

## **A longitudinal study of the professional development of teachers – the challenges of comparison**

### **Introduction**

This chapter considers some of the methodological challenges encountered when revisiting the professional lives of twenty-seven mid-career teachers (Hargreaves, 2005) from cities in Germany, Norway and England in three nationally distinct public welfare regimes (Esping-Anderson and Myles, 2009). In this study teachers' Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is situated in a complex amalgam combining teacher biography, identity work and the values embedded within different communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). It is, with varying degrees, also situated within wider international discourses reflecting the marketisation of public sector work and the development of an audit culture (Apple, 2005) in which the performance of professionals is increasingly measured by externally determined targets (Wilkins and Wood, 2009). A longitudinal comparative study is rare within the literature on teachers' CPD and yet was considered necessary when discussing this complex amalgam within a wider European context. A context informed by the European Council's agenda for improving the quality of teaching and teacher education across all of its constituent nation states (European Commission, 2010a). All too often international comparisons are used to legitimate claims and justify radical changes in education policy based on large-scale survey methods (Alexander, 2000). Yet many such comparisons avoid the in-depth understanding of educational perspectives and practices in situ, gained when viewed through the eyes of professionals within their own cultural context (Osborn, 2004). -Exploring the variety and depth of experiences these teachers have had of CPD, this study examined the extent to which these experiences addressed their professional needs and/or the professional needs of the institutions in which they worked. The findings revealed a disparity between the activities these teachers engage in and the value they place on their own professional development.

While this study is not, strictly speaking, 'ethnographic', it has much in common with ethnographic approaches in educational research. Educational ethnography

encompasses the development of theoretical and practical descriptions of professional lives, identities and activities through detailed situated investigations (Delamont, 2008; Walford, 2008; Beach, 2010). This interpretive small-scale exploratory case study drew on established qualitative research methods associated with longitudinal studies (Elliot et al., 2008) nine years after these same teachers were interviewed in research examining their professional socialisation into teaching (Czerniawski, 2009; 2013). While initially focusing on the effects of professional socialisation on teachers' values and identities, over time, the study shifted its focus to examine these teachers' perceptions of their continuing professional development. By drawing on data collected with a small sample of teachers in three national locations over many years there is, therefore, also a comparative element to this study. By 'comparative' research I refer to the cross-cultural comparison of similarities and differences in social phenomena that a study such as this explores (Osborn, 2006). Such comparisons carry with them risks and rewards for any researcher. Oversimplified findings and superficial conclusions often accompany an inability to grasp complexities in language, history and culture. Such inabilities can lead to cherry picking and a desire to snatch something from one country expecting it, unproblematically, to work elsewhere (Alexander, 2009).

And yet, in increasingly globalised times, national educational debates need international perspectives. A European Agenda (European Commission, 2010a) for teacher mobility, for example, across all European countries is problematic when considering teachers' CPD in different national locations. Differences in the constellations, configurations of influence and patterns of professional relationships ensure that the experience of being a teacher differs considerably for different individuals even within broadly similar contexts and settings. For the comparative researcher, the discovery of new policies, practices and institutions can, therefore, provide greater understanding of any education system regardless of its location or whether such studies are small- or large-scale.

This chapter starts by justifying the choice of settings in this three-country study before examining some of the issues and challenges related to comparative research with a particular focus on contextual sensitivity. After introducing the reader to the research design the chapter highlights a discrepancy between data generated initially through

questionnaires and the more in-depth understanding of the professional lives of these teachers, gained through interviews. This chapter then examines more closely some of the challenges faced when interviewing teachers in different national locations. Part of this discussion adopts a reflective style of writing engaging with some of the dilemmas encountered when embarking on a study such as this. The article finally refers back to some of the conclusions drawn from the micro-analysis deployed in the original study relating this to the professional development of teachers within the European Union.

