influence of local, national and international policy on that learning. Another difference is that although the study is based in the WDLT program, it is in no way aiming to evaluate the ‘effectiveness’ of the program or my leadership of it. Rather, it is grounded in that particular program as an *example* of professional learning but is far from limited to an inquiry into that site only. Through the duration of the study, I have always appreciated that there are invariably a variety of aims underpinning any professional learning program (program aims, stated and unstated, generated by the program leader, and also the diverse aims of those participating in the program). This has encouraged me to explore the dialogic possibilities of professional learning for

teachers in and beyond the program, but it has also enabled me to use the WDLT program as a point of common reference and as a source of data.

Another unique characteristic of this study is that it embodies a dialogic ‘bricolage’ of texts, both narrative and others, written by my participants and myself over a period of eight years. The extended selections from teacher stories and reflections (communicated to me through the WDLT program or through interviews), blog posts, emails and journal entries have been purposefully woven into this thesis document in order to represent the multi-voiced nature of the WDLT program and the research study itself. It was important for me to find a way to faithfully represent the voices, experiences and insights of my participants and myself, so that the PhD could be read, to an extent, as these people speaking in their/our own voices. The data in this study was generated both in practice and in a research capacity – in the writing of this thesis they merged in a hybrid dialogic space. Another unusual aspect of this study is the ways in which those texts, generated within the project, can be brought into contact so that they speak to each other and combine with each other in the thesis. These include: texts which originated in the WDLT program (e.g. texts written by participants in response to tasks set during workshops); my responses to those texts as teacher leader of the WDLT program; curriculum planning texts written by me as designer of the program; and texts generated in the preparation of this thesis (including a research journal that I kept over the eight years of the study, and the writing of this PhD artefact itself). This study understands writing as a mode of inquiry (Richardson, 2003) and as a significant transformative process – not just a product, not just an artefact (Yagelski, 2012). Through our separate and collective writing, the participants in the study and I have created one of those spaces in which practice and research meet. Collectively, we have taken “a professionally reflexive approach” (van de Ven & Doecke, 2011, p. 4) to our learning and teaching in a particular form of praxis.

Another of the methodological choices which made this study distinctive was my choice of practitioner inquiry (see Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Craig, 2009; Kincheloe, 2003) and my initial decision to focus on teachers I know, all of whom had a professional learning experience in common in a professional learning program that I initiated and led. This was central to the dialogic nature of the study. In that sense, the study is situated amongst the work of other teacher educator researchers who choose their own professional context as a worthwhile site of inquiry (e.g. Doecke et al., 2014; Kitchen, 2016; Leider, 2015; Tanaka, 2015; White, 2016). This study is thus important

because it joins other situated studies undertaken by teachers who draw attention to their identities as practitioners and researchers, and who put a high premium on contextualizing the teacher learning they are describing and analysing. Like the research of Craig (2010), Doecke et al. (2008), Kooy and van Veen (2012) and Parr and Bulfin (2015) I have attempted to make explicit how this research has negotiated a dialogic space for inquiry that includes the learning of teachers in the WDLT program and the policy context which is increasingly intruding upon that learning.

This study is also distinctive because of its transcultural nature. Engaging in this research in Israel while negotiating with my supervisors overseas in Australia has afforded many challenges but has contributed enormously to the new knowledge it is generating. Explaining my practice, the educational context in Israel and the policy environment in this country, has required me to examine many of my assumptions and I have had the opportunity to explore my practice and my context critically and reflexively through the eyes of ‘the other’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). A key principle in this research is that no practice or text (or translation of a text) or policy should be taken for granted. I have in fact been deeply involved in a process of ‘making the familiar strange’. This in a sense, has allowed me, metaphorically, to look inside from outside, and to look outside from inside. Having to present my professional environment in the international arena in journal articles and conference papers, to readers who are not familiar with it, has challenged me further to explore and understand my educational and professional context through the eyes of others.

The slow, thoughtful and sometimes frustrating process of translating my data and other texts from Hebrew to English, has increased my appreciation of the ways language was key to all of my pedagogical interactions with teachers in the WDLT program, and also to the ways in which the study of language is at the heart of this PhD project. It has sensitized me to additional modes of engaging with the vast range of texts and conversations I have engaged with in my work as a teacher educator and researcher. It constitutes one of the important contributions to knowledge that this study makes.

This study is critically dialogic in countless ways. As mentioned earlier, liminality was the concept I homed in on in Chapter 9 to illustrate the unique spaces in which my study participants experienced significant learning within but also beyond the WDLT program. Those spaces “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1974, p. 233) can occur between the personal and the professional

in the teachers' lives. In this final chapter, I wish to draw attention once more to the liminal spaces in which this study is situated, making it distinctive and able to contribute in different ways to discourse on professional learning for teachers. The concept of liminality permeates every part of this PhD study. In table 10.1 (below), I present the assumptions and the binaries I have examined, and in many cases challenged, as a teacher educator and as a researcher committed to reflexive practice, in the creation of this thesis.

**Table 10.1: A representation of the different binaries negotiated in the course of this study**

	<b>Traditional practice</b>	<b>Alternative dialogic practice in this study</b>
<b>Methodological Binaries</b>	Teacher teaches; researcher researches teacher's practice and these are separate activities.	Practitioner inquiry: the teacher educator reflexively researches his/her teaching and the professional learning of colleagues.
	Data is generated or 'collected' from the outset of the research.	Data is comprised of texts generated within WDLT and beyond it and is comprised of texts written both as an integral part of the learning in the WDLT program and as part of the research process.
	Data 'collected' and analysed is generated by the participants.	Data comprised of texts written both by my research participants and by me.
	Data is usually of one kind e.g. interview transcripts.	Data in multiple forms, including texts which originated as public texts (e.g. blog posts) and private texts (e.g. reflective journal).
	Writing of the researcher is distanced, often in third person.	Writing of the researcher is in first person, at times involved and at others more distanced and critical.
	Researcher attempts to pinpoint specific methodology which can be named and often replicated	A range of approaches to narrative inquiry were adopted.
<b>Pedagogical Binaries</b>	Studies focus on programs <i>or</i> on the policy context – rarely on the negotiation between them.	The WDLT program was authorised by “ <i>Ofek-Chadash</i> ” policy guidelines but aims to provide a space to negotiate those policies. The study inquires into a space between the policy and this particular site of professional learning.
	Professional development programs are usually pre-planned with outcomes tightly predicted.	The WDLT program curriculum is both pre-planned and dynamic in nature.
	Most PD programs aim to influence and improve classroom practice.	The WDLT program's focus on narrative encourages classroom – PD crossover; two directional dialogue.
	Many PD programs are aimed to improve student achievement levels in standards based curriculum and testing.	The WDLT program is interested in teacher identity, advocacy and wellbeing in addition to its aspirations to improve student outcomes.
<b>Transcultural Binaries</b>	Research is conducted in the country in which the researcher is connected to an academic institution.	Doctoral research is facilitated in Israel while university and supervisors are in Australia.
	All data and final thesis artefact are generated in one language.	Most of the data generated in Hebrew and translated into English. Thesis written in English with a selection of terms left in original Hebrew, transliterated with translation.
<b>Theoretical Binaries</b>	Study focuses on the specific and the contextualised or on the general.	Study focuses on both the local and contextualised and on the wider policy environment.
	Research often embodies a “theory-practice gap” (Loughran & Hamilton, 2016, p. 6).	Theory and practice combine in this study, an amalgamation often overlooked in education.
	There is an ever increasing climate of monologic standardisation – in research and in practice.	This is an open ended, dialogic inquiry into dialogic forms of teacher learning. Dialogism and Bakhtinian theories permeate my pedagogy as a teacher educator, my inquiry into PL, my methodology and the writing of this thesis.

