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**Building communities and sharing knowledge: a study into
teachers working together across national boundaries**

Matthew James Underwood
Wolfson College

Supervisor: Dr David Frost

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the types of professional communities that are built when teachers work in initiatives that, in various forms, link them to teachers from other countries. In doing so it explores the types of knowledge that may be exchanged by the building of these communities and the value that teachers put upon these different forms of knowledge. Therefore, this study is situated in the broad theoretical context of discussions related to the building of professional communities but explores this within a specifically international context. The most significant findings that this dissertation identifies are: that the teachers involved built the professional communities that are most important to them in more exploratory ways and with more agency than is suggested by other related research, and in connection to this that those professional communities that the participants attached most significance to were consistently alternative to the immediate workplace. It was also found that whilst the teachers involved in this study problematised the possibility of directly transferring specific classroom strategies, stories about teaching were seen by all to be useful vehicles for exchanging other forms of knowledge, for enabling affirmation and for co-constructing moral purpose. These findings have potential implications for policy and practice as they indicate that structures that focus exclusively on developing communities within schools may need to be enriched by those that provide teachers with the flexibility to discover and build communities in alternative ways too. The primary data collection method used when conducting this research was interview. The participants who were interviewed came from two countries, namely England and Macedonia. This entirely qualitative approach is positioned within an interpretivist paradigm. However, it is argued that contributions to theoretical debates regarding the nature of professional communities can still be made.



Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.



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Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Positioning this study, the International Teacher Leadership initiative	9
Chapter2: Conceptualising professional communities	15
Chapter 3: Conceptualising teachers' knowledge	29
Chapter 4: Conceptualising the challenges of crossing borders	43
Chapter 5: Methodological considerations	61
Chapter 6: Document analysis, the International Teacher Leadership initiative	95
Chapter 7: Perceptions of communities, the teachers from England	109
Chapter 8: Perceptions of communities, the Macedonian teachers	131
Chapter 9: Perceptions of knowledge sharing, the teachers from England	153
Chapter 10: Perceptions of knowledge sharing, the Macedonian teachers	169
Chapter 11: Discussion and contribution to theory	183
Conclusion and implications of the study	199
References	209
Appendix A: interview schedule	227
Appendix B: extracts illustrating the coding process	229



List of Tables and Diagrams

Diagram 4.1	the conceptual framework, iteration one	58
Diagram 6.1	the conceptual framework, iteration two	107
Table 7.1	the process used when analysing the interviews, a summary	110



Introduction

The title of this doctoral dissertation is 'Building communities and sharing knowledge: a study into teachers working together across national boundaries'. Within it I explore the forms of professional identity and the types of professional community that might be built when teachers work within initiatives of various kinds that link them with other teachers across national boundaries. I also explore the types of knowledge that may be exchanged or constructed by the building of such communities and the value that teachers put upon this. The research for this dissertation was conducted within two countries and involved, as participants, teachers from these two countries only, these countries were England and Macedonia.

There is an assumption in some research that the professional community that teachers belong to within their school is particularly significant, simply by virtue of the fact that these teachers work together as colleagues in the same workplace on a daily basis (Harris & Muijs, 2005; Hargreaves, Boyle & Harris, 2014). The corollary of this is that it is therefore assumed that to strengthen or improve the professional experience of teachers and even the quality of any individual's teaching, re-shaping this immediate school community is fundamental. However, whilst accepting the importance of the immediate workplace, I wanted to explore via this study whether teachers build their identity as members of professional communities in a more exploratory way and with more agency than is suggested by research that focuses primarily on the workplace.

My interest in this area of study comes from three routes: I worked as a teacher and senior manager in secondary schools and sixth forms from 1996 until 2013. In this capacity I was involved in several projects run by the British Council connecting teachers from various countries. I was also a case worker for and President of the Cambridgeshire branch of the National Association of School Masters, Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) for several years. Finally, I now work as a lecturer at the University of Northampton. In this role among many other things I work with teachers from other countries who have come to England to study.

Having worked with the British Council in the past and also having participated in such programmes, as a teacher, it became evident to me that working with colleagues from other countries, to the teachers involved, could have a tremendous significance personally and

professionally. My role as a union officer also played a significant part in my personal journey towards being interested in this field of study. On the simplest level, as a case worker, I have often advised involvement in an international networking programme of some kind to teachers who have approached me concerned that they are feeling dis-encharmed or burnt out at a mid-point in their career and this has often been for the teachers involved a re-invigorating and positive experience that has renewed their commitment to the profession. I therefore became interested in finding out quite why this is the case especially as to someone who feels burnt out volunteering for extra hours of unpaid work is perhaps rather counter-intuitive advice.

More significantly to me though as an officer in a teachers' union, I became interested in the nature of the professional community that I and other teachers work within and indeed in the concept of professional communities more broadly in defining a common and mutually supportive identity. The internal democratic structure of unions gives them a legitimacy to speak for the professionals that they claim to represent in a unique way. To this extent the teaching unions can provide a model for how teachers can network together and build a professional community. However, because of the many roles that they have, unions cannot provide, or at least often have not provided, a complete structure for the building of a professional community of teachers. This is because almost always, and rightly so, the emphasis taken by unions is on the basics of pay and conditions, often in a local context, in Maslow's (1943) terms with 'basic' and 'safety' needs.

The roles teachers' unions play in ensuring good working conditions for teachers are vitally important. Indeed, according to Maslow other higher order needs cannot be realised unless these are met. However, this means that unions are poorly placed to ensure the higher order needs of teachers: belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualisation are met, except in helping to provide the conditions whereby other structures can enable them to be so. The structure of unions is also based primarily around the local branch and the majority of issues addressed are local issues. Although this may strengthen the sense of professional community at a local level, this may also only reflect a very limited definition of the ways teachers perceive themselves as belonging to professional communities. When researching for this study, therefore, I was explicitly interested in whether networked and collaborative communities of teachers flourish as well or perhaps better across geographical and cultural boundaries.

Despite the development of closer ties via the internet between teachers, as well as a maintained growth in programmes linking teachers world-wide in the last seven years, since 2010

international networking programmes have been criticised explicitly by the United Kingdom's government. This was another reason why I decided to begin this study. Criticism since 2010 has been reflected in a clearly stated expectation from the United Kingdom's government that any international projects that it funds, within the field of education, in the future must be planned with specific success criteria in mind that are clearly related to school improvement. This discourse emerged very strongly in the years 2010 to 2014, when I began the process of researching towards this dissertation, as it was strongly linked to the process of cutting described in the media as the 'bonfire of the quangos' (Curtis, 2010). This saw funding for the largest organisation, that was funding projects that involved teachers networking internationally, the British Council drastically cut. However, this discourse continues in a more nuanced form into the present day.

These changes in the public discourse, regarding the value placed upon international projects involving teachers, developed into two inter-related perspectives. The result of these was that the government has therefore had a complex relationship with supporting international networking between teachers since 2010. As referred to previously, in the early stages of the coalition government it raised very public concerns regarding the relatively significant amount spent on international networking programmes and what it perceived as the comparably small amount of practice transferred into Britain. This was particularly the case following the release of data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in December 2010.

During this 'bonfire of the quangos' (Curtis, 2010) period the government repeatedly and publicly asked why the United Kingdom spent money flying teachers out to Far Eastern and European countries that perform better according to the Programme for International Student Assessment's criteria yet seemed to have little idea of how to transfer this better practice into British schools (Stewart, 2010). During 2010, especially, it was widely presumed in the British media that the British Council itself, which was the largest organisation involved in creating and supporting international dialogue between teachers, would be entirely abolished (Pearse, 2010). According to this perspective, teachers being enabled and funded by government to merely converse to other teachers across the globe was portrayed as the sort of spending on unnecessary activities that had in part prompted the global recession (Copping, 2011).

This stance was modified in 2013 with the release of another set of results by the Programme for International Student Assessment. This time the government reaction was related in that it still asked why practice was not transferred. However, it was profoundly different in its

conclusions in terms of funding. Instead of rejecting the idea of supporting teachers networking with other teachers internationally, this was now seen as positive as long as it was underpinned by high expectations regarding the direct transfer of practice with the effect of achieving rapidly improving results in national exams and large-scale comparative studies. The most well-known result of this change in policy was the decision to fly sixty Chinese maths teachers to England to develop the quality of maths teaching in English primary schools, which was widely reported in the British press (Gibb, 2015).

Therefore, this dissertation, which explores the nature of the communities that are built and the knowledge that is exchanged when teachers work together across national borders, was written during a period of time when the value of international teacher networking was being framed by government and the media in the context of two rival conservative discourses both related to but differently interpreting the same economic and market driven viewpoints. The first of these portrays such things as unaffordable luxuries in an era of austerity and the second portrays them as essential but only so long as they are linked to concrete and measurable changes such as improved exam results in core subjects. This doctoral study therefore is positioned in a specific time and addresses issues through this lens, as well as addressing these debates more broadly.

The obvious and perhaps easy reaction from someone like me who has spent many years, the bulk of my teaching career, either working within or helping to develop teacher networks in one form or another may be to be defensive and dismiss these perspectives as ideologically or economically driven and likewise with the change of tone from the government in 2013 to worry that this approach is simplistic and unlikely to produce meaningful results. However, if responded to in a reflective way these changes in policy and language provoke questions that are in fact valuable in their own right and these generated the first iteration of my research questions. These initial research questions were then modified and developed through the writing of the first four chapters. However, I place them here as they are illustrative of the starting point of the research journey that I have undertaken when completing this study. The first iteration of my research questions was as follows:

The first iteration of the research questions

- Is it true that relatively little practice is transferred when teachers build networks across countries?

- If this is true does this matter, or are there other equally valid reasons for supporting teachers engaged in professional networking internationally?
- Is there a perception of there being a common international community of teachers and if so is there value simply in supporting and developing this shared sense of belonging?

These evolved through the building of a conceptual framework, the process of which is articulated in this dissertation in Chapters Two to Four. This process led to the writing of the final iteration of the research questions that would go on to drive this study. However, it is questions such as these above that led to my initial interest in exploring this area further. This first iteration of my research questions can be compared here to the final iteration:

The final iteration of the research questions

1. In what ways do teachers perceive themselves as belonging to an international professional community of teachers?
2. How is the way teachers perceive their professional identity shaped by the experience of working with teachers from other countries?
3. Are there any significant obstacles or affordances to teachers perceiving themselves as members of an international professional community of teachers?
4. In what ways do teachers define success when working with colleagues from other countries?

These questions which emerged from the building of the conceptual framework would provide a significant tool for shaping this thesis. They are responded to directly at the end of this dissertation in the conclusion.

As has been discussed in this introduction, in this dissertation I engage in a broad exploration into the potential and limits of building and perceiving a professional community, when teachers are linked together across national boundaries, with this discussion focused through a tightly bounded qualitative research process. The reasoning behind and implications of this approach are discussed in Chapter Five. The forms of connection that are encompassed by initiatives that can be defined as international are explored and critiqued throughout this thesis. However, potentialities include those where teachers work directly with teachers from other countries and those where the international aspect is more nuanced or conceptual, these may

also overlap and interlink. These distinctions are reflected in the lived experiences of the participants and therefore form a significant theme throughout this study.

The context of the study (England and Macedonia)

The sample of participants included only teachers who had primarily worked in two countries Macedonia and England. This choice of countries and other aspects of the sampling process are discussed further in Chapter Five. However, in short this was partly a pragmatic decision based on support I was given by colleagues affiliated to the International Teacher Leadership initiative who facilitated access to the Macedonian participants. The term country is in itself a complex term but in this case it refers to political entities with distinct education systems, based on a self-governing geographical area. Therefore, England is primarily referred to rather than the United Kingdom as both Northern Ireland and Scotland have fully devolved education systems, whilst the Welsh system is partially devolved. The exceptions to this are when referring to research or other writing that draws its boundaries based on the United Kingdom or when the participants used the term United Kingdom or UK in their interviews. Some distinct aspects of the English education system, which help to contextualise this study, are referred to in Chapter Four and in the next paragraph I briefly introduce the specific context of Macedonia. This short initial contextualisation of Macedonia is also expanded upon in Chapter Four.

Macedonia in its current form is one of the newest and poorest countries in Europe. Specifically it re-emerged as a state, from the events that saw the collapse of Yugoslavia. It declared its independence in 1991, and although it had a relatively peripheral role in the wars that facilitated the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, it still saw significant social upheaval. In terms of its education system: Macedonia is highly dependent on foreign aid and intervention (Westrick, 2013). This has led to current and ongoing debates over the relevance of importing educational practices from more developed countries with different cultures (Joshevska & Kirandziska, 2017). There is a single state education system, which is comprehensive. However, the range of differences between schools in Macedonia is still very broad. There are significant differences between schools, with some rural schools being among the least resourced in Europe and other schools in Skopje and Bitola, two urban centres with relatively successful micro-economies, that are academically successful and reasonably well resourced (Westrick,

2013). There is also a private schooling sector in these cities that defines itself as internationally minded and is linked to other schools worldwide through the International Baccalaureate programmes.



Chapter 1

Positioning the Study: the International Teacher Leadership initiative

In this chapter I provide an overview of key aspects of the International Teacher Leadership (ITL) initiative. This has been placed at the start of this thesis in order to provide context for the study. This is because the sample group of participants consisted entirely of teachers who had engaged in international networking via iterations of the International Teacher Leadership initiative. The International Teacher Leadership (ITL) initiative started as an initiative based at the University of Cambridge in 2008. It grew from work of a similar nature that was already being done at the time, within England, via the HertsCam Network. This was an established programme based in Hertfordshire and at the time run in partnership with the University of Cambridge. The HertsCam Network is now run as an entirely self-governing entity. The emergence from this of an international aspect was in response to interest shown by researchers and practitioners in a number of European countries (Wearing, 2011). The majority of countries involved in the International Teacher Leadership initiative and in developing iterations of this initiative within their own borders are Balkan countries, although teachers from some other countries including Portugal and Egypt have also been involved (Frost, 2014). The reasons why this study was focused specifically on England and Macedonia are explored further in Chapters Four and Five. Documents produced from within this initiative are discussed further in greater depth in Chapter Six.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section I provide an overview of the structure of the initiative. In the second I discuss those aspects of the initiative that are distinct from other approaches that involve teachers networking across national boundaries or engaging in teacher research.

The International Teacher Leadership initiative

The International Teacher Leadership initiative is a networked initiative, it is brought together regularly by conferences at which ideas and vision are shared. It is also brought together by the process of joint and shared publication. However, each iteration of the initiative is locally run,

and linked primarily with others by a shared vision and through the use of tools and approaches, which are common to all iterations (Creaby, 2013). The overall vision and the tools that are used have the flexibility to be embedded and used within the context of other projects. As an example a teacher in Macedonia engaging in a community inspired by the teacher leadership initiative, may focus their development, leadership and writing on the work they may also be doing as part of projects run by a variety of non-governmental organisations and funded by various bodies, such as potentially USAID. One example of this is a project called 'Readers are Leaders'. This is a large project based in Macedonia and referred to later in Chapters Eight and Ten by some of the interviewees. This may be the case in other countries and contexts too. This complexity was reflected by teachers in their interviews, who used different terms, for the projects they were engaging with, in a flexible way. It is therefore also hard to define a precise number of teachers engaged with International Teacher Leadership initiatives because teachers may be involved in locally generated initiatives and only at the periphery of the international aspect or the aspect of publication in English.

There are though some central commonalities within the International Teacher Leadership approach, that are significant in their own right and that also enabled the participants involved in this study to identify themselves as part of a larger international initiative. These in summary are as follows: firstly, the sharing of moral purpose with other teachers and fellow professionals in education via regular meetings with teachers also engaging in international teacher leadership. This then enables the creation of a community in which the members identify themselves as being part of a process of teacher leadership. Secondly, the design and completion of a development project or projects, linked to those of others but reflecting that individual teacher's values, needs and vision for leading change in their workplace. Finally, it includes a process of dialogue and communication of this knowledge to other teachers in other schools and other professionals working in education (Frost, 2012). This framework is supported by tools developed to facilitate this. However, each iteration of teacher leadership also develops and builds on these.