### **Three national contexts**

The three countries chosen for the original study exemplify Esping-Anderson and Myles's (2009) three welfare state types: social democratic, in Norway; conservative and corporatist, in Germany; and free market liberal, in England. Two public sector employment models identified by the OECD (2005) are also significant when comparing professional development opportunities in these three countries: in Germany and Norway a career-based model where teachers are generally expected to stay in the public service throughout their working life; and in England a position-based model which focuses on selecting the best candidate for each position and offering more open access to a wider variety of candidates including those moving into teaching from other professions.

Previous research has characterised the Norwegian education system as one in which equality is valued over and above cultural and academic achievements (Stephens et al., 2004). Norwegian teachers have more professional autonomy than many of their European colleagues, in part due to less emphasis on formal testing and greater flexibility for teachers in terms of the taught curriculum (Czerniawski, 2010). An anti-authoritarian stance is embedded within the teaching profession (Korsgaard, 2002), and setting and streaming run contrary to the Norwegian cultural belief that everyone should be treated equally (Stephens et al., 2004). Generally speaking, Norwegian schools are 'schools for all', i.e. comprehensive, representing the same system of education that the Norwegian teachers interviewed in this study experienced when they were pupils. Also the Norwegian teacher is trained to be a 'guide/supervisor' (Stephens et al., 2004: 114), contrary to the more authoritarian notion of teaching not uncommon in the English or German school settings (Kron, 2000). Since 2005 there

has, by Norwegian standards, been an overwhelming focus on international comparisons and tests, with a requirement that each municipality and county carry out competence development measures for its teachers. Norway's recent 'pedagogic crisis' as a result of its performance in the OECD international PISA tests in reading, mathematics and science has resulted in a 'panoply of initiatives to raise the competence of teachers and head teachers' (Ure, 2007). The *Strategy for Competence Development (2005–8)* is indicative of this focus and has provided 160 million Euros for the development of teachers, school leaders and trainers in primary and secondary education (Lloyd and Payne 2012). Surveys have, however, indicated that Norwegian teachers are often disappointed with the facilitation and outcomes of CPD (Lloyd and Payne, 2012).

Generalising about teachers' CPD in Germany is even more problematic. Previous research has characterised the country's education systems as hierarchical and fragmented (Kron, 2000). The majority of German *Länder* (federal states) have a tripartite system of schooling: the *Hauptschule* provides preparation for employment in manufacturing industry or manual work; the *Realschule* provides preparation for employment in the technical, financial, commercial and middle management sectors; while the *Gymnasium*, in which teachers in this study were not only trained to teach but also attended as pupils, provides for what are generally considered the most able pupils within the system. The *Gymnasium* consists of lower and upper secondary schools. Teachers are trained and employed by the *Länder* and receive a minimum of sixteen hours' CPD per year. In-service training for teachers in Germany is compulsory albeit dominated by individual participation and mostly organised into short, one-day courses (Lipowski et al., 2011).

Teachers' CPD in England takes place within a highly regulated system (Furlong et al., 2000), under a variety of pathways and within a much greater diversity of types of school than those found in the Norwegian and German contexts. Mahoney and Hextall (2001) argue that teacher education and training in England have resulted in an increasingly tight system of teacher surveillance and regulation controlled largely from the centre but also by means of internal, localised controls. Once qualified, teachers have to pass 'Induction Standards' within their first year of qualification although at the time of writing these professional standards are being re-written. A variety of

professional development pathways (e.g. coaching and mentoring, Advanced Skills Teachers, Master's accreditation and the 'Excellent Teachers Scheme') do exist for teachers, once qualified, and are, in most cases, rewarded with certification and salary differentials although it is also worth noting that the majority of CPD for teachers in England is driven increasingly by school imperatives. Professional development programmes have, for example, escalated in schools, catalysed by the dissemination of National Literacy and Numeracy strategies (DfEE, 1998). However, despite this intense regulation there is no legal minimum requirement for teachers to spend on professional development. Five days of the statutory 195 days required for teachers to be available to work is, nevertheless, allocated for non-teaching activities including CPD (Eurdice, 2011).