## 10.4 Contribution to knowledge

In this section of the chapter, I present the understandings about teacher learning developed through this research; some of these may be seen as ‘new’, and others affirm and build on conclusions reached by other scholars. While the professional learning of teachers is, to some extent, an individual matter and individual differences mediate the way that learning is enacted and experienced in this geographical, cultural and policy space in Israel, there are also some insights into teacher learning that can be seen as similar to or applicable to experiences in other parts of the world.

This research shows that simplistic descriptions and representations of what teachers know and need to be able to do, such as are typically articulated in sets of professional teaching standards (e.g. AITSL, 2012; Department for Education, 2011), are insufficient. It illustrates how teacher learning is an inherently messy, socio-culturally mediated and complex process (e.g. Hardy, 2012; Hinchion & Hall, 2016; Korthagen, 2016). In addition to the pre-planning that I did as leader of professional learning before the WDLT program commenced, the program was flexible in many ways and attended to needs of the participating teachers. The narratives presented in Chapters 7, 8, and 9, were written (or at least begun) within the professional space of the WDLT program, and yet they tend to focus on spaces between the personal and the professional. These narratives reveal the teachers to be individual professionals with unique strengths and needs; their knowledge is, as mentioned earlier, “a complex tapestry” (Adoniou, 2015, p. 99). This study values teacher diversity (Kitchen et al., 2016; Olson & Craig, 2009; Parr et al., 2015) instead of ignoring it or seeing it as a problem or an interruption, as policy oftentimes does. The variety mentioned by Korczak in the epigraph in the preamble of this thesis “compels us to think, to see and to understand” (Korczak & Joseph, 1999, p. 122).

This thesis contributes to knowledge about the spaces in which teacher learning can be enacted. It argues the value of seeing professional learning as, at its best, an ongoing process and not as an accumulation of separate discrete events (Selland, 2017). In fact, it shows how even different professional learning experiences and events can join together meaningfully in unexpected ways when teachers make connections with other teachers, and when they are encouraged to make connections between current learning and prior knowledge.

While neoliberal thinking and educational policy and research tend to mandate models of professional development with closely defined numbers of hours (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2008) and curricular content (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2003b), this study shows that rich professional learning can emerge in the liminal spaces between top-down/bottom-up, formal/informal, or in-school/out-of-school dichotomies of professional learning. Although policy makers and researchers are often pushing for top-down and formal models of professional learning aligned with national or regional initiatives or goals (e.g. Owens et al., 2016), this PhD study has shown that often rich professional learning can emerge in the liminal spaces between these goals. I conclude that there are always pockets of significant learning occurring outside of the boundaries that policy makers seem to imagine clearly demarcate teachers' professional learning lives.

One way in which the emergent and dynamic nature of this study can be illustrated relates to my view of the role of politics in the research. In early conversations with my supervisors, I was adamant that I was not interested in 'bringing' politics into my research. Today, one of my strongest convictions is that professional learning and teacher knowledge are highly contested, deeply politicised areas (see also Doecke et al., 2008; Hardy, 2012; Kelchtermans, 2004). Any attempt to keep inquiry into teacher learning practices separate from inquiry into the policy and politics of teacher learning is therefore artificial and forced. This study concludes that any engagement with teacher learning must entail a deep and nuanced awareness of the policy context in which that learning is initiated and sustained and of the political implications involved. Research which focuses on only one of these and remains silent about the other two, is in many ways presenting a flawed and inadequate account.

Another conviction I have reached in this study is that there is a multitude of ways to enact rigorous research (Denzin, 2009) and that it is imperative that interpretive researchers join and resist the positivist assumption that "qualitative research does not count as research unless it is embedded in a randomized control trial" (Denzin, 2009, p. 140). This study firmly agrees with Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2006) who argue that the field of education should be enhanced and reinforced by the generation of knowledge from a wide range of sources. Over the course of this inquiry I have learnt first-hand that some forms of narrative research are still not always accepted as legitimate forms of research (Thomas, 2012). Likewise, practitioner inquiry is often regarded as "a blot on the landscape of inquiry, a bastardisation of science" (McWilliam, 2004, p. 113). In

various periods through the eight years of this PhD journey, I engaged in lively conversations about my chosen paradigm of research with a number of different groups. These included: my doctoral writing group peers in Israel; some editorial teams of journals in different parts of the world; and the two ethics bodies to which I needed to apply for permission to conduct the research. These conversations have shown how the kind of research undertaken in this thesis is still widely viewed with scepticism by many within academia. Critics of my research design were wary that as a leader of professional development in the WDLT program I could not be ‘objective’ and ‘removed’ from any critical inquiry into the program. These individuals and bodies could not comprehend and support my interest in what was deeply known and close to my experience. I was constantly confronted with questions such as: ‘Why is it so important for you to explore your own practice?’, ‘Why not research another PD program which you could examine with more objectivity?’ There is no doubt that special care was needed in order to avoid coercing my potential participants (and ultimately the participating teachers) and that particular attention needed to be focused on ethical research practices and critical reflexivity. As this PhD journey draws to a close, I am convinced that the benefits of researching the familiar, significantly outweighed the disadvantages. Inquiring into the professional learning of teachers I came to know well afforded me a close understanding of the contexts in which they operated, and allowed me to explore my own writing and professional learning experiences alongside them. In addition, I was able to present and critically reflect upon texts we had previously generated and shared in the WDLT program. I argue that these layers of dialogical interactions, significant in the generation of the conclusions presented here, would not have been possible in more traditional research paradigms. My attempts to distance and separate myself from the context I was attempting to describe may even have prevented me from presenting these texts and analysing them as I have done.