The International Teacher Leadership vision

In order to present an initial contextualisation of the vision of the International Teacher Leadership initiative I start by presenting a single extended quotation. This is the aims of the

International Teacher Leadership initiative as defined by Frost in 2011 (Frost, 2011). I chose this quotation because of its clarity in articulating the values behind this initiative at a relatively early stage in its development. This list of initial aims, as they were outlined in 2011, is illustrative of the overarching philosophy of the International Teacher Leadership initiative. I present them here before discussing their significance:

- to establish programmes of support for teacher leadership appropriate to a range of different cultural / national settings and responsive to the particular challenges that arise in those settings;
- to explore how the development of teachers' professional identity and their modes of professionalism can contribute to educational reform in a variety of cultural / national contexts;
- to create and/or enhance knowledge networks for teachers;
- to create and/or enhance a network of experts (academics, local government staff, NGO [non-governmental organisation] staff, policy activists, experienced teachers and school principals) who can continue to provide support for teacher and school development;
- to promote and foster inclusive educational practices;
- to contribute to the development of democratic civil society. Sharing strategies and reflecting on teaching (Frost, 2011, p.4).

As can be seen from these aims above, the vision of the International Teacher Leadership initiative is wide-ranging and ambitious. The aims while comparable in some senses to other projects involving teachers in research into their own practice are also more than simply an articulation of a methodological stance (Frost, 2011). Indeed, one distinct aspect of the International Teacher Leadership initiative is the creation of a distinct paradigm defined in its own terms. This includes a rejection of using language from academia such as research and dissemination, and replacing these with alternative terminology that empowers teachers and also re-imagines the nature of the process teachers undergo when co-constructing knowledge from practice (Woods, Roberts & Chivers, 2016).

The nature of the teacher leadership that is defined within the International Teacher Leadership initiative has three distinct aspects that distinguish it from other models that frame themselves within the language of research. One of these is the aspect of co-constructing knowledge that builds from the practice of teachers and is framed within the context of teacher led development work. The second aspect is an emphasis on understanding the nature of the communities that teachers build and thus enabling the further development of such communities. The third is regarding the building of civic society and the impact teachers as professionals can have upon this process (Miljević, Herbert & Ball, 2014). These aspects and goals of teacher leadership

respond and develop from each other in an interlinked way (Frost, 2011). The communities that are built grow from the confidence in co-constructing knowledge; whilst the goal of democratic change and building civic society feeds in an iterative way from the building of communities (Frost, 2014).

The first aim, quoted above, of establishing a programme of support for teacher leadership, ‘appropriate to a range of different cultural and national settings’ and that involves co-constructing knowledge through teacher led development (Frost, 2011, p.4) is not that different from other action research or teacher research models that involve university based academics working with schools in England or internationally to facilitate teachers to conduct practice based research. However, as these aims progress the distinctions become clearer. The next aim of ‘exploring teachers’ professional identity and professionalism’, moves this from a research based or reflective model useful for developing classroom strategies to a strategic model that has goals that move beyond the classroom towards building confidence and self-efficacy among teachers, in order to give them the ability to engage in leadership regardless of positionality (Čelebičić & Vranješević, 2013). One aim of the International Teacher Leadership initiative is to cultivate a form of professionalism that leads each individual teacher into being a creator of professional knowledge through inquiry, development work and networking. It is also emphasised that this will diminish the reliance of teachers on outside experts (Creaby, 2013; Woods, Roberts & Chivers, 2016).

The emphasis in both these first two aims regarding responsiveness to cultural and national contexts meanwhile illustrates how there is expected to be considerable flexibility within the thinking of those involved, regarding finding appropriate strategies of both leadership and teaching (Joshevska, 2016). Although the significance of teachers sharing knowledge is central to the International Teacher Leadership initiative, there is not a narrow attempt in writing produced from within this initiative to limit this entirely to sharing specific classroom strategies. The international teacher leadership model therefore presents a potential route to challenging problems associated with the dominance of more developed nations that can be contained in models that see Western answers as likely to be superior (Ramahi, 2015). This is discussed further in Chapter Four. Exploring the extent to which this would be reflected in the teachers’ interviews would help shape the analytical process when engaging with the interview data.

The four final aims explicitly refer to a networked community which can build and facilitate developments within schools and then link this directly to developing civic society, inclusive schools and democratic participation (Frost, 2011). This list of aims, whilst articulating a set of beliefs which is both far reaching and has internal clarity, also contains within it implied challenges and provocations towards positional models of leadership and to centralised education systems, which disempower teachers (Bangs & Frost, 2011). This is embedded within the process of the teachers' work that underpins their development projects. However, the facilitation of leadership in turn means the impact of these initiatives reaches beyond individual classrooms to begin to address goals that are civic or political in nature and that explore the nature of the community that is being built ((Vranješević & Čelebičić, 2014; Ramahi, 2015).

The International Teacher Leadership approach emphasises the following dimensions of teacher leadership: being a member of a professional community rather than simply a teacher engaged in a process of entirely self-development; engaging in innovation rather than complying with prescription from above, and the professional confidence to be guided by moral purpose rather than by standards, rules and externally defined deficits (Frost, 2015). These dimensions are in turn articulated through social processes that lead to individual teachers being creators and leaders of professional knowledge through inquiry, development work and networking rather than relying on initial training and continuous updating provided by expert outsiders (Miljević, Herbert & Ball, 2014). The International Teacher Leadership initiative emphasises the building of knowledge via collective processes, which in turn leads to broader societal impact (Woods, Roberts & Chivers, 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter the framework within which teacher led development work takes place within the International Teacher Leadership initiative is distinct. The approach shares some common characteristics with a range of action research and practitioner research models. However, it is distinct from these because at the point the research is completed with these other methodologies further choices in terms of dissemination are not as clearly defined but tend to be left to the teacher or left unexplored. In contrast to this the International Teacher Leadership approach by defining the structured knowledge creation of teachers as development

rather than research, involves the building of professional communities as well as the creation of knowledge.

In terms of the sharing and building of knowledge, the emphasis within the International Teacher Leadership initiative regarding co-construction enables flexibility and dialogue as regards the way that knowledge is interpreted and implemented. However, the exact form of the knowledge that is shared is left open to the decision of the teachers involved as is their reason for sharing knowledge both as a presenter and listener. One goal is to generate knowledge that can facilitate change through a process which stresses non-positional leadership, whilst another goal is the creation of a networked community. This networked community is such that it can enable improvement at classroom and school level and also in terms of developing civic society and democratic participation. The International Teacher Leadership approach therefore contains within it implied challenges and provocations towards positional models of leadership and to centralised education systems. It also presents a potential resolution to the risks of dominance by more developed countries. These themes are expanded upon in the following three chapters in the context of research and writing produced in contexts other than that of the International Teacher Leadership initiative. They are returned to throughout this dissertation and explored in more depth via documents produced within the context of International Teacher Leadership initiatives in Chapter Six.

Chapter 2

Conceptualising professional communities

This chapter is one of a group of three that together form the first substantive part of this dissertation. The purpose of these three chapters is to provide a framework for the entire study. Following from the writing of these chapters the research questions were also refined into their final form and these are included at the end of Chapter Four along with a diagram that illustrates the conceptual framework that was built, in a summative form.

This chapter and the next address in turn one substantive over-arching theme each, regarding the conceptual framework that underpinned this study. This first chapter, in this series, explores the nature of professional communities. The next chapter explores the nature of professional knowledge and ways in which this might be shared. The final chapter of this set of three is different in structure and function as it addresses issues around exchanging knowledge and building communities between different countries and across different cultures. In it I specifically look at the cultural, political and pragmatic issues that may emerge when teachers from different countries work together, especially when they come from countries with different cultures, educational values and in different economic circumstances.

There are a range of over-lapping definitions of what a professional community is (Lomos, Hofman & Bosker, 2011) that inform the development of this framework. Wenger's theoretical model of 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015) is discussed several times in this chapter and whether it is a meaningful and appropriate model with which to understand the communities that teachers specifically belong to is addressed. This is because this communities of practice model, which encompasses professional communities as well as other forms of community, has significantly influenced almost all subsequent model building in this area since 1998 (Heng, 2015). However, I also explain in the conclusion to this chapter why I did not draw the conceptual boundaries of this dissertation around the specific model of communities of practice alone but rather used this in conjunction with other perspectives to inform the development of a broader framework.

Another significant term used by several writers when exploring the nature and potential of professional communities is 'professional learning communities' (Harris & Muijs, 2005; Hord

& Sommers, 2008) and this term is often used in conjunction with the term communities of practice when defining professional communities. The relevance and challenges posed by definitions of this term, when building the conceptual framework for this dissertation, are also explored further in this chapter. Embedded within each section of this chapter is also a discussion of the ways in which conceptualising oneself as a member of a professional community may present challenges and also the difficulties faced when trying to create and sustain professional communities. Research that defines teaching as an isolated or individualistic profession is also explored.

This chapter is divided into five sections. This is to enable a logical progression through concepts and debates that are then used as analytical tools throughout this dissertation. I begin with the potential identity of individual members of a professional community, I then conceptualise the boundaries of such communities. Then I discuss the challenges posed by recognising community membership and by research that suggests that teaching is an inherently individualistic profession. In a final section I look forward to the next two chapters on knowledge sharing and on crossing national boundaries, identifying areas of overlap and connection. The five sections in this chapter are therefore titled:

- identity within a professional community.
- conceptualising community boundaries
- conceptualising community membership
- conceptualising individuality
- knowledge sharing and crossing boundaries

Identity within a professional community

Two widely accepted concepts that frame professional identity are that: identity within a professional context is self-perception as built under the influence of the specific environment that we work within and relatedly that professional identity is by definition socially constructed and must exist within a social context, usually a workplace (Pillen, Den Brok & Beijgaard, 2013). This makes professional identity distinct from identity as it is built in other contexts, as in these contexts it can potentially be self-constructed in isolation (Chalari, 2017). Professional identity is also directly related to a historical socially built identity. In short we define ourselves

as professionals both in terms of a socially created identity within the present moment in time and also in terms of a socially built identity the narrative of which interacts with others in evidenceable and tangible ways over a length of time (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). These are specifically: the length of our professional career as a whole and the time we have been in a single workplace but may include a longer timespan than this.

The significance of both social interaction and personal history in building professional identity are present in the model of 'communities of practice'. However, they did not originate with this model, indeed Wenger himself explicitly describes how other theoretical approaches influenced him in this regard (Eckert & Wenger, 2005). This illustrates how different models of professional communities are simultaneously contested and over-lapping. If the social and personal-historical nature of professional identity is accepted and, as discussed above, in a professional context at least it broadly is, by a wide range of writers, then a corollary of this is that the behaviour of others within a social context can challenge or strengthen our identity and our self-efficacy (Chalari, 2017). A negative response could be that teachers may retreat into rejection of the community that they are working within (Leeferink, Koopman, Beijgaard, et al., 2015), whilst an alternative positive response could be to find this community to be affirming and to find that membership of this community enables them to assert and define themselves in positive ways (Stanley, 2012).

In relation to this whether a teacher's professional values and beliefs are compatible with the community that they are functioning within also plays a key role in the formation of professional identity (Tseng & Kuo, 2014). Professional identity, as defined above, as being self-perception as built within a specific environment, also changes over time and is in a constant process of re-structuring (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). It is, according to such a definition, heavily dependent on the nature of the social interactions which take place within the context of the professional community that one is working within (Rots, Kelchtermans & Aelterman, 2012), if this context changes, then the level of self-efficacy we feel and thus our professional identity can change too (Slay & Smith, 2011).

This model explored in the definition above fits closely with models of communities of practice, which explore and define specific attributes of workplace communities that share learning. Within a community of practice, the newer members move via legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015) towards a more central role. Once there they find themselves in a position of comfort, status and self-efficacy (Kubiak et al.,

2015). They reach a steady state, where their primary role is in defining knowledge within that community and in developing others (Hart et al., 2013). However, this seems to be an incomplete model for describing the professional journey of teachers. Therefore, in this study I wanted to explore whether from this position of integration within the heart of a localised community, teachers then seek further challenges and begin to participate in related but alternative communities with which they begin to identify with in more exploratory ways. These include ways that may present more potential risks. However, because they have the security of belonging to this initial community these risks could perhaps be less problematic than someone moving into an initial community from a position of being a peripheral participant.

In relation to this there is also an assumption in some research, that is not framed within the model of communities of practice, that teachers simply find themselves working within a less conducive or more conducive community (Fullan, 2016). This is based on the nature of the community that exists within the workplace that they find themselves within. I use the phrase, find themselves within, as although teachers do exercise a degree of agency and choice when finding work, for pragmatic reasons, the exact school that a teacher is working in is usually to a large extent also decided by a range of factors other than a prior perception of the nature of this community (Findlay, 2006). Thereby to follow this through, whether a teacher is working in a more or less conducive community which builds their self-efficacy would be partly or largely a matter of chance.

One way in which the importance of the immediate and current workplace community is perceived in a more critical way is by acknowledging the continuing and parallel significance of what can be defined as ‘memorable’ communities (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). These are typically defined as communities people were active in and which held particular significance at that time but which although the individual no longer places in a position of current significance still builds resilience and helps them to retain self-efficacy (Agrifoglio, 2015). People according to this conceptualisation perceive this community as playing an important part of their professional identity but the community itself needs new members and a renewed focus to be re-invigorated. This is an important concept but it was not clear whether this would adequately account for the relationship teachers may have with former colleagues as within these definitions these communities although still significant become increasingly peripheral. An alternative perspective builds upon this model by placing greater significance

on those communities that were significant in people's pasts by defining them as personal historic rather than memorable, thus implying an active membership given current and continuing impetus in shaping practice by its role in a person's ongoing interpretation of their personal history (Cin & Walker, 2013).

Exploring whether these models of the nature of identity within a community are nuanced enough to explain the communities that may be built by teachers working across international boundaries is a significant aspect of this dissertation. In this study I explore whether teachers build their identity in an exploratory and pro-active way whereby they deliberately seek and create conducive communities. If this is the case then this would mean that they are not as influenced by the whim of chance, in terms of the communities that are most significant to them, as models of professional communities often suggest. This process of finding and identifying with other alternative communities may be because the immediate community that the teacher finds themselves in is less conducive than they would like or because it has ceased to engage them fully so that they are looking for new ideas or experiences. These possibilities are returned to and explored further throughout this study.

Conceptualising community boundaries

As I have discussed in the previous section, this study involves an exploration into the forms of community that are developed via teachers engaging with other teachers across national boundaries. International engagement may possibly be a way that teachers find to square the circle of building a professional community when they may usually work within structures that can promote isolation and competition (Schlichte, Yssel & Merbler, 2005). The fact that, such relationships are built away and aside from the conventional structure of the institution teachers work in, may be the strength of building relationships with colleagues internationally. Therefore, in order to build a framework that could enable me to explore this, in this section I discuss whether professional communities may be defined by boundaries other than the immediate work place and also the challenges that may be posed when defining the boundaries of a community in alternative ways.

One significant aspect of communities of practice models is that they suggest that the boundaries of a community may be broader than those of a formally created community such as a single employer (Chigona, 2013). A community of practice is often instead portrayed as

consisting of a community of people that share practice and mutual recognition of each other as members (Cashman et al., 2015), whilst practice in this context consists of a repertoire of knowledge, skills and meanings that are both personally owned and co-created (Hart et al., 2013). Thus in the creation of practice a community is built and community and practice are also continually re-enforced. This thereby creates an on-going relationship between practice, community and identity (Harden & Loving, 2015). The boundaries of a community of practice therefore may be defined by shared knowledge of practice and recognition of such rather than proximity within a workplace, although the process of recognition still involves interaction of some kind. The significance of recognition of and by other members and possible obstacles to this are explored further in the section on community membership that follows this one.