### **Comparative research and the importance of contextual sensitivity**

I wish now to turn to some of the issues and challenges related to comparative research, with a specific focus on the contextual sensitivity of the researcher. Such sensitivity is a vital ingredient in the repertoire of the comparative researcher wishing to explore the social contexts and meanings when a small-scale three-country study such as this is carried out. Specifically I refer to the sensitivity to actions, symbols and relationships that may carry different meanings in different societies or cultures and are of particular interest to ethnographic researchers.

Marsh (1967) has made a distinction between intra-societal comparison – “the analysis of variations within one society” and inter-societal comparison – “as the systematic and explicit comparison of data from two or more societies or their subsystems” (Marsh, 1967: page 11). The empirical data gathered for this study, through interviews with teachers working in three national settings falls mainly into the latter distinction made by Marsh because of the cross-national nature of this study. However comparative research is not just about comparison but explanation. Thomas (1998) states that:

In its most inclusive sense, comparative education refers to inspecting two or more educational entities or events in order to discover *how and why they are alike and different*. An educational entity in this context means any person, group or organisation associated with learning and teaching. An event is an

activity concerned with promoting learning ([Thomas, 1998: page 1] [*my emphasis*]).

How and why becoming teachers 'are alike and different' is precisely what this study explored by focusing on the three social settings in which these teachers are situated. Mabbett and Bolderson (1999) have drawn attention to two broad categories of comparative social research that have influenced how such a focus might take place. The first category represents mid or 'meso' level cross-national analysis and is exemplified by Esping-Anderson and Myles's (2009) classification of welfare state types referred to earlier and used as a justification for the choice of three countries in this study. The second category of comparative social research, that Mabbett and Bolderson (1999) draw attention to covers micro-studies that utilise in-depth, qualitative techniques of research. These studies emphasise cultural specificity, agency and reflexivity in the policy and research process (Kennet, 2001). By focusing on the 'situatedness' of the professional development of teachers, and in particular, the role that values and teacher identities play in this process this study rests within both of Mabbett and Bolderson's (1999) categories of comparative research.

A three-country, cross-national comparison and qualitative analysis in comparative education of the sort deployed in this study, is rare and presents both conceptual and methodological challenges to the researcher related to contextual sensitivity. Alexander (2005), for example, notes that "the language of education contains few universals and educational conversation across cultures is laced with pitfalls for the unwary" (Alexander, 2005: page 5). Uni-directional reforms do not necessarily lead to educational systems becoming more like each other (Green et al., 2007). Reutin (2004) has claimed that different historical starting points of education systems combined with variety in the various institutional structures also make meaningful generalisation at best, problematic. In addition, the provision of education is deeply influenced by the cultural context in which it is located, as well as by the economy and the political system responsible for educational policies (Hayhoe, 2007).

The issue of contextual sensitivity in comparative research has been raised by a number of writers (e.g. Hayhoe, 2007; Brisard et al., 2003). Crossley and Jarvis (2001) highlight the significance of differing world views, forms of knowledge and frames of reference when embarking on comparative research:

*In a world marked by the rapid intensification of globalisation, tensions between global and local agendas and developments clearly demand ever more specialist knowledge, insight and understanding. This is of vital importance; but the very same global factors heighten the significance of the contextual sensitivities that comparative researchers have a particular responsibility to identify [Crossley and Jarvis, 2001: page 407].*

Questions related to any cross-societal equivalence between concepts are prominent in the literature on comparative education and are a crucial factor in the cross-national research that this study addresses. Phenomena or relationships may have different meanings in the three societies under examination. For example the meaning of a teacher's action in one location can depend on the conventions, norms and values of not only the country concerned but also the particular type and location of the school in which that teacher's action takes place (e.g. the word 'inclusion' within the diversity of school institutions that typify the British education might cause confusion to a Norwegian teacher working within an education system that is by its nature 'inclusive' and 'comprehensive'). Carey-Wood (1991) argues that equivalence in meaning and concepts is not necessarily obtainable by 'correct' linguistic translations because of the semantic, cultural and societal differences inherent in words and concepts. Nevertheless "concepts are necessary as common points of reference for grouping phenomena that are differentiated geographically and often linguistically" (Rose, 1991: page 447). Without utilizing concepts, information collected about different countries provides no basis for relating one country to another. The problem of meaning and significance of actions is particularly important in a study that considers the views of teachers in different national locations. This is because much of the work that teachers do is conducted in terms of signals, symbols, coded language and symbolic behaviour.