As I have shown in this thesis, professional learning cannot always be pre-planned and measurable. Often teachers discover learning in surprising places in their personal and professional lives. Learning in what I have called ‘liminal spaces’ between professional and personal contexts can often be a rich source of learning for teachers. Learning which is generated in dialogical ways in these spaces can be explicitly recognised and introduced into the teacher’s classroom practice or can influence their planning and practice in more indirect ways. Teacher writing may indeed be a means of strengthening the connections between this learning and the work of the teacher in the classroom. Reflective professional writing can encourage extended critical engagement with ideas

and understandings developed in these liminal places. This process of writing can often continue and deepen the learning through theorising and/or identity work. There is also the added benefit that the created texts can be critically read and reread by the teacher herself or dialogically shared with others in other professional learning contexts (see Parr & Bulfin, 2015).

The narratives I have discussed in Chapters 7, 8 and 9 suggest that for many Israeli teachers continued professional writing doesn't seem to be an option, even after experiencing the benefits of it in a professional learning program. Apart from administrative writing (e.g. summaries of meetings) and compulsory writing (e.g. report cards), the teachers in this study reported that they seldom engaged in professional writing outside of the WDLT program. Writing groups, like those initiated in other countries (e.g. Gooda, 2016; Lieberman & Wood, 2002; Locke et al., 2013; Smith & Wrigley, 2016) are not mentioned in Israeli PD policy, and in fact I am not even aware that such groups exist in my country outside the WDLT program I was leading and *Machon Ovnayim* [Potter's Wheel Institute]<sup>55</sup>. Furthermore, in Israel, there are very few platforms directed towards the publication of teacher writing<sup>56</sup>. *Histadrut HaMorim* [The Teachers' Union] produces three publications, *Hed HaChinuch* [The Echo of Education], *Panim* [Faces], and *Shiur Chofshi* [Free Lesson], the first two of which are more academic in nature and only the third of these openly invites readers to contribute. In this vacuum, Facebook pages like *Morim le'ezrat morim* [Teachers helping teachers]<sup>57</sup>, and teacher blogs like *Mora bepijama* [Teacher in pyjamas]<sup>58</sup> are becoming more prominent.

This study contends that teachers need time and a space to discuss their practice, their learning, their professional learning needs, and their professional lives. In the “*Ofek-Chadash*” policy, regular discussion on teacher learning is incorporated as part of the guidelines. Israeli school principals are required to hold a yearly conversation with each teacher about his or her professional learning (Ministry of Education, 2008a). In practice, it appears that this isn't enough. Discussions and dialogue, such as we enjoyed in the WDLT program have the potential to help teachers clarify

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<sup>55</sup> This organization now works within the framework of the Kibbutzim College and has a library of teacher narratives on their website <http://www.smkb.ac.il/ovnayim>

<sup>56</sup> These exist in other countries: e.g. *Literacy Learning: the Middle Years* and *Practically Primary* (in Australia), *English Teaching professional* (in the UK) and *Language Arts* (in the US)

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/131442013645450/>

<sup>58</sup> <http://liatshmerling.com>

their professional learning needs and to reflect on learning achieved and on the ways in which it can contribute to their work and the school in which they are employed.

This PhD study joins literature from many parts of the world (e.g. DeBlase, 2007; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2011) which sees value in teachers and teacher educators being heard and involved in discussion on teacher learning and in the development of educational policy. One of the aims of this study was to carve a place for the voices of teachers themselves, those who are often marginalised and unheard in current policy or research conversations about education and teacher learning (Brindley, 2015; Carl, 2005; Kooy, 2015; Lefstein & Perath, 2014). Teacher learning is a central issue in education today and all stakeholders, including teachers and teacher educators, should be involved in discussion, planning and decision making. When a multitude of voices are heard and real, honest dialogue takes place, a richer and broader picture of professional learning and its importance may certainly emerge.

This study, and others (e.g. Ambler, 2012; Doecke, 2015; Locke et al., 2013; Parr & Bulfin, 2015) also show that encouraging teachers to express their experience, beliefs and knowledge through narrative is a powerful way of deeply engaging them in their own professional learning and larger professional or policy conversations about issues that matter to them. This writing can be an avenue for ‘speaking back’ and responding to the pressures of standardisation and accountability (e.g. Locke & Goodwyn, 2004; Milner, 2013; Parr, 2010). Through examining the stories the teacher participants in this study chose to tell about their experiences in professional learning, we can develop principles which may be useful for the planning of professional learning programs for other teachers in Israel and well beyond.

If teachers in Israel and other parts of the world are required by policy to participate in formal professional learning programs (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2008a; Victoria Parliament, Education and Training Committee, 2009), then it is surely crucial that those hours be spent in the most meaningful ways possible in order to empower them to cope with the dilemmas and the enormous challenges prominent in today’s educational systems. While conceiving of professional learning as an individual practice is certainly valuable, teacher collaboration has been found to be potent (e.g. Popp & Goldman, 2016; So, 2013; Vrieling et al., 2016; Warren Little, 2012) and therefore forms of collaborative professional learning can afford additional value. When a community of

professionals comes together in a dialogic space, they can learn from and with each other (e.g. Kuh, 2016), and thus generate new professional knowledge which is very different from learning which involves teachers acquiring someone else's knowledge (e.g. Parr, 2010). These dialogical spaces can be constructed both within and outside schools.

In the next section, I return to the four research questions I posed in the introduction of this thesis. As explained earlier, I was not expecting simple answers to these issues. Nonetheless, I can confidently present my critical engagement with these questions as a result of my close readings of the literature and my ongoing interaction with my participants and data.

## **10.5 A final engagement with my research questions**

### ***10.5.1 What was the nature of the learning experienced by Israeli primary school teachers in a dialogic professional learning program on writing pedagogy which involved teacher writing?***

The work done in this PhD thesis joins a growing body of qualitative literature in which teacher-researchers inquire into their own practice leading professional learning and teacher writing (e.g. Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010; Locke et al., 2013; Vujaklija, 2016). Many of those studies (e.g. Tedrow, 2016), and mine too, concentrate on critically exploring dialogic learning generated through writing and the creation of a community of learners.