A further contested area that relates to the discussion above, is the degree of self-efficacy that membership of a professional community may potentially help confer on others (Gleeson & Tait, 2012). This has been discussed earlier in terms of identity. However, it is also relevant to boundary creation as the value different communities are perceived to have, can change how people choose to shape their role in them. It is often assumed that perceived membership of a professional community would be a positive experience for community members and that working in isolation does not provide the audience of peers that is needed to affirm oneself as having professional knowledge (Stoll & Louis, 2007). This would fit with definitions of a community of practice that see the opportunity to engage in performance of one's professional skills before knowledgeable peers as vital in terms of acquiring an identity as a member of a professional community (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). However, it may also be that enforced collegiality could potentially damage an individual's self-efficacy, if that person had difficulty engaging with the values of that group or did not feel that their knowledge and expertise as a professional were being recognised (Orr, 2012).

If both these statements in the paragraph above are true: that community membership can increase teachers' self-efficacy but that some workplace communities are far from conducive environments for this to happen, it may be that working together collegially within a loose structure away from the normal structures of a school may enhance teachers' collective-efficacy without containing the same potential threats to teachers' individual self-efficacy (Skaalvik, & Skaalvik, 2007). In relation to this it may also be that the element of choice and control regarding the depth of commitment to a perceived international community of teachers is a positive element in comparison to a workplace community, which by necessity one has to visit

every day (Chigona, 2013). Such relationships may enable the teacher who has chosen for valid ethical and professional reasons to tread a more individualistic path within an institution to build collegiality within another aspect of their professional life. It may equally enable those teachers who do not define themselves in individualistic ways but for whom the structures they work within promote isolation to perceive themselves as part of a community that they value and that they perceive to value them (Wallace & Hoyle, 2012).

Within the community of practice model, practice is seen to be developed and meaning created within the social context of a community of professionals who create a boundary of distinction between themselves and others (Kubiak et al., 2015). Therefore, in the creation and sustaining of a community, a boundary is created which includes those with whom members perceive practice and the reification of practice to be shared and which excludes those where they perceive this not to be the case. This typically involves excluding those within the same field but who have different professional roles or who hold positions of formally structured authority. This is illustrated by Wenger's extended exploration into the boundaries built by claims processors in his seminal case study (Wenger, 1998). He constructed this model within the context of claims processing and positioned those outside the boundaries of the community of practice in this particular example as: medical professionals, managers, and others. It can be presumed that perhaps for teachers, those working in education outside the classroom including academics, union officials and those in management positions including principals would be characterised as similarly being outside this boundary of community membership.

Other writers also state that similar boundary creation is vital if a professional community is to be perceived at all (Hart et al., 2013). Indeed within these models without the identification of boundaries that define membership a community cannot exist as for there to be a community there must by definition also be those who sit outside it (Stoll & Louis, 2007). This therefore presents a significant challenge to the deliberate creation and maintenance of communities among teachers. These other professionals, who are positioned outside the community boundaries, may well be the very people who desire for entirely valid reasons to create and manage professional communities among teachers. Yet for those who are perceived as having this position of otherness, attempting to formally structure a professional community, engaged positively with each other, within the context of an organisation can potentially negate the existence of such a community or, if not this, then a formally created and titled 'community of practice' or 'professional learning community' could potentially sit irrelevantly outside the

workings of the actual workplace community that already exists.

This problem could potentially be addressed by developing approaches that involve positional leaders creating space in which valued communities can emerge and non-positional leadership be facilitated (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner 2015). However, this could be challenging if the communities that emerge sit within an already tightly and formally structured entity, such as a workplace (Hoyle & Wallace, 2009). Again this insight into the nature of professional communities is not unique to the communities of practice model. It is also present within explorations into the risks of contrived collegiality (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009) and within the significance of non-positionality in Frost's (2015) definition of teacher leadership.

In this dissertation I therefore explore whether locally defined boundaries are constructed by teachers and inhibit the recognition of an international community. I also discuss whether other alternative boundaries are created by teachers who perceive themselves as belonging to an international community and what the significance of these are for those who belong to such communities and also for those who wish to see such communities built and recognised. In the next section I expand upon these issues by looking at another related aspect of this discussion, which is recognition of community membership.

Conceptualising community membership

It may be the case that when teachers from different countries are not working within the same bounded conditions in terms of a workplace or country that this enables the fluidity needed to allow the development of a community that teachers value and recognise. If this is the case then a lack of structure and proximity may actually be of benefit in terms of sustaining such a community. However, a community defined along such lines potentially presents further challenges in terms of developing and sustaining its existence in the face of such a widely dispersed and amorphous membership. Different types of professional community are defined by different forms of membership from very tightly defined groups working closely together such as teachers developing lessons together in the Japanese system of lesson study (Saito & Atencio, 2015) to much more loosely bonded groups such as a perceived international community of teachers, perhaps linked in a given teacher's perception by a project in some way, or other extrinsic motivator (Huang, 2010). Each of these differing membership structures potentially creates further challenges to its development and sustained existence. These issues

are discussed in the paragraphs below.

One issue faced by the more tightly knit form of community is that there may be tension between the building of community and valuing individualism (Takayama, 2010). In relation to this some good teachers define themselves in individual terms (Pedder & Opfer, 2013). This is discussed further in the next section. On the other hand, the potential membership of an international community of teachers is so large and amorphous that it cannot perhaps be perceived as a community at all. One challenge for such a community therefore lies in defining and acknowledging its role and relevance in teachers' professional lives. It may be that crossing national boundaries in working with colleagues could be a significant part of a teacher's personal and professional narrative but that while it is a social process it may primarily be a personal and idiographic experience. Interaction in this context may become part of a private story of difference rather than of belonging to a community in which we feel valued and which we conform closely to (Reicher, 2004). We all also belong to communities that we can be characterised as belonging to but that we don't at any given moment use in building our identity (Avidov-Ungar, 2016). However, the recognition of such membership may also be a positive moment in teachers' own personal and professional narratives.

In building this conceptual framework it therefore emerged that it would be possible that teachers may perceive themselves as members of a broadly defined professional community of teachers but that their awareness of this may not impact on their professional identity or self-efficacy. It may be a factual membership rather than an affective membership, interpreted into their identity. As an analogy, research into the relevance of union membership for teachers (Popiel, 2013) indicates that there are teachers who identify as political activists and for whom such membership is an active form of self-identification. However, there are many others for whom it can be defined as a known fact but one that has no impact on their self-perception (Popiel, 2013). Other studies indicate that part of the experience of engaging with teachers in larger more loosely defined professional communities, including teachers from other countries, may be a realisation of the existence of such a community (Paik et al., 2015). In this case the existence of one's membership of the community is something people only become aware of when it is revealed to them but which once this is done starts to gain significance for them (Teleshaliyev, 2014).

If this were to be the case with teachers working with other teachers across boundaries the nature of the problem in sustaining such a community, unlike with smaller more narrowly

defined groups, does not lie in creating or managing it but rather lies in creating opportunities for recognising its existence. However, it may equally be the case that only a relatively small number of teachers would wish to define themselves in this way. For others belonging to such larger more loosely structured communities may simply have little relevance for them, even if they acknowledge their membership at all (Pedder & Opfer, 2013). Therefore, a potentially internationally orientated community of teachers may be self-sustaining but have difficulty growing and have little impact outside the teachers' own classrooms (Huang, 2010).

Conceptualising individuality

For a prolonged period spanning more than two decades, in England, emphasis has been placed upon teachers to work collegially and to build professional communities (Hargreaves, 1991; Hargreaves, Boyle & Harris, 2014). This has been linked directly to enabling school improvement. It has come from a wide range of sources including in England the highly influential National College for Teaching and Leadership (Glatter, 2014) and it has been reflected in model building that emphasises that professional communities, should ideally be professional learning communities (Harris & Muijs 2005; Hord & Sommers, 2008). Positives commonly associated with learning collegially include that it has the potential to take teaching beyond the need for dependence on outside experts while ensuring that it becomes more than a personal and idiosyncratic process (Datnow, 2011). Many educational cultures in other countries also emphasise the positive aspects of processes that break down teacher isolation. This has often been over an even longer timespan (Winch, Oancea, & Orchard, 2015). One clear example from outside England is the process of lesson-study in Japan whereby teachers observe the same lesson repeatedly as taught by each other, continually honing and refining it. However, there is evidence that when this has been enforced practice it is unpopular and creates stress (Yorimitsu et al., 2014).

Even if perceived as a positive, this idealisation of collegial working described above is not consistently enabled by the reality of teachers' working lives in many countries. In terms of sharing knowledge by observing, this is for most teachers a relatively rare experience. In many countries including both England and Macedonia, which form the focus of this study, teachers are frequently observed in their earliest training years but even in this circumstance beyond the earliest stages of training rarely teach together. After this initial period, teaching is an unusually

isolated profession with teachers working alone in individual classrooms, typically observed just once a year or at most a handful of times (Pedder & Opfer, 2013). Whilst it is true that schools internally and in conjunction with universities often create some opportunities for peer observation or other shared learning experiences, these are likely to form a very small proportion of any teacher's professional working year and only impact on a small minority of teachers (White, 2013). Therefore, the experiential aspect of a teacher's professional learning and identity building happens as much in isolation as it does collegially (Taber, 2009).

As well as these structural limitations, there are also further conceptual limitations to the possibility of teachers building knowledge collegially. The complex nature of teachers' knowledge means that it is not necessarily the case that this knowledge can be easily shared with others (Guzman, 2009). This reflects tensions that are present within the potentially prescriptive nature of the term 'professional learning communities' and was a significant reason why I did not use it exclusively when building the conceptual framework. This term potentially implies that professional communities should emphasise learning if they are to have value. Professional learning communities also tend to be defined within relatively narrow geographical boundaries, a school or a group of schools, and tend to be focused towards agreed and shared goals. Models of professional learning communities typically put emphasis on processes such as peer observation (Dogan, Pringle & Mesa, 2016). Giving such models pre-eminence in building this conceptual framework, would have inserted a degree of inflexibility into this study, as communities that are perceived to have value by teachers might not necessarily have these characteristics. By conducting this study I wanted to discover whether teachers perceive learning to be at the heart of professional communities and if so I wanted to discover what forms of knowledge may be learnt or exchanged. This is discussed in more depth in the next chapter, Chapter Three.

There is considerable evidence though to suggest that those teachers who embrace collegiality most strongly are often most resilient (Baker-Doyle et al., 2012). Teachers for example, even when developing a strong individual identity may simultaneously find it helpful to share stories about the process of teaching, which then might help to fuse an individualistic experience into a collective process (Lingard, 2009; Biesta, 2012). It may well be the case that teachers want to establish themselves as individuals within their own space of the classroom, to have a self-perception of efficacy and also want to build positive collegial relationships. It is also possible that membership of a professional community enhances practice on an individual level even if

practice isn't directly copied. These issues around the nature of knowledge sharing between teachers are explored further in the next chapter. Therefore, even if it is accepted that teaching is at least partially an isolated and individualistic profession, studying the dynamics of the professional communities that teachers perceive themselves as belonging to is still potentially valid. Research into the perceived nature of these communities could perhaps also yield the kind of knowledge that empowers individuals (Hoyle & Wallace 2009; Fullan 2016).

Knowledge sharing and crossing cultures

In the next two concept framework chapters I discuss issues of knowledge sharing and crossing geographical boundaries. This final section to this first chapter therefore links this chapter to Chapter Three and Chapter Four, identifying some common and overlapping themes.

As I have discussed in the previous sections: although it is possible that a degree of fluidity and a lack of proximity may enable the effective development of a certain type of professional community, developing and sustaining professional communities over distance presents other specific challenges. One key aspect of the community of practice model is that of shared engagement in common tasks through which meaning is built and defined and the community itself is created. Practice in this sense is not an abstract concept but refers to concrete ways of doing things that are created and negotiated by the members of the community in relationship with each other over a long period (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Hargreaves although using different language developed very similar ideas in his seminal article on a 'knowledge creating school' (1999).

In terms of the existence of an international community of teachers there may be mutual engagement in practice, which would imply learning or developing teaching strategies. However, it may be that, as well as inevitably relatively infrequent contact, this degree of commonality is not present. It may be that the wider conditions in which teaching takes place such as: the policies imposed by government, and practical issues such as class size and the layout of the school mean that there is relatively little potential for engagement in the detail of classroom strategies (Manzon, 2014). This presents a series of challenges in terms of developing or recognising a professional community, as the creation of shared meaning may not be possible. This shared meaning may best be built within a context of geographical proximity or even a single workplace rather than across distance.

In relation to this, people usually belong to more than one professional community at any given time, including both locally based communities and more disparate ones (Nishino, 2012), not all of which have value in a teachers' professional life. The local community may well be the one that teachers identify with most strongly and may be the one where practice and meaning are most deeply shared (Kinman, Wray & Strange, 2011). However, the professional gains in terms of improvement in practice or affirmation may also be potentially limiting and narrow. On the other hand engagement with a larger international community may potentially break the inherent limitations of the local (Lee, 2011). Affirmation and imagination may have a greater role and it may be these rather than practice that can be sustained and developed in this context. Envisaging a larger community with a broader vision may potentially empower teachers to perceive themselves as part of a community that exists beyond those that they are directly involved with on a day to day basis and to value themselves and their professional role more.

If the international community of teachers is perceived as a community of empowerment or affirmation rather than of practice then the relatively infrequent contact or, the often commented on, failure to directly transfer practice become less significant issues. To this extent it is also possible that exactly who we build a relationship with also becomes less important. The particular teachers from other countries may be more significant as representatives of a broader community enabling teachers to envision their own place and value rather than as specific individuals with specific practice to share or meanings to co-create (Paik et al., 2015). These 'boundary encounters' (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015) between those distinct enough in their professional context to challenge our personal meanings but related enough in their professional role to make this challenge comprehensible, can perhaps have an impact on defining our own professional identity. However, this may be without necessarily leading to the building of a community of practice (Paik et al., 2015).

In conclusion to this section, the challenges presented in developing and sustaining different types of professional community vary enormously depending on the type of community being referred to: local or distant, small or large, created for a specific purpose or naturally occurring. In terms of an international community of teachers it is possible that rather than a community of practice it could be a community of shared affirmation that can be recognised, developed, and sustained. In which case the definitions of success, the significance of different activities and the role this community plays in people's working lives would be significantly different as

would the challenges involved in sustaining and developing it. The strength of such a community may not be that meanings are shared but rather that personal meanings are reflected upon and clarified in an independent way. The process of sharing knowledge and debates regarding what forms of knowledge may be shared are addressed in the following chapter.

Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter, it seems that the importance of building one's professional identity through social interaction with peers engaged in the same profession is present across a range of research into the nature of the professional communities that teachers and other professionals build and it is a particularly strong theme in models of communities of practice. However, the nature of teaching as a profession problematises this. The structure of schools promotes isolation, whilst teaching knowledge is often personal and idiographic. The risks of contrived collegiality and the importance of enabling teachers to have agency in the formation of communities, in order to counter-act this has been identified in research crossing a twenty five year period (Hargreaves, 1991; Frost 2015). It therefore may be that the school as a workplace is not one that can be expected to necessarily have a particular primacy for teachers. It may instead be the case that teachers seek out communities that empower them and which build their self-efficacy.

The boundaries that may be built in order to define such communities of teachers may be distinct from the tangible barriers of the workplace community. It is also possible that an international community of teachers may be primarily a community of affirmation rather than of practice or if it is one of practice that the knowledge shared may not be mechanistic and may be present in ways that enable teachers to interpret and utilise it more fluidly. These debates regarding the sharing of knowledge that have been touched upon here are explored in more detail in the next chapter. In this I address the nature of the knowledge exchanged by teachers. I also address the ways this impacts upon the types of networks that cross distances, including the possible benefits of perceiving oneself as belonging to a variety of communities with looser or tighter structures.