Brisard et al. (2003) draw attention to the need for researchers engaging in micro-forms of comparative research to be contextually sensitive and 'contextually qualified' (Brisard et al., 2003: page 2). By this they argue that researchers engaging in research in different national locations need to have the necessary background and experience required when describing and interpreting the contextual objects under study:

*To enhance the validity of their research, researchers need to possess, either collectively or individually the contextual knowledge and understanding needed to design and carry out the study [Brisard et al., 2003: page 4].*

As a teacher-researcher and linguist I have carried out the research for this study in ways that, I hope, address many of the concerns related to both contextual qualification and sensitivity discussed in this section and these are discussed later in the chapter when discussing the challenges of comparison.

### **Research design**

This longitudinal, interpretive small-scale exploratory case-study, revisits the lives of mid-career teachers (Hargreaves, 2005) nine years after they were interviewed in research examining their professional socialisation into teaching. In the original study, a purposive sample (Winne and Alexander, 2006) of thirty-two teachers from Norway, Germany and England were interviewed three times during the first two years of their professional careers. In this follow-up study, ten Norwegian, nine German and eight English teachers from the original sample explore the variety and depth of experiences they have had of CPD, and consider whose interests are being satisfied by the proliferation of these activities.

Specifically these teachers' views shed light on the extent to which these experiences have addressed their professional needs and/or the professional needs of the institutions in which they work. In so doing their views address two research questions:

1. What sorts of CPD activities did teachers engage with?
2. To what extent did teachers find these activities useful?

Drawing on the literature related to teachers' CPD, semi-structured questionnaires were constructed to gather information about the types of formal and informal professional development these teachers had received. Face-to-face and, in some cases, further telephone interviews (Kvale, 1996) were then used to capture and elaborate these teachers' perceptions about their experiences. This chapter focuses



on one element associated with the collection of data, namely, the use of cards as a tool to generate conversation during the interviews.

In adopting a suitable analytical framework to illuminate the formal and informal processes associated with teachers' CPD in three countries, the author has drawn on Layder's (1998) adaptive theory. Informed by the grounded theory tradition associated with Glaser and Strauss (1967) the author utilised its more recent interpretations (Charmaz, 2006). Part of the analysis also drew on Wengerian notions of 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998). The study has been conducted along ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011). In consideration of the small sample size and the potentially sensitive nature of the data, all participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity.

**Initial findings and a disparity in data**

Table 1 summarises the results from semi-structured questionnaires initially sent electronically to the teachers in this study prior to being interviewed. Drawing on the international literature on teachers' CPD, the questionnaires asked teachers to describe professional development activities they had encountered since qualifying as teachers, briefly summarized in the table:

**Table 1 – Results from the questionnaires indicating the CPD experiences of German, Norwegian and English teachers.**

<b>Teachers' CPD</b>	<b>Germany (n=9)</b>	<b>Norway (n=10)</b>	<b>England (n=8)</b>
Participation in school courses	7	7	7
External courses attended (short 1 day courses or less)	2	3	5

External courses attended (more than one day course)	2	2	5
Experience of working with other colleagues in classroom (e.g. team teaching)	2	2	6
Working with colleagues collaboratively outside of the classroom (e.g. joint planning, curriculum projects, action research etc.)	2	3	7
Annual appraisals	2	5	7
Classroom observation of other staff	0	1	3
Classroom observation by other staff	2	2	7
Currently involved in further training (formal study)	3	2	3
Plans for further training	1	3	3
Awareness of external bodies providing professional development	5	4	7
Opportunities for future promotion	3	3	6
Experience working in different schools	3	5	6
Involvement in any form of research activity	0	2	3

The results from these questionnaires alone would seem to indicate that the teachers in England experienced the widest range of professional development opportunities. However, the data gathered from interviews with each teacher *after* completion of the questionnaire revealed a somewhat more complex and nuanced exploration of CPD experiences revealing a disparity between the activities these teachers engage in and the value they place on their own professional development.