Learning in the WDLT program was implicitly social in nature and grounded in an unequivocal belief in the value of teacher conversation (Danielson, 2009; Kitchen et al., 2008; Kooy, 2006). The narrative accounts of participating teachers' engagement in this program show that they learnt through their dialogic interaction, spoken and written, professional and personal, intellectual and emotional, and through shared reflection. They learnt about the teaching of writing through writing themselves. Putting themselves in the position of their students afforded these teachers an opportunity to stop and reflect on their practice, and to reflect on their classroom relationships with their students in the teaching of writing (e.g. Cremin & Locke, 2017; Woodard, 2015). The dialogic nature of the program meant that teachers had the chance to bring their own professional (and sometimes personal) lives into the learning space and community. They talked about them, wrote

about them and received meaningful feedback from their peers and from me as program leader. Having the chance to discuss success and failure, to question and ‘speak back’ to policy, to reflect on student assessment practices and/or the national curriculum, in a supportive environment was significant. The requirement to generate teaching narratives and present them to the group afforded the participants a chance to see themselves as a supportive group of professionals. This sharing reassured teachers that they are not alone in their struggle to meet the challenges before them in the standards based reality of schools today. They became more aware that everyone has something to bring to the learning community, and were encouraged to pose a question or raise a difficulty. It became clear that while most teachers struggle with the teaching of writing (Morgan, 2017), significant dialogue with students on their writing, alongside suitable classroom instruction, can be extremely satisfying and rewarding.

The WDLT program interwove practical pedagogy and theory, in a form of praxis. Rather than aiming to provide guaranteed lesson plans, sure-fire worksheets, and tips and tricks to ensure any writing class is a ‘winner’, the program tended to concentrate on philosophy, theory and on the acquisition of a new shared language to talk about writing and writing pedagogy. Some of those terms, discussed in relation to classroom strategies, were indicative of the approach to teaching and learning – ‘process’, ‘ownership’, ‘respect’, ‘culture’, ‘effort’, ‘difference’...

Ambler (2016) argues for the critical exploration and challenge of the assumptions behind teaching. This study suggests that when this important exploration is mediated by writing, the products of those reflections can be saved, shared, and analysed in a range of ways which can indeed lead to the development of teacher identity and may contribute to an improvement of practice.

This study aligns with other studies which inquire into the nature of teacher learning and writing in a variety of contexts. Since the 1990s, connections between teacher writing and professional learning have been explored in the literature (e.g. Gooda, 2016). Despite widespread enthusiasm for teachers engaging in writing (Dix, 2012; Gennrich & Janks, 2013; Locke, 2015; Smith & Wrigley, 2010), either in private or for sharing in public, significant hesitations have been raised (Cremin & Oliver, 2016; Cremin & Baker, 2014). This research supports the literature arguing that teacher writing can lead to professional agency and growth (e.g. Attard, 2012; Choi, 2012;

Ciuffetelli Parker, 2010; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010) and is a powerful means of grappling with the complexities of teaching in an age in which standards based policies are attempting to narrow and deprofessionalise teaching (e.g. Doecke, 2013). This study joins other researchers (e.g. Cremin & Oliver, 2016) in the conclusion that there is no clear consensus on the value of teacher writing which can be simply applied to all teachers in all professional contexts.

### ***10.5.2 How were these learning experiences significant in teachers' work and their sense of professional identity?***

The findings of this study supports research which understands professional identity to be a complex unfolding concept (e.g. Edwards & Edwards, 2016) and that teacher learning and the shaping of teacher identity are inseparable (e.g. Netolicky, 2016; Olsen, 2016). Teacher identity is forever being moulded by the interactions, both personal and professional, the teacher engages in. Teacher knowledge is comprised of what a teacher has learnt about subject matter, learning itself, his or her students, his or her school, and pedagogy. This knowledge includes the capacity of teachers to make the important judgements every minute of a professional day.

As described earlier, the connections that teachers make between what they have learned in professional learning programs cannot be entirely pre-planned and measured. Each teacher, a thinking professional, makes unique connections between that learning and their practice.

This study has shown that teachers appreciate professional learning programs which are grounded in the belief that teachers are professionals, capable of generating significant knowledge. They like being treated respectfully and their prior learning and experience being valued and drawn into the learning process (e.g. Kitchen, 2005a). Professional learning experiences which afford this respect to teachers, provide these teachers with opportunities to stop and think, beyond the content in the program curriculum. This should in no way be taken for granted in the extremely busy lives of teachers. The question of time is crucial. Israeli primary teachers, in the framework of the “*Ofek-Chadash*” policy, are overloaded with planning, teaching commitments, recording learning outcomes and administrative tasks<sup>59</sup> (RAMA, 2011). It appears that deep reflection, which can be transformative, is often neglected.

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<sup>59</sup> The excessive workload of teachers is also discussed by Bermejo-Toro, Preto-Ursua, and Hernandez (2016).

### ***10.5.3 How do these Israeli literacy teachers understand professional learning and its role in their professional lives?***

My research suggests that many Israeli teachers are ambivalent towards the prospect of professional learning. They are acutely aware that in order to progress from 'stage' to 'stage' in their professional development as it is defined by the Ministry of Education, and to increase their salary, it is necessary for them to participate in formal professional learning programs, specifically those authorised as acceptable by the "*Ofek-Chadash*" policy (Ministry of Education, 2008a). In this sense, it is clear to them that they are required to participate in formal learning programs throughout their careers. All of the teachers interviewed for this study reported having participated in authorized PL programs which afforded them positive learning experiences, and they said that these had contributed to their professional lives and identities in significant ways. Those teachers discussed informative and challenging programs which encouraged them to develop new insights and knowledge useful for their work in the classroom or were influential in the development of their professional identities. Those teachers knew how to recognize professional learning opportunities which were suited to their needs and are thankful for what they have gained from their time spent.

On the other hand, all the teacher participants in this study told stories of time spent in professional learning programs which were not fitted to their professional needs, and all had experienced feelings that their time had been wasted in those programs. Other negative experiences were connected to teachers' feelings that their prior knowledge and professional experience weren't respected and valued in those courses. Some of the teachers argued that they would be prepared to spend more time in PL programs if they were relevant and successfully run. Some pointed out that the learning in such programs is more important to them than the financial rewards attached.

There is such a great variety in professional learning programs available and the needs of teachers are so diverse (Timperley, 2008), that it is not possible to generalise about the experiences of Israeli teachers in professional learning frameworks.