Chapter 3

Conceptualising teachers' knowledge

In this chapter I discuss competing definitions of professional knowledge and also issues around the sharing or co-construction of this knowledge. I conceptualise these here because these are returned to when analysing the teachers' interviews later. These concepts are fundamental to understanding the nature of the communities that teachers perceive themselves as belonging to. I start by discussing debates regarding how professional knowledge is currently defined in England. I also link this to similar trends in Macedonia. This is by necessity a discussion that is interweaved with a brief history of policy changes in terms of the training of teachers and the introduction of teaching standards. This is because defining professional knowledge is a negotiated and contested process, which occurs in a public and political arena as much as it does in a professional context. Teachers define themselves as professionals but they also have definitions of professional knowledge and of professionalism imposed upon them externally. These definitions have the potential to become widely accepted in public discourse. In the second section I then discuss different theoretical models for the professional knowledge that teachers possess. In the third section I discuss issues of knowledge sharing or co-construction and what types of knowledge may be built by teachers. In the final section I explore the nature of the networks that may underpin a professional community that is engaged in sharing knowledge and I also link together several common themes that have run through Chapters Two and Three. This final section involves a discussion into the impact of developments in social media in terms of knowledge sharing and community building, and ways in which research into this supports or challenges more established theoretical models. The sections have been given the following titles:

- positioning codified knowledge
- conceptualising teachers' knowledge
- sharing and co-constructing knowledge
- conceptualising knowledge networks

Positioning codified knowledge

In these first few paragraphs I discuss ways in which the knowledge of teachers has been defined in a political context. In using the term political I am referring to two specific interlinked arenas in which these debates have taken place in England. These are: the decisions of the Department for Education and its at times somewhat differently entitled predecessors and the responses of the three largest teachers' unions to these developments, these are the NUT (National Union of Teachers), NASUWT (National Association of Schoolmasters, Union of Women Teachers) and ATL (the Association of Teachers and Lecturers), and media responses to these ongoing debates.

In the past three decades, since the late 1980s, the use of a highly codified method of defining and creating a professional community with distinct professional knowledge amongst teachers has become dominant in political discourse about teaching (Beck, 2009). This was initially introduced by the encouragement of the development of models and standards by Local Education Authorities. This was then centralised via the creation of the General Teaching Councils of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, which were given the specific remit of maintaining a common set of professional teaching standards within their respective countries (Page, 2013). This model which is based on the presumption that professional knowledge can be codified into a set of universal and commonly agreed standards has therefore dominated the formal discourse coming from the United Kingdom's government for over forty years with occasional exceptional challenges that are discussed at the end of this section (Smith, 2013). Although the General Teaching Council for (England) was disbanded by the previous coalition government in 2010, linking the recognition of professional knowledge to the attaining of commonly agreed codified standards remains very much in place.

There were during the 1980s and up until the mid-1990s a series of successful conference motions put forward by various teaching unions that demanded the abolition of teaching standards (NASUWT, 1989). However, this regular debate dwindled following the election of the Labour government in 1997, which subsequently gave the teachers' unions a central role in the General Teaching Councils and in the writing of revised standards. Once included more actively, the unions changed their position in these debates to a less confrontational one (Kirk, 2000). Therefore, the view that codified standards are the most appropriate way to define professional knowledge has been dominant and largely unquestioned in the political arena since 1997. Instead debate has focused on who controls these standards (Bangs & MacBeath, 2013).

Within this discourse there is what can be loosely defined as a left-wing perspective, this being that these standards should be primarily defined by teachers themselves, possibly as negotiated through their unions, though occasionally nuanced with differing models for obtaining teachers voice being presented (Bangs & MacBeath, 2013). In response there has also emerged, what can loosely be defined as a right wing perspective in which it is argued that these standards should be imposed from outside, based on a democratic mandate that politicians have in terms of representing their electorate and by extension the people (Smith, 2013).

From 1997 to 2010 in particular, the codification of professional knowledge was also linked to the introduction of a more rigorous disciplinary system for teachers in England who were deemed to be performing below these standards. This was accompanied by the introduction of performance related threshold pay for those teachers clearly performing above them (NUT, 2015). This in turn was connected to a parallel discourse on improving standards in schools (Page, 2013). Thus by 2010 policies based upon this way of perceiving the nature of teachers' professional knowledge had become so embedded that political debates focused on fair ways of managing this process rather than on the broader issue of whether it was a suitable way of understanding teachers' professional knowledge at all (Smith, 2013).

In 2010, with the abolition of the GTC(E) and the subsequent decision that the Teacher Development Agency (later to become part of the National College for Teaching and Leadership) would only discipline teachers for misconduct and not for incompetence, the dominance of an approach to professional knowledge based on enforced, common, codified, standards seemed to have been to some extent challenged. At the Association of Teachers and Lecturers conference of that year it was debated whether the right had to some extent stolen the clothes of the old left and would look to create a new discourse in terms of defining professional knowledge (ATL, 2010; Berry 2012). However, this brief flirtation from the coalition government with alternative discourses proved in the end to be short-lived. In fact the government since 2012 has simply asserted a tighter control over standards issuing new and more detailed versions but this time without the influence of the voice of the teachers' unions.

One further lens with which to understand the way professional knowledge has been perceived to exist among teachers, by policy makers, is to look at changes in the introduction of teachers to this knowledge community via their initial teacher training. Over the past thirty years there has been a steady growing apart in terms of the specific structures through which teachers attain professional recognition, among the countries of the United Kingdom. The implied differences

in the kinds of professional knowledge that are seen to exist in these models does not necessarily contradict models that codify and standardise teachers' professional knowledge, as it is possible to define various forms of knowledge in such ways. Therefore, this is not necessarily a challenge to such processes but it does expand the nature of the debate around them. Specifically Scotland has moved towards an increasing emphasis on teachers as academically and theoretically informed professionals (Gray & Weir, 2014) while England and Wales have moved increasingly towards a craft based model of the profession, with an emphasis on learning via observing and working alongside teachers rather than in a university context (Jackson & Burch, 2015). This English and Welsh model has something akin to an apprentice model about it (Beauchamp et al., 2015). The significance of this is that the nature of the professional learning that is formally sanctioned shapes the way that professional knowledge is perceived and defined by those who work in that area.

Finally, the situation in Macedonia in terms of such debates is also worth referring to here, because of the design of the study and the nature of the sample, both of which are discussed further in sections within the next two chapters. In terms of the dominance of a codified model of professional knowledge the situation is fundamentally very similar in Macedonia and in England. There has also been in the past five years a movement towards the introduction of performance related pay and of more rigorous systems of disciplining teachers who fall below codified standards (Joshevska & Kirandziska, 2015). However, a significant difference, which is discussed further in the next chapter, is that Macedonia has also been influenced by these models within the context of needing to respond to the demands of donor governments such as those of the USA, United Kingdom and other member states of the European Union (Stojanovska & Barakoska, 2014). To this extent these changes have caused a distinct set of tensions from those in England as they have also become entwined with teachers' sense of independence and national identity (Joshevska, 2016).

In conclusion to this section, in recent decades there has emerged the dominance of a definition of the professional knowledge of teachers that sees this as something that can be codified and standardised. This has been the case in England for several decades but is also a trend that is common across a wide range of countries, pertinent to this study this includes Macedonia. This has implications in terms of defining the kinds of knowledge that teachers may share or co-construct and their ways of doing this. However, it does not resolve these issues as different kinds of knowledge may be similarly codified or not. In the next two sections I address the

nature of the knowledge that may be shared or built by teachers. Subsequently I then look at research and theory building that suggests that teaching knowledge can and should be shared. I also explore the potential distinction that exists between sharing and co-constructing knowledge. Finally I explore views that challenge these and suggest that the knowledge of teachers is by definition built in a distinctly isolated and idiographic way.

Conceptualising teachers' knowledge

Despite this dominance of a single and simple definition of professional knowledge in policy contexts, one that links it to achieving a designated list of standards, within academic discourse a variety of different competing models of professionalism and therefore of professional knowledge compete. This is discussed further in these next few paragraphs.

Two ways in which professional knowledge has been defined in academic discourse has been: idealistically as being based on a group who have authentically distinct professional knowledge and a contrasting Foucaultian critical approach whereby the language of professional knowledge is used as a smoke screen to create an impression of separateness (Stickney, 2012). However, both these potential models for defining professional knowledge although opposing each other in the value they give to such a process present peculiar issues regarding defining professional knowledge within the teaching profession. To address the first of these, if professions are defined by having a body of formally learnt, specialist knowledge that is beyond the reach of lay people (Wang, 2011), or at least an illusion of such, then this cannot be an adequate way of defining the professional knowledge of teachers. This is not to say that teachers don't acquire a body of distinct and highly developed knowledge and skills, just that it will always be possible to define these in the language of lay people. This is simply because all lay people have a deep familiarity with and gain a vast amount of language from teachers and in schools (Ball, 2006). The problem therefore lies in the idea that professional knowledge as it is defined in other professions is beyond reach whether authentically so or not.

This can be illustrated by comparisons with definitions of professionalism and of professional knowledge as used within the traditional professions of medicine and law, already mentioned earlier. To refer back to the previous section, this is a relevant comparison as the General Medical Council and Law Society were publicly presented as models on which the creation of the General Teaching Councils of the United Kingdom were based (GTC(E), 1993; Smith,

2013). In both these professions it is the case that such arenas as operating theatres and court rooms are alien places to most people that we only enter during rare moments of crises in our lives. The status of having distinct professional knowledge, whether authentic or illusory, is therefore easy to maintain via a formal and shared language reinforced by codes of practice (Hui & Stickley, 2007). However, these documented and formalised versions of professional knowledge do not make sense as a way of creating a genuine model for the nature of teachers' knowledge nor can they artificially create the illusion of this with any degree of success because the language of schools and education is the language of lay people, even if only because we have all spent so much of our lives in them (Stickney, 2012). It seems therefore that borrowing a way of defining professional knowledge that is highly codified and which historically is based on law and medicine shows a misunderstanding of the nature of the teaching profession (Talbot, 2016).

Other potentially more valid models of teachers' knowledge identify and describe typologies that define the different forms of knowledge that teachers may acquire. Shulman (2013) built and refined a typology of knowledge that defines teaching knowledge in pedagogical, subject content and contextual terms whilst simultaneously being flexible enough to link these. This way of identifying different forms of knowledge is significant because it distinguishes between potentially mechanistic acts of classroom strategy and a deeper knowledge of practice, the latter of which enables innovation and responsiveness. It also distinguishes between the factual content knowledge of teachers and a simple knowledge of strategies, both of which can be easily shared and the tacit knowledge of: how to teach well in this context, which is much harder to share with others.

This tacit knowledge, a 'wisdom of practice' (Shulman, 2013), is a form of knowledge that is harder to transfer than either subject content knowledge or the mechanistic knowledge of individual classroom acts or strategies (Dogan, Pringle, & Mesa, 2016). Shulman's typology influenced the building of the conceptual framework especially the distinction between strategy and practice. However, the primacy given to subject content and contextual knowledge meant that it could not be used as a conceptual tool on its own. This was because of the lack of content similarity and the differing contexts when teachers engage with teachers from other countries. This meant that the conceptual framework needed to accommodate the probability that the sharing of these forms of knowledge would be unlikely to be given significance by the participants in this study.

Another alternative way of understanding how teachers build and define the professional knowledge they possess, which has a strong academic root in theory building, is by reference to either craft based or arts based traditions (Shimahara, 1998; Lupton, 2013). Theory building, using these analogies as tools, links teaching to other skills based roles that historically often lay at the heart of communities. As mentioned previously, this way of understanding teachers' professional knowledge, especially reference to craft based traditions, has had a deep influence on teacher training in England and Wales in recent years, which has progressively moved towards something much closer to an apprenticeship model. One argument for such a definition is based on acknowledging that once teachers are trained, on-going professional knowledge is built via an accumulation of experience (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Oancea, 2014).

This means that experienced teachers make sense of problematic situations by bringing a vast repertoire of past experiences and similar cases to the forefront of their minds (Taber, 2009). According to this account a teacher's knowledge is not primarily gained early on in a career via access to texts and learning that are simply inaccessible to others. It is instead gained steadily throughout a career, through the accumulation of inter-connected experiences. These specific experiences are equally inaccessible to others but are more idiographic, more likely to be expressed in less specialist language and the process of gaining them is done in the real world setting of the teacher's classroom (Nyman, 2014). However, this knowledge is still highly specialised and can only be accumulated by deeply committed professionals over an extended period of time (Parker-Katz & Bay, 2008).

These analogies are useful tools for understanding the types of knowledge that teachers possess. Within these accounts a distinction is often made between teaching as craft and teaching as art, whilst defining teaching knowledge as a union of both types of knowledge (Lupton, 2013). Craft in this analogy is described as the accumulation of a broad set of skills, whilst art is the utilisation of these in innovative and unique ways by any given teacher. According to these analogies just as an experienced carpenter will make each piece in a distinct and unique way but based on prior experience of having dealt with a similar challenge before so will a teacher when designing lessons and teaching strategies (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012). Because of the flexibility inherent in this model, as each challenge is resolved, the store of accumulated expertise and depth of knowledge is extended. This is also why knowledge with its implications of continual growth, rather than expertise which implies a moment of completion, may be more appropriate in defining teachers' professional knowledge (Van

Velzen, 2012).

The knowledge of teachers according to arts based analogies specifically, exists in the discourse but is not directly replicated, as the moment of making such knowledge concrete is also a moment of individual creativity (Magnusen, 2005). Artists are interested in other artists work because of the creative discourse that is enabled by seeing and discussing it, not because they intend to replicate it entirely (Oleson & Hora, 2014). Therefore, whereas in other fields such as medicine an exact equivalent case informs the way to address the next, in teaching, the myriad range of similar classroom experiences informs later decisions. However, this knowledge is used far more flexibly, a different setting is not simply advantageous or disadvantageous but it leads to different but equally valid decisions being made (Gun, 2014).

To some extent of course these interlinking definitions of professional knowledge would also be appropriate when defining experienced professionals in any profession including the traditional professions of law and medicine, which I placed in opposition to these models earlier. However this use of stored experiential knowledge may function at a higher level in teaching (Frost, 2014), as law is bounded by more rigidly formalised and highly constrained rules of interaction within the various settings of the police station, court room or tribunal, while medicine is similarly bounded by rigidly set procedures (Kuper and D'Eon, 2011). If this is the case then it is also possible for proponents of this viewpoint to argue that the experiential knowledge of teachers, which once qualified is built experientially, is potentially a more sophisticated form of knowledge than the procedural knowledge of other professions and is worth understanding in a distinct way (Eraut, 2007; Frost, 2015). These accounts of knowledge construction within arts and craft based analogies are useful tools for exploring teachers' conceptualisations of their professional knowledge. Exploring whether these definitions of professional knowledge are ones that teachers themselves articulate when defining the professional communities that they belong to and that they find meaningful, helped to shape the research questions and underpin the later analysis and discussion of the interviews.

These models discussed above though are not a complete account (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012). The potential these models create for acknowledging the co-construction of knowledge through discourse, which then in turn still leaves room for acknowledging the role of individuality and innovation, fits closely with the ideas of Frost (2014). However, they lack the developed explanatory framework regarding leadership which is present in the teacher leadership model (Frost, 2015). This is discussed further in Chapter Six. While another

challenge to their usefulness is that whilst this may be a strong model for explaining the nature of teachers' knowledge it poses challenges for understanding the nature of the communities that they belong to and the ways in which they communicate this knowledge. It is in short possible for crafts people or artists to develop their skills largely in isolation from each other (McCluskey, Sim & Johnson, 2011).

Sharing and co-constructing knowledge

In this chapter so far I have discussed competing definitions of professional knowledge, starting with contemporary political debates as regards codifying teachers' knowledge. I then expanded upon this by discussing current academic discourse about the nature of teachers' professional knowledge. In the paragraphs below I move on to discuss ideas regarding the sharing and co-constructing of knowledge, the purpose of doing so and the forms of knowledge that may be shared.