It might appear, for example, from the table above that colleagues in England had greater access to externally accredited CPD courses than their Norwegian and German colleagues. It is true that the English cohort referred to 'universities', 'professional associations', 'private organisations' and 'exam boards' as potential

sources of professional development, with the latter receiving the most support. However, interview data highlighted the instrumental nature of some of these courses and how problematic, for some, this could be:

At my school we do get funding for these sorts of courses but this tends to be anything that is exam-based – so it's good in that we learn about the exams – but not sure it really is about developing me professionally – rather it's developing my ability to pass examinations, theirs [pupils], not mine. [Sylvia]

It would also appear, from the table that participation in school courses featured relatively strongly in the professional lives of most of these mid-career teachers. However appearances can be deceptive. For some German teachers, for example, these days 'hardly ever happened', or 'took place but are frankly speaking generally a waste of time'. While many teachers referred to these days as being opportunities, often, to 'collect', 'brainstorm', 'share' practice, for Harald the outcomes were less than satisfactory:

I cannot remember what we do in most of these days. We seem to sit around on tables with large pieces of paper, sharing our ideas and when I first took part I thought "oh good, this is like training again" – but actually we are never receiving anything afterwards and I wonder what is happening with all these paper tablecloths. [Harald]

This tendency for there to be few opportunities to develop further or apply what these teachers had learnt was shared across all three cohorts. Most could not see the long-term benefits of many school-based training activities. Svend, a Norwegian mid-career teacher, for instance, said that he:

Did not find [school-based CPD activities] useful as they are not implemented after the courses are finished so you wonder why you started them. We need to work these practices out together, not in isolation. [Svend]

As I said, appearances can be deceptive. Certainly the findings from the questionnaires would seem to indicate that the teachers from the English sample receive considerably more CPD opportunities than their Norwegian and German counterparts. The development of an audit culture, so often positioned as oppressive (Apple, 2005) in many English schools; the practice of performance-enhancing competitiveness (Wilkins and Wood, 2009); and a more market-driven orientation of all learning institutions within the nested cultures they are located in would seem to

provide a richer, more varied and accessible stream of teacher developmental opportunities. However, on closer examination, interviews revealed that the English teachers in this study experienced the harder economic utilitarian forms of professional development referred to by Earley and Bubb (2004), addressing, in most cases, the strategic goals of the school rather than their professional learning needs.

### **The Interview technique**

The idiosyncratic method of data collection adopted in this study, in addition to the questionnaire referred to above, can best be described as a form of guided/semi-structured interview, which followed a format that borrowed much from my experience as a former teacher. Drawing on international literature related to teacher professional development, the technique involved giving the candidate separate cards with single concepts or phrases on each card (e.g. “classroom observations”; “external courses”). Mindful of Broadfoot and Osborn’s (1992) ‘conceptual equivalence’, these cards were translated and then checked by professional colleagues of mine, working in schools, in Germany and Norway. After ranking the cards in terms of the importance the participants placed in relation to their professional development, they were then asked to justify their ranking before finally choosing five cards to discuss more fully. Kitwood (1977) argues that it is essential to put the respondent at ease before valid information can be obtained in an interview. As an interview technique, using cards as prompts, got over the initial problem of nerves faced by any interviewee when knowingly audio-recorded for the first time. It was also an effective way of establishing much needed rapport. The fact that teachers felt they *could* choose different issues to talk about was a particular strength in the approach, voiced by the participants post-interview. In general, I received a variety of compliments for the card strategy particularly from those Norwegian or German teachers that had elected to be interviewed in English with many saying that they found it a less intimidating experience than it might have otherwise been had I been posing direct questions to them. It is also worth noting that these interviews were often, as is the case in much fieldwork, carried out in, or near, the busy professional environment in which these teachers worked with interviews taking place in local cafés, empty classrooms etc but where time was of a premium to the person being interviewed. A further advantage to the cards, therefore, was that in

the short time available for an interview to take place the participant was distracted by the cards while the recording device was being set up thereby reducing the degree of nervousness that can exist in most interview scenarios, particularly when very often respondents in schools are 'snatching' bits of their valuable time in order to take part in research.