#### ***10.5.4 What characterised my teaching and leadership in a dialogic professional learning program in which teacher writing was central?***

My leadership in the WDLT program was characterised by my awareness, on one hand, of the policy context in which I worked and the numerous limitations it placed on the participating teachers and myself. Time, place, course length, number of sessions and number of participants were all heavily shaped by policy guidelines. Negotiation surrounding program content was an ongoing process together with those responsible for language and literacy studies in the Ministry of Education.

In terms of the content of the courses, I was constantly negotiating between the planned curriculum and themes which arose from the needs of the teachers participating and cohort group dynamics. In the first few years, I was hesitant to provide opportunities for teachers to write as I feared teachers' may be unwilling to apply themselves to the task of writing, and I was far less assertive about it when teachers openly resisted my invitation to them to write. In time, when I immersed myself further in the literature on teacher writing (e.g. Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010; Whitney, 2008; Wood & Lieberman, 2000) I introduced more opportunities for writing into the program and explicitly discussed the teachers' feelings about writing in the sessions.

Throughout my leadership in the WDLT program I adopted a number of interchanging identities: teacher, lecturer, colleague, and even researcher and writer. As a teacher I was clearly responsible for the planning and running of the sessions but made a sincere effort to be responsive to the needs of the group and each of its members. When teachers asked to share stories of their classrooms or to pose questions, I adjusted the program to accommodate them. There were times when this flexibility required patience and the need to gauge the reactions of other group members to ensure that they were not annoyed by the 'interruption' or confused by it. As the leader of the program, I was constantly moving my attention from the whole group to individual teachers and back again.

As a lecturer, I made a particular effort to arrive at the sessions completely prepared for every session I would be teaching. I paid close attention to the stories I would tell and the examples I would present from my own classroom experience. I was conscious of the possible contradictions between lecturing (presenting materials in a monologue as an expert) and the dialogic learning experience I was striving for. At times, I finished a session aware that I had been centre-stage too

much and was determined to work differently in the next one. Conscious that the teachers' time was valuable, I made sure I started the sessions on time and utilized the time at our disposal as wisely as possible. Inevitably, there were occasional technology issues, or participant lateness or other problems, which complicated my best laid plans.

In my role as teacher educator, I strived to create a relational dialogic relationship with teachers in the group (e.g. Kitchen, 2005a) and between the teachers themselves. This was difficult to achieve in a program that was only 30 hours long. Nevertheless, I was determined to establish respectful relationships with the teachers based on trust. It was important to me to be considerate, approachable and available to the teachers in the sessions and between them and to take a real interest in their professional contexts, practice and lives.

Throughout the years that I led the WDLT program, I was proud to present myself as a classroom teacher, a school based educator and as a colleague. This stance allowed me to react to the teachers and their needs in an empathic and understanding manner but also to adamantly insist that the teaching strategies I was presenting were feasible.

In addition, as part of my dialogic teaching, I considered myself a learner in those sessions and was constantly aware of new understandings generated in my interactions with the teachers and their stories.

## **10.6 Recommendations emerging from this study**

Emerging from the knowledge generated in this study, I offer a number of recommendations for various stakeholders in the field of teacher professional learning and for future research. I begin with recommendations for individual teachers, for schools and institutions and for policy makers.

### **10.6.1 Recommendations for individual teachers**

This study recommends teachers set aside time in their busy professional lives to identify and reflect on their own professional learning needs, and that they seek to discuss them with school leadership in an attempt to receive support for their professional learning.

This study contends that teachers who are seriously prepared to dialogically engage with the ideas arising in professional learning programs and grapple with them, both in the PL sessions and in their classrooms, they are likely to gain more from the time allotted to professional learning programs.

Teachers' lives are extremely busy, characterised by "work overload and lack of time" (Bermejo-Toro, Prieto-Ursúa, & Hernández, 2016). Teachers can benefit intensely by engaging in extra-curricular activities in areas of interest. In addition to enjoyment and recreation, this study suggests that it is well worth trying to find connections and understandings between learning achieved in those activities and the learning and teaching occurring in the classroom. This study strongly recommends teachers joining or forming groups, communities which can facilitate opportunities, even if they are small, for collaboration and collegial dialogue. This dialogue can be generated with or without teacher writing. This research does, however, argue that the benefits of these practices are likely to be enhanced if the conversation is mediated by writing.

This study strongly encourages teachers, especially those teaching writing in the classroom, to set aside time in their busy professional lives to engage in narrative, personal and/or professional reflective writing. This writing can be private in nature or shared through group work, blogging and publication.

This study recognises the important role of school leadership in the creation of spaces for dialogue and teacher learning in the busy professional lives of teachers. The learning teachers do within their schools and classrooms can be enhanced when school leaders encourage teachers to reflect and engage in collaborative dialogue surrounding that learning. The time and the space for that empowering practice are dependent on the support that school leadership is willing to prioritise and provide in amongst the whole range of school imperatives.

### **10.6.2 Recommendations for schools and institutions**

As a means of bridging the space between the formal PL program and classroom practice, follow up conversations, after formal professional learning programs have concluded, may be useful. This may encourage or enable the continuation of the learning experienced in professional learning programs and it may facilitate the making of links and connections with classroom practice in ongoing ways. This dialogue may be possible online and it may be built in as an integral part of a formal professional learning course. It may be especially useful following short programs after which teachers typically ask questions such as: What has changed since my participation in this professional learning program? How do I apply my learning now that I am back in the classroom? What new questions am I asking about my practice? What next? Other questions may lead to the planning of new programs. In addition to this continuation of conversation following PL programs, time and space for ongoing dialogue between educators should be built in to teachers' workloads. These empowering experiences should be encouraged inside school and out.

This study recommends that teacher educators (in universities and in other spaces and institutions) explicitly discuss the dialogic nature of professional learning programs with their teacher learners. Such conversations may increase awareness that may lead to deeper understanding of the learning process and may accompany the teachers into their further classroom practices and future professional learning experiences. This kind of discussion may provide a model for classroom teaching and it may increase the chances that teachers make the most of the open-endedness of the professional learning opportunity.

This study joins the advocacy of teacher educators in the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and elsewhere who recognise the outstanding contribution of organised teacher writing groups, like the NWP. It strongly endorses the creation of similar projects for teachers in Israel.

### **10.6.3 Recommendations for policy makers**

This study recommends that if ongoing learning is expected of teachers, they should be encouraged by school leadership and leaders of professional learning to engage in some forms of professional reading. Teachers should be provided with affordable access to professional literature in libraries

and online collections. In Israel, this could be arranged by the Ministry of Education or *Histadrut HaMorim* [The Teachers' Union]. Postgraduate study and research, such as my work on this PhD, have afforded me an opportunity to discover the value of such reading in my professional learning life.