Knowledge is present in the dialogue between teachers. However, the forms that this knowledge takes and the significance of the dialogue it exists within are contested. The crafts based model outlined above would suggest that knowledge of specific aspects of classroom strategy are exchanged in concrete terms through teachers sharing stories of teaching (Zangori & Forbes, 2013). This has also been expressed as the goal of both the United Kingdom's and Macedonian government when teachers work together across international boundaries. However, it may be that the knowledge shared is regarding strategies of leadership and design that inform practice (Hord & Sommers, 2008) or knowledge of moral purpose (Frost, 2014). The conversations between teachers may empower as much as they inform and in doing so may be part of the process of building collective efficacy within a professional community (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2013). This co-constructed know-why knowledge could be part of the process of developing as an innovative and resilient teacher capable of leading change (Frost, 2012).

One interpretation of the knowledge that teachers share via discussing teaching emphasises the process as one of shared reflection rather than sharing strategies (McNiff, 2010). This involves the co-construction of new knowledge through dialogue about teaching that facilitates reflection. Reflection has entered the public and political discourse on teaching quality in England partly via the teaching standards for England and Wales. The teaching standards

referred to at the beginning of this chapter explicitly define the teacher emerging from trainee to become an established professional as having developed the skills of reflection (Bangs & MacBeath, 2013). Similarly, those organisations that support international teacher networking often use the words reflection and research in documents that outline their purpose and vision (British Council 2016). This movement into the public discourse has tended to emphasise the possibility of reflection to facilitate concrete change (Menter, 2009) and in relation to this a strong case can be made that all professional reflection by teachers is unprocessed research (McNiff, 2010).

One reason for this interest in reflection as a vehicle for change is in response to concerns that conventional academic research rarely impacts on educational practice (McIntyre, 2005; McLaughlin, Black-Hawkins & McIntyre, 2007). However, a codified emphasis on reflection within the Teaching Standards for England and Wales has caused some controversy due to the difficulty in measuring such an allusive concept (McIntyre, 2005). In relation to this over-stressing the ability of teachers' reflections to lead to improvements in teaching and learning by itself may be naive (Wallace & Hoyle, 2012), while direct comparisons with academic research may inadvertently denigrate the process of reflection, which may be equally valid but simply different (Hodkinson, 2009). Reflection is often a positive personal experience but it is also potentially narrow. It may not necessarily lead to personal or professional development unless directly linked to further frameworks and tools that facilitate leadership (Frost, 2015).

It is also unclear quite how the development of an ability to reflect links directly to the accumulation of professional knowledge. It may be the case that some teachers have simply developed a greater ability than others to reflect in an effective way that enables them to develop as professionals and to engage in an ongoing cyclical process of improvement in their professional knowledge and understanding. If this is the case this would again limit the potential impact of reflection as a method for improving teaching more broadly (McLaughlin, Black-Hawkins & McIntyre, 2007). However, if reflection is enabled via concrete tools that facilitate discussion and if it is also linked to a sharing of ideas via story-telling, which in turn links to the co-construction of new understanding and approaches, the needed aspects of agency and leadership may emerge (Hodkinson, 2009).

In conclusion to this section: teaching communities may perhaps be bonded by shared stories and thereby by the sharing of experiences. It may be in this case that it is in fact the way of sharing that is the practice that is developed as a community and that this is linked to a further

process of knowledge construction. It is perhaps also not important that teachers sharing stories about professional understanding agree on the best teaching strategies to use, indeed this expectation may be rather simplistic. It may be that they have articulated these stories and their own beliefs to each other to enable new but idiographic understandings to be developed (Elliott, 2009). Sharing experiences via stories about teaching can potentially achieve a variety of goals aside from the direct adopting of classroom strategies from others, including building self-efficacy, reinforcing the sense of belonging to a professional community and inspiring teachers to innovate and lead change (Frost, 2013). It may be that this is in fact easier, in the face of pressures that push teachers towards individualism, with people from other countries. In such contexts more than in a localised context the sharing of stories and the reflection, affirmation and development that takes place when working with teachers from another country could perhaps be of a more personally challenging and rewarding kind.

Conceptualising knowledge networks

In the previous sections, I discussed different possible definitions of the professional knowledge that teachers may have. I then also discussed ways in which knowledge might be shared or co-constructed and the purposes teachers may have in doing so. This included discussing whether professional knowledge is gained and embedded within a personal and individual process of reflection and if this is the case what the implications may be for teachers identifying as members of a professional community. In this final section to this chapter I discuss theoretical models and research into the process of networking and relate this back to how these might impact upon the nature of the communities that teachers may perceive themselves as belonging too. In doing this I also discuss the impact of developments in social media in terms of building professional communities and sharing knowledge. This final section links ideas presented in both of this chapter and the previous one, as it links concepts regarding the nature of professional communities with concepts regarding the nature of knowledge and of knowledge sharing.

Early seminal research into social network theories generally asserts that there are two primary forms of social link. These can be defined as 'strong ties' where information and ideas flow and circulate freely but very little that is transferred is new, and 'weak ties' where a considerable amount of information is new but it flows less freely (Granovetter, 1983). Although the nature

of networking has changed radically in the last four decades because of technological changes, these basic principles are supported in more recent articles, written across a period of time that reflects growth in the use of the internet (Castells, 2009; Matthews et al., 2015). However, there have also been changes to networking theories that have accompanied the development of the internet. Older research into social networks tended to place a great deal of emphasis on exact geographical distance. (Homans, 1961) stressing that the geographical location of our personal ties influences the role these people have (Granovetter, 1983). Changes in technology mean that this has been increasingly challenged by a variety of writers, who argue that it is the perceived environment that matters most (Castells, 2009; Matthews et al., 2015).

It can be argued that many people now seek and build relationships with those people both professionally and personally who they feel most attuned to being or working with regardless of geographical distance (Kelly & Antonio, 2016). In the current era of internet communication, finding colleagues we enjoy working with and communities we wish to identify with may often involve working beyond national boundaries (Matthews et al., 2015). However, this is potentially distinct from identifying oneself as a member of a professional community. It may be that rather than perceiving themselves as part of a professional community that some teachers simply find individual colleagues, across the world, who they particularly enjoy working with. Those factors that pull us towards particular individuals or communities may account for the positive motivation to seek alternative colleagues to engage with and communities to be part of. However, there may also be reasons why a teacher is not feeling affirmed within their own workplace community, which then leads them to find alternative affirming communities.

Factors that may lead to teachers being dissatisfied with their immediate workplace include the possibility that some highly complex organisations simply have no shared culture of any substance (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). In the case of a teacher working in such an institution it is possible that teachers may find a greater degree of meaningful collegiality amongst colleagues from outside their institution (Kelly & Antonio, 2016). It is similarly possible that teachers may shut one door where the local circumstances of their particular school mean that they perceive this as a positive strategy for developing their own professionalism whilst simultaneously opening doors to colleagues from other institutions that are removed by distance and culture. This has already been discussed without specific reference to the internet in the first part of this chapter. However, the internet is a powerful tool for seeking such

alternative communities.

To build from this it is widely acknowledged that obstacles exist which prevent the building of collegiality within the same institution on a local level (Macia & Garcia, 2016). Some such as the way teachers usually teach in individual classrooms are physical but others are structural (MacBeath, 2008). As an example: a significant challenge to building collegiality are systems that promote competition for promotions and for progression upwards on pay-scales, while teachers may also become isolated because the system of evaluation forces them into competitive isolation against each other (Collie et al., 2012). It may therefore be the case that incomplete understanding, or at least non-involvement, in school, local and national political issues actually makes dialogue between teachers easier. It is possible that a more nuanced understanding of the individualistic teacher may show that they reject collegiality within the single institution for highly professional and ethical reasons (Datnow, 2011) but welcome dialogue with professionals from other countries. It may even be the case that this is a more positive form of collegiality. It is possible that the meaningful collegiality that Hargreaves describes, in his seminal article, which is: spontaneous, voluntary, pervasive across time and space and unpredictable (Hargreaves, 1999) is more easily achieved outside one's own country rather than within it and in relation to this when removed from the formal structures of the individual institution.

The school a teacher works within may consist of a large number of strong ties. It is potentially a comfortable place where the teacher may have the confidence to work at the peak of their ability but it may not be a place that presents them with new ideas. On the contrary, the experience of working internationally may present a teacher with short-term, weak ties that are still professionally based. This is not to play down the roles of these older ties but it may be that a healthy professional life needs the existence of both. The first type however, for teachers, is usually relatively easily attained as it is built into the structure of their school life while the second needs to be sought, with the support of others. It is also possible that as long as the strong ties are located near to the teacher that there may be benefit if these weaker more challenging ties are located at a geographical distance.

Conclusion

The ideas discussed in this chapter regarding the dangers inherent in highly managed

collaboration; of the inherent individualism of working life in schools; and in the importance of weak ties in making reflection and discourse meaningful can be linked together. If combined they may suggest that active participation and a self-definition of belonging to an international community of teachers may have distinct advantages for the teacher involved. They may even suggest that a sense of belonging to an international professional community of teachers could be as significant in a teacher's personal and professional development as local ties are. One advantage to teachers of international networking may be that it is by definition less manageable within a conventional view of management. As has been written about by both Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), and Frost (2013) collegiality that is contrived, designed and structured by management is unlikely to be successful. Even if created within a structure, it may be that the relationships built by teachers across countries tend to develop in more unpredictable and unmanageable ways. This may lead to a degree of failure with projects that simply peter out but it may mean that where and when they do succeed that there is more inherent strength to the relationship. Fullan (2016) has also pointed out that teachers are more likely to work together productively, if their beliefs and values regarding education and teaching are compatible. It may be that such compatibility is relatively rare but that such instances may be as likely to occur across borders and when they do may be even more enriching. This issue, the extent to which it may be problematic and others related to politics and culture are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Conceptualising the challenges of crossing borders

This chapter addresses issues that relate to the ways in which political, cultural and economic differences between countries potentially problematise the possibility of teachers being able to identify as members of an international community of fellow professionals. Firstly, I position the context within which teacher dialogue internationally is supported in different countries. Then I discuss challenges that are presented when sharing teaching ideas between countries in differing economic circumstances and with different cultures and educational traditions. I then discuss what forms of knowledge other than teaching strategies may be shared including civic values or approaches to education. Finally, I address the specific context of Macedonia and contextualise aspects of education within that country in contrast to England. The sections that follow are titled as follows:

- positioning international dialogue
- sharing teaching ideas
- sharing values
- the specific context of Macedonia

The conclusion to this chapter functions as a conclusion to all of Chapters Two, Three and Four, that together have built towards the construction of the conceptual framework for this study. In this conclusion I therefore outline the final version of the research questions that I have developed through writing these chapters. I also present a diagrammatic summary of the conceptual framework that emerged through these chapters and that in turn would frame the analytical process for this study.

Positioning teacher dialogue

There are a wide variety of different policy approaches regarding the support given to teachers to enable them to work together across borders. This is partly but not entirely dependent upon a country's financial ability to support such processes. However, within that caveat there are still significant differences. The countries with the strongest traditions of governments enabling

teachers to work with other teachers internationally tend to be the Anglophone West and the Far East (Steiner-Khamsi, 2013). This has included for several decades especially Japan but now increasingly includes China, Singapore and others from among the emerging economies of Asia (Bray, 2014). Elsewhere support for teachers working with colleagues from other countries tends to be more limited or to be focused on those working in education other than teaching such as academics or policy makers, rather than teachers themselves (Santoro, 2014).

As has been mentioned above, this is often simply due to funding, with wealthier countries being more able to support teachers in engaging in such processes. However, differences between the support provided by wealthier countries can also in some cases, such as regarding the United Kingdom or Japan, be interpreted through a post-colonialist, historical, perspective. According to this account the countries that are most active in supporting international networking between teachers tend to also be those that exported their form of schooling through empire world-wide during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and in doing so established a self-perception as exporters of educational expertise (Foster, Addy & Samoff, 2012). This historical legacy may mean that these countries are prepared to support international dialogue between teachers. However, this may primarily be because the policy-makers and teachers who come from them still perceive themselves in this way, as exporters of educational knowledge and practices (Rapple, 2012; Welch, 2013).

More significantly for this study it may be that teachers in these countries for deep-rooted cultural and historical reasons as well as financial ones are seen as leaders of educational change and where despite local concerns expressed by teachers, teaching is already a relatively high status and autonomous profession. The other side of this is that teachers perhaps do not have the same status in the world outside these countries, particularly in less economically developed countries (Watt et al., 2012). In contrast to this, countries outside the developed West and the wealthier countries of the East Asia are often thirsty to try to import practice from countries that are perceived to be more advanced in terms of the quality of schooling (Oyewole, 2016). One result of this is that it is argued by some that practice is sometimes imported wholesale too rapidly leading to decline or at least not the improvement expected by the school or government concerned (Burroughs, 2015; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016), this is discussed further in the next section.

This clearly raises issues regarding the possibility of recognising or creating a sense of international community amongst teachers, since presumably such a culture would need to be

based on a presumption of equality between all members participating in it. If there were to be perceived inequality between the professional status of the teachers who are interacting; if teachers from more developed nations and in the case of this study specifically England largely find themselves in dialogue with non-teachers; or if teachers from outside England have profoundly different goals from partnering and networking with colleagues from other countries, these may all prove to be problematic in either identifying or building an international community of professionals. The implications of these issues in terms of the potential sharing of knowledge and in turn the form of community that may exist are discussed further in the section below.

Sharing teaching strategies

This section relates to and expands upon ideas presented in the previous two chapters regarding the potential and limitations of sharing strategies among teachers, if common membership of a professional community is to be recognised. However, in this chapter I approach this specifically from the perspective of teachers working across national borders.

The challenges faced by teachers from countries outside Europe engaging in dialogue about education with England or other Western countries, have often been interpreted through theoretical models of neo-colonialism (Steiner-Khamsi, 2013). This study involves as participants teachers from England and Macedonia. However, although Macedonia was never a colony of a Western country, due to the economic disparity between England and Macedonia, this neo-colonialist perspective and related dependency models (Khavenson & Carnoy, 2016) still provide a useful lens for conceptualising this context (Pickering, 2010; Cvete, 2012). One significant potential obstacle that emerges when an economic aspect is taken into account is whether the discourse within a community of teachers who come from countries in different economic circumstances could be perceived by all as a dialogue between equals. Further issues that then develop from this are whether, if it is perceived not to be, this then negates any positive benefits coming from the dialogue within such a community or whether success can still be defined in a way that is meaningful for teachers from all the countries involved.

In relation to the two previous paragraphs and as just one clear example of the current resonance of these issues, recent literature published by the British Council (2016) suggests two reasons for teachers to engage in working with colleagues from other countries; one being to exchange

teaching ideas, the other to develop concepts of human rights and global understanding amongst both their colleagues and their students. These two ideas are then linked with an ideal of using education to develop critical thinking and then further related to increased democratisation. However, all these goals become problematic if economic differences are accounted for. As it may be difficult for meaningful relationships to emerge and a community built if one country sees itself as leading the discussion and as having expertise to export but not import, and equally if teachers from different countries do not feel able to contribute as equals.

There is considerable debate over whether a search for transferable teaching strategies from more developed countries by teachers or policy makers in less developed countries is a positive or achievable goal. This critique typically questions whether, what are frequently defined as, Western teaching styles (Tan & Chua; 2015), are necessarily appropriate for non-Western cultures with different norms of behaviour in social and generational terms and even whether this process of export is part of a broader neo-liberal agenda (Sikoyo, 2010). These Western approaches to teaching are often described as tending to emphasise: child-centred strategies, project work and the testing of critical thinking (Burroughs, 2010), although the validity of this perception of the nature of teaching in the West has also been challenged, as is discussed further below (Bignold & Gayton, 2010). This concern that Western teaching methods are simply often impractical and inappropriate for developing countries, where the political culture is different and where simple issues such as class size and lack of resources present specific challenges, is one that is shared by a significant number of writers (Bajaj, 2010; Osei 2010; Westrick, 2013).

In relation to this there may also often be an economic motive for encouraging the export of teaching approaches and the accompanying materials of delivery such as textbooks and exams (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016), which means that the educational value and potential impact are over-sold (Steiner-Khamsi, 2013). In countries that are in receipt of aid this may include pressure to reshape the national education system to fit with the perceived educational values of the donor country (Grødeland, 2010), even when this does not take into account local circumstances (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008). These will typically be more developed countries and in the case of Macedonia specifically the countries of the European Union and United States of America.