On subsequent visits all teachers were offered the cards they chose at the start of the field research. However these interviews also allowed some opportunity to explore additional issues that had emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts in general as well as increasingly being informed by the literature researched during the duration of the study. It is perhaps relevant to say here that quite a few respondents thanked me afterwards for allowing them to take part in the whole project. The general sense that was conveyed by a number of the respondents was that they found the experience cathartic. This was particularly the case with the German and Norwegian teachers, a minority of whom said that there was, in the daily routine of teaching, little opportunity to talk to other colleagues about the more abstract, yet significant, issues to do with their jobs that these interviews explored.

### **Encountering some of the challenges of comparison**

The three sample groups in this study were relatively small and from limited and contrasting geographical areas making it difficult to compare like with like. For example the largely inner-city environment used in the English context provided a set of expectations and socialising experiences that contrasted with both the relatively less metropolitan and less diverse environments found in either the Norwegian or German cities used in this study. One example of how such a geographical distinction can impact on the life styles of teachers is the amount of time it took many of the English sample to travel to work with many saying it took anything up to an hour and a half each way. This contrasts with the 'ten to fifteen' minute journeys that most Norwegian and German teachers claimed they spent travelling to and from work. While this particular point was not something I chose to focus on as significant to the work in this study, it does nevertheless show how different geographical locations can radically affect the lifestyles, and therefore the work-based experiences of different sample groups in comparative research.

The age range of the teachers in the three samples broadly represents the average age ranges of teachers going into the teaching profession in those particular countries although the London sample were, in general, slightly older than the national average of teachers entering the profession for the first time in the UK. That said, it is not, nor has it ever been, an aim of this research to offer data that claims to be representative of a larger group of individuals but rather draw the reader's attention to similarities and differences between the three groups of teachers. More significant however is the fact that the German teachers were considerably older on entering teaching, on average, than either their Norwegian or English counterparts because of the extended period of study it takes German teachers to reach their final qualification. There is, therefore, a greater investment of self by the German teachers in their training than can be said about either the Norwegian or English cohorts. I cannot say that I found any qualitative difference in responses purely based on this difference in length of training and subsequently their older age on entering the profession for the first time. However, I tended to find that the German teachers were more reflective about their own experiences as classroom teachers, their professional development and about being in new situations. This might possibly be due to the fact that they had, in many cases, experienced a number of part-time jobs at university and therefore had a greater reflective stock on which to call upon when considering these experiences.

The significance of the linguistic ability of any researcher cannot be underestimated when embarking on research in a different national location. I am fortunate to be fluent in German and this helped when carrying out interviews with German teachers even when it was apparent that in most cases their command of the English language was exemplary. Often this ability acted as an icebreaker and rapport builder with the inevitable discussion about where I had learnt German, where had I studied and so on. During the interviews I was able to clarify issues in German that might otherwise have gone astray as a result of miscomprehension of a question. However despite my enthusiasm initially to do these in their native language many respondents wished to be interviewed in English. This was, in part, one of the problems of being the 'exotic other' (Stephens et al. 2004). I presented to these participants, as an Englishman, an opportunity to 'try out' their English and I did not feel it was appropriate for me to insist on speaking German bearing in mind the enthusiasm some shared in wanting to speak

English. In most cases the standard of English spoken was extremely good and I could switch if necessary into German to clarify issues.

My rudimentary knowledge of Norwegian ruled out any possibility of carrying out interviews in Norwegian. However out of the thirteen interviewees only one student was not fluent in English. Norway is a country with a small population and one that warmly embraces the English language. English is the first foreign language that school children learn and cinema and television broadcast all foreign films with subtitles rather than being dubbed (this contrasts with the automatic dubbing of all foreign films in Germany). While many Norwegian teenagers enthusiastically follow the Norwegian domestic music industry it is impossible to escape the dominance of American and British bands in the Norwegian charts. This, in general, meant that the interviews in Norway were effortless, in terms of any potential language difficulties that might have been thrown up. That said, I cannot possibly account for how these interviews, in content, would have varied had I carried them out in Norwegian. In other words I am sure that there were interpretations made of questions I posed that highlighted linguistic differences however it is impossible for me to say what these might have been. All I can do is draw attention to the fact that I was aware of their potential existence.