The same postgraduate study and research have made clear to me the value of professional and academic writing, in individual and social contexts, to my professional life. As this study draws to a close, I am acutely aware that I will have to make a concerted effort if I wish to continue writing after this PhD is completed, and I will have to search for and help to create appropriate platforms and communities for sharing that writing. Indeed, after the study I fear I may be in a similar position to some of my participants who value the opportunity to write but stopped writing when they left the formal WDLT program due to lack of time, personal interest and encouragement from others. This study recommends that there be frameworks suggested and provided which offer a space for writing about issues which professionally interest educators at a particular time, regardless of enrolment in formal professional learning programs. This is different from learning in a program about a particular topic. The example of the NWP in the United States and its counterparts in New Zealand and England, appear to be appropriate and extremely promising in this sense.

This study also recommends a change in the "*Ofek-Chadash*" policy to allow interested Israeli teachers to participate in one 60 hour professional learning course in an academic year (rather than two 30 hour courses as currently required). The longer time framework would ensure more significant dialogue, the generation of a sense of community, and would allow teachers to concentrate on deeper learning of one topic at a time.

## 10.7 Recommendations for further research

This study recommends teacher educators in Israel and in other parts of the world continue exploring meaningful avenues for the empowerment of teachers through learning. Teacher educators who engage in practitioner inquiry and critically explore how participants in their own programs and contexts understand professional learning, have the potential to develop interesting collaborations and knowledge in a variety of professional contexts.

Further research on the professional learning for teachers in dialogic programs could be enacted in a wide range of research methodologies. Each unique study can contribute to the growing knowledge on this subject, which most stakeholders agree is crucial (e.g. Borko, 2004; Jones & O'Brian, 2014; Schleicher, 2016). While the present study afforded me some space to critically inquire into the learning experienced by myself as the professional learning leader in a dialogic program, future research could focus closer attention on this leadership experience, and could explore the leader's learning in a longitudinal study, that ranged across different programs. This may be enacted through forms of narrative inquiry or autoethnography.

This research joins other scholars (e.g. Gardner, 2014) in calling for additional research investigating the connections between teachers' experience and identities as writers and the writing experiences of their students, which as yet has not been widely explored (Cremin & Oliver, 2016).

## 10.8 Study limitations

A significant limitation of this study is connected to the recruitment procedure of participants described in 6.1. The number of teachers who responded to the invitation from the *Pisga* centre leadership was lower than I had hoped it would be. Conversations with additional teachers would certainly have added to the rich data generated in the study.

An important feature of the reflexivity in this kind of dialogic study is to receive feedback from those who take part in the study. One of the most significant limitations in this study was that none of my study participants responded to my invitation to engage with the discussion and analysis in my thesis drafts. Although five of the participants were enthusiastic to read the relevant sections

of the thesis that I sent to them, none of them, in fact, responded. Before I sent the chapters I asked if they were interested in reading the text and asked whether they would prefer to read it in English or in Hebrew. I suggested they respond in writing, or orally on the telephone or in person. Four teachers replied in a short email that they found the reading very interesting and that they would respond at a later time. I reminded them once and decided not to trouble them. In further research, I suggest this issue be considered and other ways of continuing the dialogue with participants be explored.

### **10.9 Closing thoughts**

Despite the range of critique I have presented over the pages of this thesis with respect to standards-based education reform agendas and various professional learning policies, I conclude this thesis optimistic that the evidence of dialogic teacher learning which does exist in Israel and other parts of the world is exciting, sometimes deeply inspiring. This evidence shows that there is value and dialogic potential in this learning, and that it is viable. Despite the increasingly monologic overtones in educational policy in societies dominated by neo-liberal ways of thinking, it is possible to find and create dialogic spaces in which significant learning opportunities for literacy teachers can be generated. Learning like this can carve out a space in which significant dialogue can contribute to positive identity shaping, teacher well-being and the improvement of teaching practice.

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### Appendix 1: Interview Protocols

1. Signing of consent form with explanation.
2. As I wrote in my letter of introduction, learning and the professional development of teachers are of great interest to me. I am interested in hearing about your experiences. I have purposefully chosen to focus on teachers I know from the WDLT programs I teach.

The interview is supposed to take about an hour and a half. If at any stage you want to stop or say something else, just say so. I am recording the interview so that I can concentrate on listening to you seriously and connect to what you are saying.

I see this interview as a dialogue between us rather than a question/answer questionnaire. Just as I based the WDLT program in teacher narratives, here too I am interested in hearing your stories. In the first part of the interview I will mainly listen to you and in the second part I will respond more to what you are saying.

3. To start with, please tell me about yourself as an educator in general and as a language and literacy teacher in particular.
4. Please tell me about your professional learning as a teacher (you can discuss both formal and informal learning).
5. I would be happy to hear in detail about a positive learning experience you have had since we last met.
6. What do you think makes a professional learning program significant?
7. Tell me please about writing in your professional life.
8. I would like to hear about opportunities you have to share your work, your professional deliberations and your successes with others.
9. I am interested in showing you the teacher narrative you wrote in the WDLT program. Please tell me a bit about the text and its writing, and maybe something about its significance for you.
10. As we are approaching the end of the interview, I would like to hear your thoughts on the WDLT program in which we met.
11. Have you got anything else to say which may interest me and be relevant?

**Appendix 2: Ethics Approval: MUHREC and Ministry of Education,  
Chief Scientist's Office**



**Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee**

**(MUHREC) Research Office**

**Human Ethics Certificate of Approval**

**Date:** 15 July 2010

**Project Number:** CF10/0789 – 2010000381

**Project Title:** Professional learning for Israeli literacy teachers

**Chief Investigator:** Dr Graham Parr

**Approved:** From: 15 July 2010 To: 15 July 2015

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**Terms of approval**

1. The Chief investigator is responsible for ensuring that permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to MUHREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. **Failure to provide permission letters to MUHREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.**
2. Approval is only valid whilst you hold a position at Monash University.

3. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure the project is conducted as approved by MUHREC.
4. You should notify MUHREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.
5. The Explanatory Statement must be on Monash University letterhead and the Monash University complaints clause must contain your project number.
6. **Amendments to the approved project (including changes in personnel):**  
Requires the submission of a Request for Amendment form to MUHREC and must not begin without written approval from MUHREC.  
Substantial variations may require a new application.
7. **Future correspondence:** Please quote the project number and project title above in any further correspondence.
8. **Annual reports:** Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an Annual Report. This is determined by the date of your letter of approval.
9. **Final report:** A Final Report should be provided at the conclusion of the project. MUHREC should be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
10. **Monitoring:** Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by MUHREC at any time.
11. **Retention and storage of data:** The Chief Investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project for a minimum period of five years.