As mentioned above, even the definition of what distinctly Western educational approaches may be is a contested concept. Steiner-Khamsi (2013) describes how it is often testing regimes

rather than pedagogical approaches that are exported from the West into less developed countries. Furthermore, whilst a testing regime may be imported, the accompanying teaching approaches may not be. This can then lead to a disconnect and the subsequent disempowering of teachers and disadvantaging of students. She also identifies how a focus on testing and international comparison can distract from a meaningful dialogue about teaching (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). The contested nature of what exactly Westernised strategies even are: whether when exported they inappropriately emphasise child-centred-ness or conversely rigorous standardised testing clearly illustrates the possible problems of importing teaching strategies (Bignold & Gayton, 2010).

These critical perspectives described above, are not necessarily universally accepted (Nordtvelt, 2010) and indeed many of the writers discussed earlier present nuanced and multi-faceted accounts rather than being dogmatic, illustrating the complexity of this area. However, it is possible that these challenges may inhibit the potential mutual recognition of a common professional community among teachers that crosses borders. One positive response to these challenges though may be to suggest that teacher networking with its emphasis on smaller scale change and on building a community of professional equals is a more practical and positive way than other methods to build international relationships without accusations of neo-colonialism or paternalism, whilst simultaneously being a meaningful process for teachers.

It is also possible that in recent years the situation in terms of the borrowing of practice has changed. There seems at present to be a greater willingness than in the past for Western countries to look to borrow practice from the more developed countries of East Asia, including specifically: Japan, Singapore, Korea and some specific regions of China. This has partly been in response to successes by these countries on international comparative league tables (Huang, Su & Xu, 2014). However, this change has also been challenged as being not reflective of an authentic desire among Western countries to learn from other countries. These concerns have been identified by various writers, writing at differing points over the past fifteen years (Chabbott & Elliott, 2003; Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016).

They specifically see much government support for the process of comparison, as involving policy makers seeking around the world for justification for solutions that they already have in mind. They especially identify this as occurring in the context of political responses to the results of large cross-national surveys, as published and interpreted through the media. Regardless of the depth and authenticity of the process of seeking teaching strategies from

other countries, England now seems to be increasingly keen to learn from other countries, including former colonies. This suggests that in relation to some countries at least, at this current point in time neo-colonialist models need to be nuanced before they are applicable.

Sharing values

In this section I build from the section before and I discuss other forms of knowledge that may be shared when teachers work together across national boundaries: these include sharing values, civic goals and pedagogical ideals. This section builds upon the last and it also relates to discussions in the previous two chapters regarding different forms of knowledge that communities of teachers may exchange. As discussed above there is an established history of less developed countries seeking to import teaching strategies and practice from more developed countries. There is also a long history in England and the USA of the process of linking with education systems of other countries, whether this be via research or via projects such as teacher exchange, being connected to highly idealistic goals regarding the building of a better society rather than relating to the classroom directly (Masemann & Epstein, 2008).

The idealism contained within much international engagement in the field of education is reflected in academic writing and in the literature produced by organisations that support international comparative research in education and has been since these organisations were formed (Dale, 2015). The initial two commitments agreed at the first meeting of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies in 1970, were ‘the internationalization of man and cooperation between cultures’ (Masemann & Epstein, 2008, p.19). Meanwhile at the first meeting of the British section of the Comparative Education Society of Europe, later to become the British Association of International and Comparative Education, ‘little attention was given to the possibility of improving the United Kingdom's system as a result of comparative studies’ (Sutherland, Watson & Crossley, 2008, p.158). Within the documents released by organisations that supported teachers the following terms dominated discourse in terms of international engagement between teachers over successive decades within England and the USA: ‘international understanding’ in the 1950s, ‘development education’ with its implications of supporting poorer countries in the 1960s and 70s, and ‘multi-cultural education’ and ‘peace education’ up until the 2000s (Fujikane, 2003). All of these imply a need for these relatively wealthier countries to understand the educational systems of the poorer countries of the world

for idealistic rather than practical reasons, as a window into societal understanding rather than into the nitty-gritty of classroom strategies.

These terms also imply that one significant goal of people working in the field of education would be transferring Western democratic values. Although Fujikane's (2003) historical account is now somewhat dated it is noticeable that the largest United Kingdom based organisation involved in enabling international networks of teachers still explicitly affirms that its goal is in part to use education as a vehicle for promulgating civic values of democratic participation (the British Council, 2016). The implications of this in terms of inhibiting or enabling the emergence of a sense of community amongst teachers from different countries is significant: as discussion regarding political or civic engagement could potentially be a driver in building such a community but if teachers from one country perceive themselves as having, lessons to teach, this could also potentially inhibit this process.

An idealistic and goal driven approach is also reflected in the British Council's descriptions of its teacher partnerships projects. The most frequently used phrase the British Council uses on its website pages, dedicated to teacher partnership projects (2016) is of using teacher networking to develop 'global citizenship' with implications of goals beyond and separate to developing classroom strategies. However, the picture is also not quite as one dimensional as this. The case studies of excellent networking practice contained on the British Council website do include examples of sharing ideas related to lesson content and of dialogue that reflects the shared professional interests of teachers working together. It is also important not to be too cynical about these approaches. An attempt to transfer strategies rapidly could have as many pitfalls as a shared conversation about culture and values.

Equally it can be argued that teachers are so fundamental in building civic society that it is only to be expected that their conversations will be wider than addressing teaching strategies alone and will inevitably involve a civic or political dimension (Dale, 2015). Also, the value of developing cultural understanding itself, even on a small scale, should not be treated disdainfully especially when such understanding is genuinely portrayed as an equal dialogue free from any possible accusation of neo-colonialism (Arnone, 2013). However, these possibilities did suggest that an alternative typology regarding the forms of knowledge that teachers may exchange and construct, within such communities, may be needed, one that could potentially include knowledge of purpose as well as of strategies and practice.

In this chapter so far I have largely discussed issues that may arise because of significant differences between different countries. However, there is a significant body of literature that problematises knowledge exchange across national boundaries in an alternative way. This research instead suggests that teachers could expect to find a high degree of commonality in the practice, experience and professional identity of colleagues from other countries. If this is the case it is possible that one reason why relatively little practice is transferred between countries is simply that there is no more to import or export from the Anglophone West, East Asia, Finland or indeed any other country, than there is from the school or even classroom next door (Manzon, 2014). As Bray (2014) argues, it is important not to assume that a school is representative of a nation or a nation representative of a region, a perspective reflected in the Bray cube model (2014), which emphasises how differences in practice can be as distinct within a school or between schools in the same country as they can be between schools or teachers from different countries.

It is even possible that this degree of commonality may exist within the detail of classroom strategies but that these are utilised in a nuanced form that is more appropriate to the local culture (Shiohata, 2010). Relatively few articles are published in English language journals on the detail of classroom strategy within countries other than those it is presumed that the United Kingdom or USA can learn from (Foster, Addy & Samoff, 2012). If little research is done into teaching strategies, then it may be that there is no effective context in which governments or other organisations can be certain that strategies are being imported into. This therefore risks a potentially paternalistic and impractical approach, whereby expertise is assumed only to exist outside the less developed country, when in fact it may already be present in the country that strategies are being imported into (Westrick, 2013). In later chapters in which I analyse the interviews, with the participants from both England and Macedonia, I discuss whether the goals of these teachers were focused on classroom strategy, on civic goals or on a process of cultural exchange and personal reflection. I also discuss whether their experience of working with colleagues across national boundaries was primarily one of finding difference or of discovering similarity and a shared identity, through co-constructing moral purpose. I also discuss the extent to which the participants' professional role as teachers was particularly relevant or whether they defined the boundaries of the communities that they built more flexibly.

The specific context of Macedonia and England

Although this dissertation is framed as a broad exploration into the potential and limits of building and perceiving a professional community, when teachers work together across national boundaries, the participants were all teachers who primarily worked in Macedonia or in England. Therefore, in these next few paragraphs I explore the specific context of Macedonia and compare this with England. Firstly, I briefly address Macedonia's wider political, cultural and economic context. I then discuss some relevant issues and developments in terms of education in Macedonia at present. Finally, I discuss the significance of the International Teacher Leadership initiative and its role in developing Macedonian education and engaging teachers from Macedonia in the wider community of teachers world-wide.

Macedonia has an ancient history, rooting its past into the era of Alexander the Great. However, in its current incarnation it is one of the newest and poorest countries in Europe. Specifically, it re-emerged as a state, from the events that saw the collapse of Yugoslavia. It declared its independence in 1991, and although relatively peripheral to the wars that facilitated the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, it still experienced significant social upheaval and loss of life. In the following decade this period of social and political change included together with the emergence of the new state a significant influx of ethnically Albanian people. The government's long-term ambition is to join the European Union, which is perceived by many to offer a possible long term economic solution to its developing economy. However, this is some way off due to differences among the member states of the European Union and resistance by some, most consistently Greece, to its membership. Macedonia receives significant amounts of aid that is channelled through a range of non-governmental organisations (Grødeland, 2010). The term: 'the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)' is used as the name of the country in some political and other contexts. This is a diplomatic response devised in order to address some aspects of the political relationship with Greece. These issues lie outside the scope of this dissertation. The country name used in Macedonia, is simply Macedonia and in this dissertation this is used throughout.

In comparison England is a larger and more economically secure country than Macedonia. It is the largest constituent nation within: the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the UK). The countries and regions that make up the United Kingdom exercise varying degrees of self-governance in different areas of national life. Education is one of the most fully devolved. The Scottish and Northern Irish education systems are entirely self-governed by

these devolved nations and are quite different in many respects to the English system. The Welsh system is partially devolved within a common framework shared with England, which includes a common school leaving age and outline curriculum. Therefore, in this dissertation the term England and English are used when defining the sample group of participants as it is the common education system that has defined the unit of comparison. The United Kingdom is an established democracy and the fifth largest economy in the world by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with relatively strong per capita GDP. The school system in all the nations and regions of the United Kingdom is therefore relatively well-funded in comparison to global standards (UNESCO, 2017).

In terms of its education system: the Macedonian system is highly dependent on foreign aid and intervention (Westrick, 2013), whilst the United Kingdom is a major donor of aid. This is largely donated indirectly, via the European Union. In recent years in Macedonia this relationship with more developed countries has seen one particularly significant development, which was mentioned by all of the Macedonian interviewees. This is the imposition of a new national curriculum at primary level bought in from Cambridge International Exams, with the intention to further develop this at secondary level in coming years.

This has caused considerable controversy and these internal debates in Macedonia link to several of the debates already presented in the paragraphs above in this chapter. These include concerns over the relevance of importing a curriculum wholesale into Macedonia from England, when Macedonia has a different history, educational culture and just as significantly different levels of resourcing of education (Joshevska & Kirandziska, 2017). The state education system in both England and Macedonia has a largely comprehensive structure, although in England this is complicated by the continued existence of a small grammar sector. In both countries schooling is compulsory. In England this is up to sixteen years old, in Macedonia up to fifteen years old. In England education, although not schooling, is compulsory up to eighteen. It is provided free of charge up until eighteen years old in both countries, when school leaving and university entrance exams are taken. Although the overall structure of the school system in Macedonia is comprehensive, there is still a wide range of differences between schools in Macedonia (UNICEF, 2015).

The landscape of schooling in Macedonia is complicated by the fact that some schools use Macedonian as the medium of teaching and others Albanian. This reflects the ethnic mix of Macedonia, discussed above (Sejdini, 2014). However, there are also significant other

differences between schools with some rural schools among the least resourced in Europe and others that are academically successful and reasonably well resourced (Westrick, 2013). The better resourcing of these schools is in part due to the relatively successful micro economies of two cities: Skopje and Bitola, which are where these more successful schools tend to be located (Westrick, 2013). There is also a small private school sector that is internationally minded and linked to other schools worldwide. This is primarily through the International Baccalaureate programmes. One of the Macedonian interviewees both studied and worked within this sector, whilst another taught in a rural primary school. The other three all taught in state schools in Skopje. Brief participant biographies are presented in Chapter Eight.

All issues concerning the education system in Macedonia fall under the governance of the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES, formerly the Ministry of Education and Physical Culture), whilst the State Education Inspectorate supervises the implementation of laws and other acts pertinent to education, the provision of quality education, and the implementation of educational standards. There are 990 schools in Macedonia of which 110 are secondary schools and the remainder primary schools. Primary schooling lasts from 6 to 14 years old and secondary schooling from 14 to 18 (UNESCO, 2017). Therefore, these terms are not a precise match with their meaning in England, where schooling is typically divided 5 to 11 and 11 to 18, albeit with some regional differences. This number of schools in Macedonia seems set to remain largely stable. Emigration outwards is slightly greater than immigration and has been since 2010, balanced against population increase by birth rate, current school numbers are predicted to be adequate, there are therefore no significant school building plans (USAID, 2017). There has however, been a large amount of school rebuilding funded by money from both the European Union and United States of America. Sixty-three schools have been fully re-furbished in the past four years with money provided via USAID (USAID, 2017).

As mentioned in the paragraphs above, foreign aid channelled through non-governmental organisations has played a significant role in developing the landscape of education in Macedonia and this includes in terms of teachers' professional development. The largest project involving the professional development of teachers, led by a foreign aid donor and directed via a non-governmental organisation is the 'Readers are Leaders' project funded by USAID and managed by the Step by Step Foundation (International Step by Step Association, 2017). It is one of many examples of foreign aid being used to develop teaching in Macedonia (UNESCO, 2017). However, as it is the largest it is both significant in its own right and

illustrative of both the positive benefits of aid but also the challenges and controversies. The project which involves the provision of reading materials and support has reached every primary school in Macedonia but in the absence of a market of alternatives has also become the main delivery mechanism across the country for the teaching of literacy, meaning that aside from the innovations of individual teachers, schools are now highly dependent on a single project, which in turn is dependent on funding beyond the control of the Ministry of Education and Science (USAID, 2017). In this respect the situation in Macedonia differs greatly from the situation in England where there is very little external funding other than that provided by the national government but where funding by the national government is more secure.

Another significant contributor to the funding and therefore shaping of education in Macedonia is the World Bank. In this case it has funded the development of school infrastructure, rather than training or development, but in turn this has had an impact on policy, which has shaped professional development and formal ways of ensuring teaching quality and defining teacher status (Klemencic & Zgaga, 2014). This has included encouraging the Macedonian ministry to engage with the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and to use it as a quality benchmark. World Bank advice has also led to the ministry requiring schools to release three-year plans that are driven by data evidencing achievement in exam results (Tikly, 2014). This has then had the further impact that in order to be able to evidence that Macedonian qualifications can be accurately matched against international standards that the Macedonian government has chosen to import wholesale a curriculum and assessment structure across all years written by Cambridge International Examinations, a private company affiliated to the University of Cambridge (CIE, 2017), as mentioned above. All of these developments again reflect changes brought in within England over the past thirty years. However, the important distinction is that although models that influenced policy in England were themselves based on and inspired by models elsewhere in the world the final form has been generated internally. In contrast in Macedonia, the final form of these changes has been introduced by outside experts albeit in conversation with Macedonian professionals working in education.

These changes have included the introduction of the national child-friendly school framework, which has involved the development of standards in six areas: inclusiveness; effectiveness; a safe and protective environment; gender equality; participation; and multiculturalism and child rights (UNESCO, 2017). Much of this can be seen as building on and reflecting practice already present in Macedonia. However, there are aspects that can be problematised. This

includes linking these processes to standards, which reflects the ‘standards agenda’ (Fullan, 2016) in terms of defining the expertise of teachers, that has dominated teaching in England since the 1980s. Also, there are terms used, that put forward contested concepts in an uncontested way such as ‘multi-culturalism’ and ‘child’s rights’ (UNESCO, 2017). Two significant documents that have shaped and illustrate the complex map that is education in Macedonia are the Law on Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Education of 2008, which stipulates the obligation to publish textbooks in both Macedonian and Albanian, and the Ohrid Framework agreement of 2001 (UNESCO, 2017), which guarantees that any minority which constitutes over 20% of the population has a right to education in their language, In practice this has led to education in Macedonian and Albanian.