At this point I wish to raise a methodological issue that I have termed the 'translation effect' when interviewing foreign nationals in English. When interviewing many of my Norwegian and some German teachers, the slight pause they often needed to gather their thoughts before responding, was in many cases linguistically driven. In other words these participants needed a gap, albeit a short one, to fully grasp the question, card, phrase in their own language. This pause might also have created a space in which they could gather a more focused response to whatever issue they wished to talk about. This observation occurred to me during the process of transcription. I often found that where native speakers spoke their language in interview, their responses were quicker, although they tended to require a couple of sentences, or phrases before the issue they were trying to address was responded to. This 'thinking-on-their-feet' was in contrast to the slower and yet more immediately focussed answers of those German participants opting to be interviewed in English and their Norwegian counterparts.

## **Combating the dangers of misrepresentation**

The relationship between teachers' values and what teachers actually say about them, is ambiguous, fluid and difficult to unpack. Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) have warned that asking teachers to explain their reasons for a particular action will not necessarily guarantee that researchers can obtain a reliable picture of the values teachers hold. In attempting to achieve this, I have, up to this point, painted perhaps an overly rosy picture regarding the advantages of, not only qualitative interview strategies in general, but the idiosyncratic method of interview that I have adopted for this study. I wish now to redress this balance. There are unavoidable problems (Cicourel, 1964) that the researcher is faced with when adopting interviews as a method and I wish to refer to the ones that were significant to me when attempting to critically evaluate this study.

Mason (1996) discusses the complexities involved in writing up qualitative research findings from a large data set. The dilemma in deciding what data to include is more than balanced by the dilemma of deciding what *not* to include. This latter dilemma has been termed the "agony of omission" (Lofland and Lofland, 1995: page 262). The decisions I have made concerning which data to use and which to leave out has been based upon the key themes that have emerged from progressive focussing (Glaser, 1992) on key themes in relation to the study as a whole. However it is important to point out that the quotations used in the various publications that have emerged from this study are but tiny sections of the transcripts of the original interviews and here lies a significant ethical issue concerned with the typing up and representation of interview data. Holland et al. (1998) describe the transcript of any interview as a 'transgression' where the "original live, face-to-face conversations disappear in endless transcripts and reappear butchered into fragmented quotes" (Holland et al., 1998: page 222). However I have tried, over the nine years this study took, to remain true to the ideas conveyed by teachers in all our discussions.

One further source of potential misrepresentation that needs to be addressed is related to the issue of linguistics and the politics of representation (Lather, 1991). The topic of translation in qualitative comparative studies is well-rehearsed (e.g. Phillips, 1960; Lewin, 1990; Shklarow, 2009; Tarozzi, 2012;). In one sense, at least, *all* qualitative research involves translation in that, as researchers, we attempt to translate



and represent the meanings of others regardless of what, or how many languages are involved (Roth, 2013). Nevertheless carrying out a small-scale qualitative study in three countries was, linguistically, challenging. I have already talked about my ability to speak German and in three cases this meant that the interviews were conducted in German. This however has also meant that I transcribed these interviews into English, necessitating translation on my part. I found this process to be tougher than I had first imagined and while I attempted to do this as accurately as possible I am aware that this imposed an additional distance between what the interviewee meant and how I have conveyed their interpretation. Strategies for eliminating translation-related problems included back translation, consultation and collaboration with other people during the translation process and, pre-testing or piloting (for example, the interview cards used in this study) whenever this was possible (Birbili, 2000). During the course of this study I drew on German and Norwegian contacts and friends for their linguistic support (in the preparation of interview cards, questions and during the transcription and translation processes). This violation, in part, of the confidentiality I had promised my participants was a regrettable and yet necessary step I was faced with and one for which I could find no alternative solution.