Professor Ben Canny Chair, MUHREC

**cc: Mrs Nicole Ira Aharonian**

Postal – Monash University, Vic 3800, Australia  
Building 3E, Room 111, Clayton Campus, Wellington Road, Clayton  
Telephone +61 3 9905 5490 Facsimile +61 3 9905 3831  
Email [muhrec@adm.monash.edu.au](mailto:muhrec@adm.monash.edu.au) [www.monash.edu/research/ethics/human/index/html](http://www.monash.edu/research/ethics/human/index/html)  
ABN 12 377 614 012 CRICOS Provider #00008C

מדינת ישראל  
משרד החינוך  
לשכת המדען הראשי

עמוד 1 מתוך 3  
ירושלים, ד' תמוז, תשע"ב  
24 יוני, 2012  
ל 67 10.32

היתר לעריכת מחקר בנושא  
"למידה מקצועית של מורים ישראלים לחינוך לשוני"  
בביצועה של גב' ניקי אהרוניאן

במסמך זה ההתייחסות לכל מי שאינם מזוהים לפי שם היא בלשון זכר. זאת מטעמי נוחות בלבד, והכוונה היא גם לנקבה אם לא מצוין אחרת.

לצורך הכניסה למרכז פסג"ה יומצא העתק של מסמך זה למנהל של מרכז פסג"ה הנוגע בדבר וכן בפני המועמדים להיבדק במסגרת המחקר.

ההיתר בתוקף החל מהתאריך הרשום לעיל ועד לסיום שנת הלימודים תשע"ג בלבד.

המסגרת שבה נערך המחקר: לימודיה של עורכת המחקר לקראת תואר שלישי באוניברסיטת מונש (Monash University) באוסטרליה.

מטרת המחקר: בחינת דרכים שבהן מורים לחינוך לשוני חווים למידה מקצועית ומגיבים אליה, וכן בחינת גישות חלופיות ללמידה של מורים.

אלה עיקרי המרכיבים של המחקר לעניין היתר זה:

הנבדקים: מורים לחינוך לשוני המשתתפים בהשתלמות בנושא "חינוך לשוני: הכתיבה ככלי לפיתוח למידה וחשיבה", שאותה מנחה עורכת המחקר במרכזים לפיתוח סגל הוראה (פסג"ה).

הליך איסוף המידע: ראיונות עם המורים, לאחר השתתפותם בהשתלמות הנ"ל, וניתוח של טקסטים שאותם חיברו במהלך ההשתלמות. הראיונות יוקלטו באמצעות רשמקול.

הבקשה לביצוע המחקר הנ"ל נבדקה על ידי לשכת המדען הראשי, ונמצאה עומדת בכל התנאים הנוגעים בדבר הקבועים בנוהל "אישור איסוף מידע במוסדות החינוך". לאור זאת הוחלט להיתר את איסוף המידע המבוקש שלעיל בקרב מורים, בסיום לימודיהם במרכזי פסג"ה שבמחוזות חיפה וצפון.

ההיתר כפוף לכל התנאים שלהלן שלקיומם אחראים עורכת המחקר ומנהל מרכז פסג"ה הנוגע בדבר, אלא אם כן נקבע אחרת בתנאי עצמו:

1. המועמדים להשתתף במחקר אינם כפופים לצוות המחקר או לכל אדם אחר הפועל מטעמו ואינם תלויים בצוות המחקר או בכל אדם אחר הפועל מטעמו בכל דרך אחרת. לפיכך, בין היתר, לא יכללו במחקר מורים המלמדים בבית הספר שבו מועסקת עורכת המחקר.
2. תכובד זכותם של כלל המועמדים להיבדק להחליט לא להשתתף במחקר, הזכותם של אלה שהחלו להשתתף בו להחליט לא להמשיך את השתתפותם בכל עת שירצו, והאת בלי שייפגעו בעקבות החלטותיהם בנושא באופן כלשהו. נקודות אלה יובהרו לכל המועמדים ליטול חלק במחקר ע"י עורכת המחקר.

מדינת ישראל  
משרד החינוך  
לשכת המדען הראשי

עמוד 2 מתוך 3

3. במחקר ישתתפו אך ורק מורים שהביעו את הסכמתם להשתתף במחקר בכתובים (מצ"ב הנוסח של כתב ההסכמה בחותמת לשכת המדען הראשי). הפניה אל המורים, לצורך קבלת הסכמתם להשתתפות במחקר, תיערך בכתב. לשם כך:
- א. עורכת המחקר תספק להנהלת מרכז פסג"ה את המספר הנחוץ של מכתבי הפנייה למורים (מצ"ב הנוסח של המכתב ושל כתב ההסכמה שאושרו להפצה, בחותמת לשכת המדען הראשי).
  - ב. הנהלת המרכז תסדיר את הפצת המכתבים למורים, ללא מעורבות הפונה.
  - ג. מורים המעוניינים להשתתף במחקר יצרו קשר עם עורכת המחקר באמצעות הפרטים המצויינים במכתב.
  - ד. המורים יחזירו את כתבי ההסכמה החתומים על ידם לעורכת המחקר, והיא תמסור אותם להנהלת מרכז הפס"גה ותשמור העתק שלהם ברשותה.<sup>1</sup>
4. המכתב יופץ בקרב המורים לאחר סיום ההשתלמות, וסיום כל חובותיהם בקשר להשתלמות, ככל שישנם כאלה.
5. במהלך הראיונות תכובד זכותו של הנבדק לפרטיות מפני כל אדם, למעט אוסף המידע עצמו.

עוד יובהר כדלהלן:

- עורכת המחקר התחייבה בכתובים לפני לשכת המדען הראשי:
  - א. לשמור בקפדנות על החיסיון של ההקלטות ושל כל הנתונים המזוהים הנוספים שייאספו על אודות הנבדקים ולהשמיט לצמיתות את ההקלטות ואת יתר הפרטים המאפשרים את זיהוי הנבדקים מיד עם תום העיבודים, ובכל מקרה לא יאוחר מהתאריך 31.8.2013, במועד המוקדם מבין השניים;
  - ב. לא לפרסם את ממצאי המחקר באופן שיאפשר את זיהוי הנבדקים או את זיהוי מרכזי פס"גה, שבמסגרתם נאסף המידע הנדון.
- ההיתר ניתן אך ורק לאיסוף המידע באמצעות כלי המחקר שהוצגו לבדיקה בלשכת המדען הראשי, במתכונת שהותרה להפצה.
- ככל שקיימות זכויות יוצרים בנוגע לכלים שמשמשים את המחקר הנדון או בנוגע לתשובות או לתוצרים האחרים של הנבדקים הנוצרים במסגרת המחקר ו/או הנמסרים לצוות המחקר במסגרתו, באחריותה הבלעדית של עורכת המחקר להסדיר את הנושא בהתאם לכל הוראות החוקים הנוגעים בדבר.