Macedonian teachers are guaranteed by statute thirty hours of personal development time within their expected workload. Based on international comparisons this is a relatively high amount. It is expected in models produced by the Macedonian Ministry of Education and Science to equate to four committed working days per year (USAID, 2017). However, although this is a relatively high amount much of it is already directed by the ministry via the school the teacher works in and only a small amount is therefore free for the teacher to use at their discretion. This is comparable to the situation in England where teachers also have time for professional development allocated within national workload agreements but where another, parallel set of guidance for schools, and in the case of local authority schools, local statute, directs this through professional development days on the school site. The result of this in both countries therefore is that whilst teachers are expected to be involved in self-development, in fact in both countries the possibility of using the time given in flexible and self-directed ways is extremely limited. Teachers who wish to engage in development opportunities outside the boundaries of those directed by the school or ministry need to dedicate a considerable amount of their own time and this is likely to include evenings and weekends (Murchan, Shiel & Mikovska, 2012). This therefore potentially limits those who may wish to do so and also those who have the capacity to do so.

These changes to the overall national framework that schooling functions within and to the forms of professional development that teachers’ engage with potentially impacts on teacher status. Teacher status and defining this in different national contexts can be difficult and allusive. There is evidence that there are very few countries, if any, regardless of differing government policies where teachers perceive that their status has improved and that this is even

the case in countries where teacher status is perceived in the global media to be high (Park & Byun, 2015). However, it has been argued, by different writers, that teacher status has both increased and decreased in Macedonia over the past two decades. The case for an increase in teacher status has been made based on the assumption that improved professionalisation via the introduction of standards, results driven inspections and engagement with large scale surveys increases teachers' perceptions of themselves as professionals (Pantic, Wubbels & Mainhard, 2011). Conversely it has been argued that loss of autonomy, and the importing of expertise has led to a loss of status which has also been accompanied by the ongoing marketisation of public services within the Balkan nations as a whole (Silova & Eklof, 2012).

The International Teacher Leadership initiative has been used as a model for developing teacher development programmes by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded organisation, 'Step by Step' (Joshevska & Kirandziska, 2017). The teachers involved in this Macedonian iteration of the International Teacher Leadership initiative are those teachers who one might reasonably expect to perceive themselves as being internationally connected teachers with an international outlook regarding the communities they belong to. In summary they have been: involved in initiatives based on ideas developed in England, put into practice in Macedonia by an organisation funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and with the goal of enabling schools to be prepared to teach towards a curriculum bought in and designed by a company that is affiliated to an English university (Joshevska & Kirandziska, 2017). The exact ways in which this programme has been implemented in Macedonia and the teachers' responses to it are discussed in more detail in Chapter Six, Eight and Ten. Further specific details regarding the sample of teachers who participated in interviews as part of this study are discussed in Chapters Five and Eight, prior to the presentation and analysis of the interview data.

Conclusion

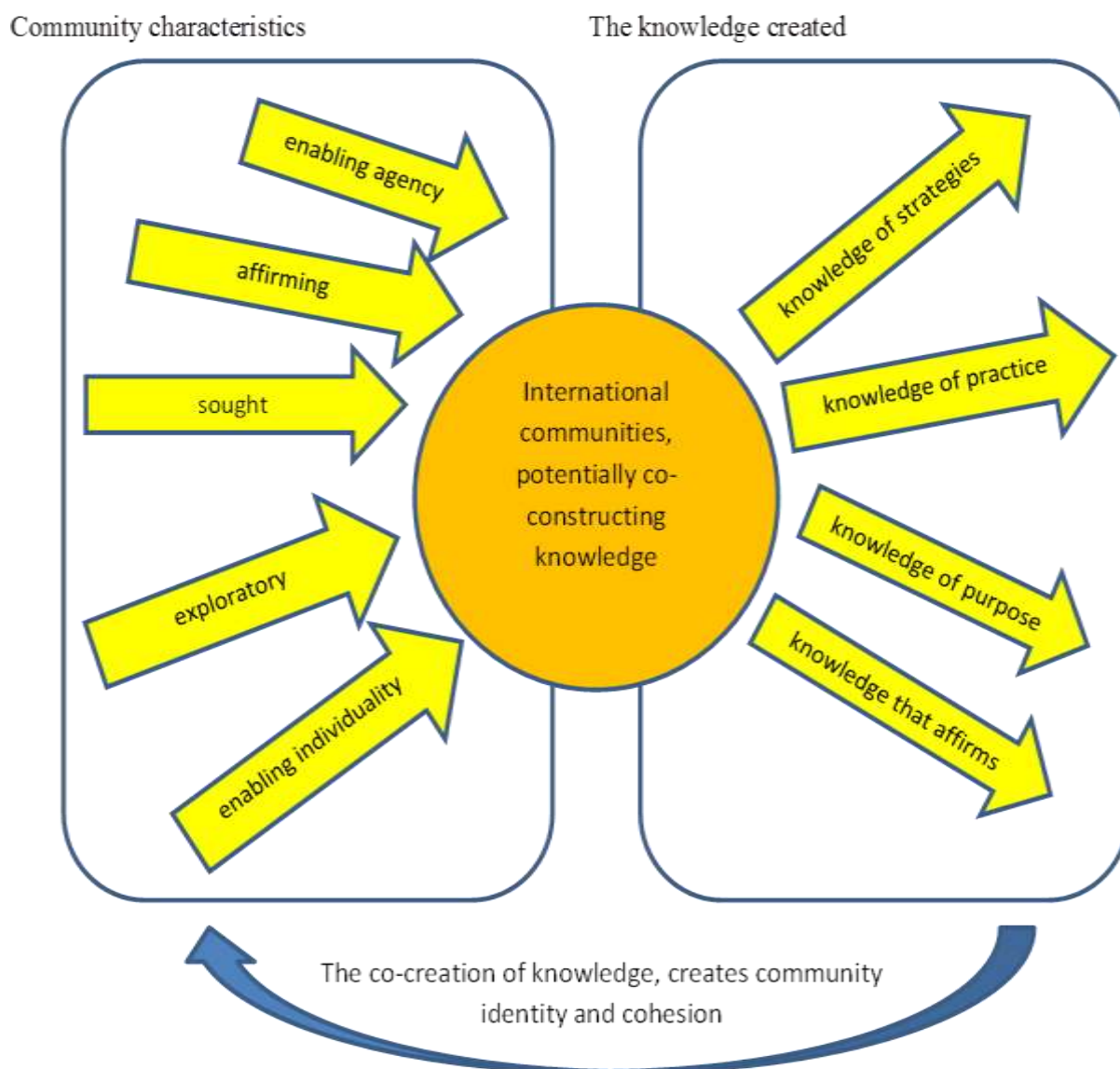
In conclusion to this chapter: one significant issue that emerged is that teachers from different countries may have very different expectations from what they may gain from working with colleagues from other countries. Specifically, a wide range of research written over a prolonged timespan suggests that relatively little practice is successfully imported into the most developed countries including England via the process of international networking or partnership by

professionals in education, nor is this commonly the goal of teachers from England although it is increasingly the goal of the British government. Conversely, throughout the developing world and also within recently developed countries, there have been many attempts often directed by government, to import what are perceived to be Western practice wholesale and at high speed. However, these policies have led to recent debates over whether this is a responsible approach to developing education within these countries. At the strongest these have even included accusations of neo-colonialism although with a few exceptions such strong accusations tend to be nuanced rather than entirely rejectionist.

On the other hand, other goals may provide a more compelling justification for teachers working together internationally. One possible motivation for working with colleagues in other countries may be highly idealistic and involve a desire to enhance democratic values and improve global understanding. However, other reasons may be practice based but in more nuanced ways. It may be that relatively little practice is either exported or imported because of the deep similarities in teaching worldwide. This would suggest that there may be a shared professional identity amongst teachers and in relation to this an international professional community of teachers that it may be deeply rewarding to engage with but that this is not the same as a community that engages in the sharing of teaching strategies.

It is also possible to suggest that the legacy of having participated in such a community by working with colleagues from other countries may not be that the teacher will have learnt transferable practice but that they will have learnt how to compare and reflect, or developed their skills in this area. They may also have reaffirmed their sense of moral purpose or developed their professional self-efficacy. The issues discussed here and in the chapters before built towards the conceptual framework. They also built towards the final iteration of my research questions. In the next few paragraphs I discuss both of these. Below, I firstly present a summary of the conceptual framework in diagrammatic form with a commentary. Finally I present the final iteration of my research questions.

Diagram 4.1: the conceptual framework, iteration one



At the heart of this diagram lies: potentially significant international communities co-constructing knowledge. Feeding into this are those characteristics which may be the characteristics that teachers are intent on finding when they choose to seek alternative, and specifically international communities that they could potentially identify themselves as members of. Flowing out of this community are the forms of knowledge that such a community may generate and that may be present in the discourse between teachers engaged in a process of mutual recognition as members. The further long arrow at the bottom of the diagram, curving

back, illustrates how this process of sharing knowledge may be both an outcome of community engagement and a creator of community identity and cohesion.

An initial typology of knowledge is presented in this diagram. This includes knowledge of strategies which refers to specific classroom based actions which are both mechanistic and relatively easily transferred, knowledge of practice which relates to perspectives on and approaches to teaching and lesson design and includes practice based aspects of the tacit knowledge of teachers, knowledge of purpose and knowledge that affirms. In this first iteration of this conceptual framework the knowledge feeds back primarily into the community itself. There is a further iteration of this conceptual framework presented at the end of Chapter Six, this is extended and refined following the review of documents produced within the context of the International Teacher Leadership initiative. Lastly, I have included here the final version of my research questions. This final version of the research questions functioned as a further set of tools that built from the conceptual framework and provided direction for the process of analysis and contributing to theory building.

The final version of the research questions for my doctoral study

1. In what ways do teachers perceive themselves as belonging to an international professional community of teachers?
2. How is the way teachers perceive their professional identity shaped by the experience of working with teachers from other countries?
3. Are there any significant obstacles or affordances to teachers perceiving themselves as members of an international professional community of teachers?
4. In what ways do teachers define success when working with colleagues from other countries?

The term community is addressed directly in all these questions, while the possibility that knowledge is exchanged in various forms is implied in all but not presented in the phrasing of the questions themselves. The potential that these are knowledge sharing, or knowledge constructing communities is left open but so is the possibility that they are not. For example: the first research question enables the possibility that these teachers perceive themselves as belonging to a community that directly shares knowledge. However, it also allows for the possibility that they perceive the purpose and nature of this community in other ways too.

The term communities is addressed directly because, via the building of the conceptual

framework, it emerged that some form of community membership would in all likelihood be acknowledged by the participants and it would be the precise form and the implications of this rather than its presence at all that I would be exploring. The word ‘with’ also needs to be problematised. All of the participants perceived themselves as members of initiatives with an international dimension. In this sense they perceived a direct and tangible link. However, as is discussed in Chapters Seven to Ten, they did not necessarily expect to work in direct and close proximity with colleagues from other countries. With was retained in the questions though as this problematising could enable rather than inhibit the potential for this thesis to contribute to knowledge.

Chapter 5

Methodological considerations

In this chapter I explore and discuss the methodology that frames this study, the methods used and the implications and issues that arose because of these choices. This chapter is divided into two halves. The first focuses on the process of data collection and the second half on the process of data analysis. In the first half of this chapter, I also discuss the broad epistemological framework that this study sits within. This is then followed by an overview of the data collection design. The details of the process of data collection are then presented in the chronological order of the stages of the research conducted. I discuss the research I conducted prior to interviewing: namely systematic documentary research into writing produced in the context of the International Teacher Leadership initiative. I then discuss the design of the primary data collection process, which was via interview. The discussion of the design of the interview process is divided into two. Firstly, I discuss issues of access and sampling, I then discuss the interview process itself. The final section involves a discussion of ethical issues that emerged through this design for data collection and ways in which these were resolved. There are therefore six sections within this first half of this chapter, with the following titles:

- defining the epistemology
- overall research design
- data collection: documents
- data collection: sampling
- data collection: interviews
- data collection: ethics

There is following this a second half to this chapter, in which I discuss the process of data analysis and related issues of validity, reliability, generalisability and theory generation, the ethical issues that emerged from data analysis and the way the data fed into the answer to each research question.

Defining the epistemology

My approach to researching this dissertation sits outside a positivist tradition. That is a simple and in some ways obvious statement to make (Flick, 2014) as broadly speaking very little research conducted in the United Kingdom or USA in education in the present era is framed within an entirely positivist tradition, even when it contains a significant quantitative element (Newby, 2014). This dissertation however is positioned more clearly outside this than this general statement suggests as the methods used were entirely qualitative and the sample small. In the following paragraphs therefore I define the epistemology that framed the research methodology for this study.

In order for there to be consistency between the methods used, the process of analysis and my claims for generalisability, reliability and validity later in this dissertation I have positioned this study within an interpretivist paradigm. I have chosen the term interpretivism based on Robson and McCartan's (2016) problematising of the terms social constructivism and social constructionism. In this they define social constructionism as emphasising the significance of group interaction rather than individual interpretation in terms of constructing shared definitions, whilst social constructivism emphasises the opposite. This division was problematic in terms of this study because these are the very issues that are explored in this dissertation. Therefore, the term interpretivism which is less firmly linked to a collectivist or individualistic perspective and enables more fluidity was more appropriate (Charmaz, 2014).

The design of the research process for this dissertation was also intended to involve an open acknowledgment of my subjectivity as a researcher and also the participants' perceptions of the communities of teachers they may belong to. This again fits with an interpretivist framework (Bryman, 2016). There are some writers who suggest that an interpretivist approach can usefully be further nuanced into different forms of interpretivism (Charmaz, 2014). However, in not doing so I take my lead from Rubin and Rubin (2012) who argue that an over emphasis on defining a study this way can detract from the ability to build robust conclusions, as the research can be too overtly squeezed into a paradigmatic box.

This epistemological framework has also been shaped by my personal and professional experience. As Neuman writes (2014) what people do in the name of research is influenced by both their assumptions about knowledge and by their perception of what is the most appropriate methodology for the phenomena that is being studied. The paradigm a researcher works within

is more than a pragmatic choice, it also reflects a way of perceiving the world built from past experiences that are deeper than research training or research experience alone (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). Therefore, in the paragraphs below I locate myself as a researcher with a brief discussion into my personal and professional background.

My epistemological and methodological standpoints, have grown from personally significant educational and professional experiences. These include my first degree, which was in history and a career background largely in education but partly in law. As a caseworker for the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) I had some post-graduate training in law and I am experienced in taking legal cases. Studying history with its idiographic nature whereby it involves telling stories and alternate truths and rarely searching for patterns and general rules helped define for me what seemed to me to be a realistic epistemological model. Law unlike history is based on acknowledging the existence of generalisable ethical concepts, truths and patterns of behaviour. However, it identifies these through the gradual collection and comparison of detailed cases, often over many years. Also, although the discourse of research is different in that of both history and law, both are in essence areas of study in which meanings are contested and co-constructed almost always via qualitative methods. Therefore, to me these seemed to be appropriate epistemological models that can be reflected in the social sciences by conducting research using a broader interpretivist framework.

The overall research design

The overall design for data collection for this study was as follows and divides into three clear and separate stages (Newby, 2014). These stages were successive rather than concurrent and one purpose of each was to inform the research design of the next, with the final stage: the interviews, providing the primary source of data for answering the research questions (Flick, 2014). Firstly, there was a preparatory stage which involved the writing of the conceptual framework. The purpose of this stage was to build a conceptual framework that would be used to guide the analysis of documents and the interviews at a later stage. In doing so it would also inform the process of building towards a synthesis in the later chapters.