In all three locations other facets of social location such as age, class, and gender etc might have added to the interviewer effect (Oakley 1981). However I have no way of measuring to what extent this was a significant issue or indeed how this might have impacted on the outcome of my research. I can say that class distinctions tend to dissolve more easily when talking to other foreign nationals because they may not necessarily be able to pick up on the subtle cultural 'clues' that infer a particular class background.

## **Discussion**

As stated earlier, the interview data from these teachers revealed an altogether different picture regarding their experiences of CPD from that gleaned by examining data from the questionnaires. Across all three countries, findings indicated that the experiences of CPD teachers most value are with, and from, their peers in informal groups. CPD for teachers that is intensive and sustained has a greater effect on professional practice than the short snapshot sessions (Alexandrou et al., 2005) that

many of these teachers reported experiencing. Teachers in all three locations in this study identified few opportunities to develop further or apply what they had learnt and many could not see the long-term benefits of many school-based training activities. Whilst expressing satisfaction with some aspects of their experiences of CPD (particularly those associated with external courses designed to enhance pupil examination results), attention was drawn to how 'pointless', 'wasteful' and 'forgettable' many school-based activities were.

The experiences of professional development articulated by the teachers in these three European locations varied to such an extent as to provoke further critical enquiry in relation to teachers' CPD in a wider arena. The complex amalgam, referred to at the start of this chapter, into which teacher professional development is embedded, extends beyond the biographies, identity work and values of teachers. Into this mix one must also add the pressures associated with more economic forms of globalisation and those born from rapid societal transformation. And yet to what extent these pressures determine teachers' CPD in particular (Day and Sachs, 2009) is open to question. It is true that the sweeping European agenda for teachers' CPD (European Commission, 2010a; 2010b; 2011) embraces the three countries this study addresses. However, in most cases, teachers interviewed in this study identified not just a huge variation in their experience of professional development, but confirmed existing literature by registering dissatisfaction with the development they received. According to these teachers, their professional development would appear neither systematic nor particularly successful.

Two European 'one-size-fits-all' agendas are problematic when discussing teacher professional development in Europe. First, the European Education Council's focus on CPD and its determination to increase the provision and variety of formal and informal developmental opportunities is marred by its requirement that education systems provide quality assurance. Not that this requirement is bad in itself, but 'quality' in this sense tends to reflect a belief that good professional development equates to narrow, instrumental concerns over school improvement and pupil outcomes. In effect this overrides teacher agency, teacher need and the softer, more humanistic form of CPD for teachers highlighted in the study. In so doing it ignores, this author believes, the human face of professional development and its place in

increasing teacher motivation and career satisfaction. Second, teacher mobility across all European countries would imply a homogenisation of the teaching profession and a unitary understanding of what constitutes appropriate and desirable CPD. As this small-scale, longitudinal, three-country study clearly indicated, this is far from the heterogeneous reality confronting any teacher seeking employment opportunities across, and in some cases within, national boundaries. Seeking a common understanding of what effective teachers' CPD is, risks jumping to the conclusion that there is a common understanding of what being a teacher is, or indeed losing sight of the fact that teachers are professional learners and not just tools for school improvement.

### **Concluding thoughts**

One might wonder what use a small-scale study such as the one described in this chapter might have when discussing issues related to globalisation, the professional development of teachers and their mobility within and beyond national borders. And yet the microanalysis deployed in this study did enable the drawing of conclusions at the macro-level, with a particular focus on teacher mobility and CPD within the European Union. In so doing this three-country longitudinal comparative study avoided some of the pitfalls of dichotomous assumptions associated with many two-country comparative studies i.e. an overly simplified polarisation of issues based around similarity and difference. The author recognises that drawing conclusions about the nature of CPD for teachers in these countries on the basis of a small number of interviews and questionnaires alone can be problematic. Teachers' recollections, interpretations and explanations of their professional development reveal little about the long-term impact of CPD on their professional practice. Nevertheless the research methods deployed in this study revealed, in all three national locations, the discrepancy between the activities these teachers engaged in and the value they placed on their own professional development.

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