<sup>1</sup> המסמכים הנ"ל יישמרו על-ידי הנהלת המוסד החינוכי, ובאחריותה, בארון נעול לתקופה של שלוש שנים לפחות.

מדינת ישראל  
משרד החינוך  
לשכת המדען הראשי

עמוד 3 מתוך 3

- אין במכתב זה משום חיווי דעה של לשכת המדען הראשי על איכותו של המחקר.
- לא נדרש היתר נפרד מטעם המחוז.



תפוצה :

ניקי אהרוניאן, קיבוץ יזרעאל, מיקוד : 19350  
מנהלי המחוזות שלעיל



תאריך: \_\_\_\_\_  
שנת הלימודים תשע"ב/תשע"ג

### מחקר: למידה מקצועית של מורים ישראלים לחינוך לשוני

במסגרת לימודי לתואר שלישי באוניברסיטת מונש (Monash University) שבאוסטרליה אני עורכת מחקר בהנחייתו של ד"ר גרהם פר, מרצה בכיר בחוג לחינוך באוניברסיטה הנ"ל.

מטרת המחקר היא לבחון דרכים שבהן מורים לחינוך לשוני חווים למידה מקצועית ומגיבים אליה. המחקר מתמקד בסוגי הידע שמורים מפיקים כשהם כותבים נרטיבים רפלקטיביים על ההוראה ומשתפים את עמיתיהם בטקסטים אלו. אני מתעניינת במיוחד בלמידה שמכוונת לשיפור הפדגוגיה הקשורה להוראת הכתיבה.

במסגרת המחקר אני מבקשת לראיין מספר מורים שהשתתפו בהשתלמויות שאותן אני מעבירה בנושא "חינוך לשוני: הכתיבה ככלי לפיתוח למידה וחשיבה" וכן לאסוף טקסטים שנכתבו על ידי אותם המורים במהלך ההשתלמות.

הראיון יעסוק בחווית הלימוד בהשתלמות ובהשלכותיה לעבודת המורה. הראיון יאריך כשעה ויוקלט בטייפ. לאחר הראיון, כל משתתף יקבל תמליל של הראיון הקשור אליו לפני שיופיע בדו"ח המחקר. הראיון ייערך במקום ובמועד שנוחים לך.

אני מתחייבת לשמור בסודיות את כל המידע שייאסף, לא לאפשר גישה למידע זה לאף גורם מחוץ לצוות המחקר וכן להשמיט לצמיתות את הזיהוי מהנתונים (כולל הקלטות השמע מהראיונות) מיד עם תום קידודם, ובכל מקרה לא יאוחר מהתאריך 31.8.2013, במועד המוקדם בין השניים. המידע שייאסף ישמש לצורכי המחקר הנדון בלבד. פרסום ממצאיו יעשה באופן שלא יאפשר זיהוי של מורים, בתי ספר, ישובים או מרכזי פסג"ה הנוגעים בדבר.

משרד החינוך  
כשכתבתי לך ראשון  
הח' דבורה הכריזה  
17915  
91911  
ירושלים

השתתפותך במחקר זה היא בהתנדבות ואינך חייבת להסכים להשתתף. כמו כן, גם אם את/ה תביעה את הסכמתך להשתתף, תוכל/י לבטל את ההשתתפות כל עוד לא אישרת את השימוש בטקסטים שהכנת ובתמליל הריאיון, לצורכי המחקר.

אחסון המידע יהיה בהתאם לחוקי האוניברסיטה וישמר בקמפוס האוניברסיטה, בארון סגור למשך 5 שנים ממועד איסופו.

המעוניינים לקבל פרטים נוספים על המחקר או לשמוע על תוצאות המחקר, מוזמנים ליצור קשר עמי באמצעות הדואר האלקטרוני: [Nicole.Aharonian@education.monash.edu](mailto:Nicole.Aharonian@education.monash.edu)

אם את/ה מסכים/מסכימה להשתתף במחקרי, אשמח מאוד אם:

(א) תודיע/י לי על כך לכתובת דואר אלקטרוני:

[Nicole.Aharonian@education.monash.edu](mailto:Nicole.Aharonian@education.monash.edu),

או לכתובת הדואר: ניקי אהרוניאן, קיבוץ יזרעאל, מיקוד: 19350

ו-(ב) חתום/י על טופס ההסכמה המצורף, ומסרי אותו אלי במעמד ביצוע הראיון.

תודה רבה,

ניקי אהרוניאן,

משרד החינוך  
לשכת מידע ראשי  
רח' דבורה הכהן 2  
ירושלים 91911

## כתב הסכמה

לכבוד

גב' ניקי אהרוניאן

ג"נ

הנדון: כתב הסכמה לאיסוף נתונים מזוהים

הואיל ואת עורכת מחקר (להלן "המחקר") בנושא "למידה מקצועית של מורים ישראלים לחינוך לשוני"

הואיל וביקשת את הסכמתי לכך שתאספי במסגרת המחקר נתונים מזוהים (להלן "הנתונים") אודותי

לפיכך הריני מצהירה בזאת כדלקמן:

א. כי הסברתי לי את מטרות המחקר ואת הנושאים ואת הסוגיות שייבדקו במסגרתו;

ב. כי הסברתי לי את כל הפעולות, על תוכנן, שאשתתף בהן או שייאספו בהן מידע על אודותי במסגרת מחקר זה;

ג. כי ציינת בפניי את המועד שבו יושמט הזיהוי מהנתונים שייאספו;

ד. כי הבטחת שתנקטי את כל האמצעים הדרושים כדי להבטיח את סודיות הנתונים המזוהים עד אשר יושמט זיהויים;

ה. כי מסרת לי את אופן פרסומם של הנתונים.

לאחר שהבנתי את כל האמור לעיל, הריני נותן בזה את הסכמתי לאיסוף הנתונים המבוקש על ידך.

**ולראיה באתי על החתום**

\_\_\_\_\_ תאריך  
\_\_\_\_\_ שם המורה  
\_\_\_\_\_ חתימה