The second stage involved the collection and analysis of documentary data. This was specifically documents produced by the International Teacher Leadership initiative since 2008,

including those written by teachers involved in this project. The purpose of this stage was to inform the design of the final, primary stage of data collection by enabling me to further refine the interview design and the analytical process. This data therefore enabled me to contextualise these interviews in greater depth and to analyse them more effectively (Silverman, 2013).

The third and final stage involved conducting ten interviews with two different groups of teachers. The first of these were teachers working in schools in England who were all engaged in some way with the International Teacher Leadership initiative. The second group was teachers working in Macedonia who were similarly engaged in developments in Macedonia also based on the International Teacher Leadership initiative. The stages of data collection would be conducted successively, with each stage informing the design of the next and with the interview data being the primary form of data collected. The analysis of the interview data would be accorded the greatest weight and consequently the chapters in which this data has been discussed have been given the most space in this dissertation (Bryman, 2016). As this illustrates this is an entirely qualitative study, with the primary form of data collection in the form of interviews.

A significant reason for my decision to construct an entirely qualitative design was that the aims and goals of teacher networking programmes, articulated in the literature of the organisations that promote international networking tend to be strong, clear and hard to disagree with. This includes the documents produced via the International Teacher Leadership initiative, which are described and discussed in the next chapter. They variously combine an emphasis on the importance of: democratic participation, enabling civic society, empowering teachers and on building international communities of teachers and of others (British Council, 2016; Frost, 2008). All of these are values, which I felt were likely to be shared by the majority of teachers who participate in any international teacher networking project. Therefore, it seemed to me that there would be a strong likelihood of gaining data where the participants would replicate each other and where little new understanding would be gained, if I used a highly structured process (Flick, 2014). Specifically it seemed to me that quantitative results based on a large sample would be unlikely to yield a significant new contribution to knowledge beyond that already gained by research referred to in the earlier chapters (Bryman, 2016).

Qualitative research can be especially valuable when researching into complex areas, with large areas of agreement but where the researcher is interested in nuanced perspectives (Creswell, 2013). This was very much how I perceived this field. This expectation that differences in

viewpoint among teachers engaged in working with other teachers across national boundaries would be subtle was confirmed by my analysis of writing produced from within the International Teacher Leadership initiative. From reading this it became clear that it would be likely that most teachers involved in this initiative would agree with the basic principles and ethical standpoints that the initiative is framed by, especially as they articulate perspectives that are also to a large extent based on Western liberal values, an issue that was previously discussed in Chapter Four.

I therefore decided that I needed an approach that would, via personal narratives and extended descriptions, reveal subtle differences in teachers' perceptions and in the nature of their experiences (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This in turn led to the decision that the second and primary part of the research process could most usefully be in the form of interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (2012) write that interview is an appropriate method to use when studying a complex and nuanced topic, especially one dealing with a variety of cultural arenas, which very precisely described how I perceived this study. However, the decision to collect data via an initial process of document analysis followed by interviewing just two relatively small sample groups had implications for the possibility of producing generalisable concepts or theoretical propositions (Yin, 2014). This is discussed further in the second half of this chapter in which I discuss my approach to data analysis.

Data collection: documents

The first method of data collection I used for this doctoral study was a systematic review of documentary evidence that was produced from within the International Teacher Leadership initiative. I define this as such in that it fulfils the four conditions for a systematic document review as described by Newby (2014) these are that it is: bounded, structured, replicable and updateable. As has been referred to above, the purpose of this review was to refine the themes that emerged from the writing of the conceptual framework, to further shape the design of the interview schedule and to inform the analysis of the interviews. This stage of document analysis preceded the interviews, which were the main form of data collection, which were accorded the greatest weight in this study.

This documentary analysis stage involved reading and analysing writing produced within the context of the International Teacher Leadership initiative. This initiative therefore provided the

boundaries of this review (Bryman, 2016). The reason for drawing the boundaries of the document analysis stage in this way was because the sample of teachers who were interviewed was based entirely on teachers who are involved in international dialogue via this initiative, although as is discussed in later chapters the exact form of engagement varied from teacher to teacher.

This documentary analysis was also supported by attendance at conferences over a five year period which enabled me to observe the evolution of the International Teacher Leadership initiative over this period of time. In 2011 I attended a conference in Bulgaria run by the International Teacher Leadership initiative and in 2012 I attended a further conference in Sarajevo run by the same organisation. In 2014 and 2015 I attended symposia presented by this organisation at the European Conference on Education Research. This was done with the specific purpose of supporting the documentary analysis because it enabled me to more fully understand the context in which these documents were produced and disseminated and subsequently to be able to better contextualise the interview data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

This methodological approach: with each form of data being collected in succession; and with each form of data collected therefore informing the next; and leading to refinement of the conceptual framework that would contextualise the initial analysis of the interview data is based on the processes defined in grounded theory. In the terms of Corbin and Strauss (2015) this iterative process enabled me to locate my study within the range of micro and macro conditions in which it is embedded. However, it should be noted that I am not claiming to be using a fully realised grounded theory approach. One reason being because this design had pre-defined boundaries for data collection, something that would not be compatible with a fully realised grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014), which should be unbounded.

Further reasons as to why I am not defining this approach as grounded theory are explored and discussed in more detail in later sections in this chapter, which focus on the process of data analysis. In these later sections, I also discuss alternative approaches which are related to grounded theory as regards some of the specific methods and techniques used but which position these within alternative perceptions regarding the overall framework of the study.

Data collection: sampling

This section and the next address the process of data collection via interview. In the next few paragraphs I discuss the design of my sampling frame, for the interview stage of data collection. I then in the following section discuss the interview process itself.

My sampling of participants was based on two linked approaches. These are discussed in the following paragraphs. However, there was also a pragmatic aspect to the selection of the participants in terms of the first stage of the sampling frame (Yin, 2014), namely the choice of two countries from which all the participants came. The pragmatic aspects were the access and contextual understanding (Bryman, 2016) which was enabled by choosing to interview participants from England. The second was choosing to interview participants from Macedonia. This was because of support offered from colleagues working in education, in leadership roles, within the non-governmental organisation Step by Step, which facilitated access to participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The first aspect of the sampling process beyond the choice of these two countries upon which to focus this study, could in Robson and McCartan's (2016) terms be defined as 'purposive sampling'. This was sampling bounded by specific, formal criteria or dimensions (Flick, 2014). This produced a pool of potential participants that could have been approached and with whom as described in the paragraph above I was confident an interview could be arranged. The second stage in the process which refined this pool to the final groups of interviewees was sampling based on the likelihood of a depth of data being created which, again to use Robson and McCartan's terms (2016), could be defined as 'theoretical sampling'. There is precedent for linking these two approaches to sampling especially when exploring a complex area via a small-scale study (Flick, 2014). Each of these approaches is discussed in this order in the paragraphs below.

In terms of bounding the sample via specific criteria: this sample was set within clear temporal and organisational boundaries (Flick, 2014). In this case the boundaries were that my first sample of interviewees consisted of a small group of teachers from Macedonia who at the time of writing this dissertation were working in a formally created network which linked them with teachers from England, albeit in some cases peripherally, whilst my second sample consisted of teachers from England who were working or had recently worked within the same initiative. The initiative that all the participants were working within was the International Teacher

Leadership initiative. A further criteria was that all the interviewees from Macedonia spoke English well enough that they could be interviewed without a translator. Although, a translator was also present in case there was any need for further clarification at any stage. The total sample size was ten, divided into two distinct groups of five given the titles 'Teachers from England' and 'Teachers from Macedonia'. This decision to draw the boundaries based on only three criteria: nationality, professional experience and language spoken is based on Bryman (2016) who stresses that it is possible to insert too many boundaries thus limiting the variety of lived experiences of the sample.

As regards the second aspect of my sampling frame namely: seeking participants who were likely to generate depth of data, I built a suitable theoretical approach for this study by using Flick's (2014, p.170) model for sampling when using qualitative methods with the intention of theory generation. In this case as this model of sample building is significant for this study it is worth quoting directly:

Select individuals according to their (expected) level of new insights for the developing theory in relation to the state of theory elaboration so far (Flick, 2014, p.170).

As Flick goes on to state, sampling based on such a definition involves acknowledging subjectivity rather than striving for objectivity. The participants' commitment to engagement with teacher networking initiatives was important when selecting them. Therefore, as is appropriate within a sampling frame based on these principles, recommendations by those who enabled access to these participants shaped the process of selection (Flick, 2014). Those who facilitated access were specifically professionals involved in leadership roles in the International Teacher Leadership initiative and the non-governmental organisation Step by Step. To this extent the individual biography of each participant is also relevant and these are presented at the beginning of Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight. However, in brief all participants from both countries had worked with teachers from other countries in a variety of ways including: in close proximity, online and in initiatives that were internationally defined but that did not facilitate teacher networking directly.

A small sample of ten participants was realistic in terms of my desire to generate a relatively small amount of qualitative data in the form of text that could be analysed in depth. In making this decision I was influenced by Rubin and Rubin (2012) and Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) who describe and discuss the benefits of using far smaller samples, than would be typical when developing a sampling frame for a study that aims at reaching a high level of

generalisability, when wanting to seek subtle and nuanced differences in perception and when participants may be expected to have broadly similar perceptions. Based on these perspectives, my intention was that by designing a small-scale interview based study it would enable me to gain a greater depth of understanding based on detailed analysis.

This small sample size would be enough to collectively present (but not represent) an overall view of the topic (Flick, 2014). Referring back to the overall design of this study, discussed in the section above, this method of sampling by linking these two approaches was also appropriate because of the successive rather than concurrent nature of the two methods of data collection. This was because it meant that I was able to choose the specific interviewees based on the likelihood of these interviewees generating deep enough data for analysis against an already emerging conceptual framework (Flick, 2014). Also, as Flick states, these two approaches to sampling should not necessarily be seen as opposites. Yin, writing specifically regarding case study design acknowledges that effective design often involves a degree of flexibility regarding designing sampling frames (Yin, 2014). The implications of this as far as reliability and validity and the possibility of theory generation are discussed later in this chapter.

The decision to choose a sample size of ten participants also positions this study within a group of related research conducted within the broader umbrella of the International Teacher Leadership initiative. These studies, written within the context of this initiative, all involved a sample of between eight and twelve participants (Bolat, 2013; Creaby, 2013; Teleshaliyev, 2014). In all cases the foundation of the research conducted was a doctoral study. However, further articles have since been published that develop from these (Teleshaliyev, 2014). These studies tend to be entirely qualitative and use interview as the main data collection method. All of these therefore via their design mirror some of the principles that underpin teacher led development work as framed by the International Teacher Leadership initiative. In this paradigm there is an acknowledgment that research is often conducted in familiar professional fields, in which an interview process may be just one of many professional conversations that take place. This includes a perception of the participants as professional equals and the study as an opportunity to explore the values and perceptions of a community (Frost, 2015). This study was positioned within a family of related studies because it intends to contribute knowledge to this community as well as more broadly.

All those who were interviewed had worked as teachers in either Macedonia or in England.

However, within these boundaries there was a significant variety of experience. Each participant's professional background is detailed further in the participant biographies presented at the start of Chapters Seven and Eight. However, in short, the sample of participants included experienced teachers, senior leaders in schools and those who had taught recently but at the time of conducting this research held positions in non-governmental organisations, none of the participants was new to the teaching profession. All at the point when they were interviewed had taught for at least two years. There is precedent in choosing participants with a wide range of professional experiences instead of drawing the sampling boundaries tighter via other more specific criteria (Silverman, 2014). The potential strength of such an approach is that it enables a rich, range of experiences to be explored and discussed. It also enables commonalities to be sought that can be applied beyond a narrow category of individuals (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Such an approach however, does potentially limit the generalisability of the study even within the boundaries to which a concept such as generalisability can be applied to qualitative research (Yin, 2014). The implications of this are discussed further later in this chapter.

The choice of Macedonia was in part fortuitous and was based on the welcoming approach of those who enabled me to access the participants, specifically those in leadership positions within the International Step by Step Association. I had worked closely with colleagues in Macedonia as part of being engaged with teachers via the International Teacher Leadership initiative. However, in my work with the British Council in the period from 2006 to 2014 I had built similarly close relationships with colleagues in Bahrain and in Japan. It could have been possible to build a sample group based on these countries instead, with colleagues working in the British Council in these countries facilitating access. However, there were implications of cost and accessibility that were simplified by choosing to base this second sample on teachers from a European country. There was also the potential for more coherent comparison by choosing to compare groups of teachers who had all been involved in international networking via the International Teacher Leadership initiative. These two factors therefore were significant in making the decision to base this sample on Macedonia.

There are implications that emerged from the decision to interview these teachers in English as this then limited the potential pool of participants to those whose English was effectively fluent. This is a section of the population that is almost always a minority in any country outside the Anglophone world, including in Macedonia. As is discussed in the participant biographies at

the start of Chapters Seven and Eight these teachers therefore tended to have similar characteristics in that for the most part they had travelled quite widely and built friendships with colleagues and others from other nations in both formal and informal ways. This is not necessarily representative of the wider population of teachers in either country (Joshevska & Kirandziska, 2016). Potentially this could, simply by this one commonality of being fluent English speakers, have led to the creation of a sample group that shared other political and social values such as a welcoming perspective on globalisation and associated societal changes (Goodheart, 2017). However, the exploratory and narrative nature of this research means that this does not negate the possibility of suggesting commonalities that may be found across communities of teachers, within the context of definitions of validity and reliability explored later in this thesis so long as this is acknowledged throughout (Silverman, 2014).

Details regarding the participants themselves are presented in a short series of brief biographies at the opening of the chapters in which I discuss the interview data. They are presented here for ease of reference when contextualising the findings that emerged from the interviews. However, one distinct aspect that emerged was that all the participants involved were women. This was not an intended boundary to this study. It to some extent reflects the teaching population in Macedonia and to a lesser extent in England. Once it had emerged as a commonality I did not attempt to build a different gender balance. This was based on the precedence given by Midgley, Danaher and Baguley (2013) who state that to respond to this issue when the other aspects of the sample are coherently reflected by the participants can lead to poorer quality data especially when theoretical sampling informs the design of the sampling frame. There is also precedent for following this advice when researching professional contexts such as research into the experiences of teachers (Zirkel, Garcia & Murphy, 2015).

Data collection: interviews

As mentioned above in the section on sampling. I held ten interviews. These interviews lasted between forty minutes to one hour each and were recorded. I acknowledge that there is considerable debate regarding the use of recording. Noticeably Rubin and Rubin (2012) advise considering note-taking instead, whilst a significant number of other writers (Bryman, 2016), strongly assert that both recording and transcribing are essential for any study to make claims for reliability and validity, issues that are discussed in the next half of this chapter. I felt that

constraints of time and the difficulty in repeating some interviews meant that, for this particular study, I needed as comprehensive a record of the data I had collected as possible and that recording would be the most appropriate method to ensure this. The issue of transcribing is referred to later in this chapter. The interviews were all held in English. They were held in private and were all one to one interviews. However, all the Macedonian participants were accompanied by a translator, who was able to clarify phrases or words as required. This was based on the approach advised by Squires (2009) when interviewing people in a second language and reflects the need to impose a systematic element that proactively addresses potential issues of misunderstanding, before beginning interviews with second language speakers, even if they are close to bilingual. The interview process itself is described in further detail in the paragraphs below.

The interview schedule and process was as follows. As a prompt to enable the participants to start talking freely, they were asked to draw a diagram of the professional communities they belong to and were asked to discuss and explain their diagram. They were told they could draw this in any way they wished. Following this a conversation took place based on a very simple interview schedule, this is included in the appendices. This schedule consisted of just a small number of pre-scheduled themes from which I expected further discussion to develop (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The same interview schedule was used with all my participants with an expectation that all would potentially contribute data that would be useful for answering all the research questions.

Both Rubin and Rubin (2012) and Flick (2014) suggest that while some methodological texts divide interviews neatly between structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews this is an over-simplification of the wide variety of interview schedules that are used in an equally wide range of contexts. Therefore, they present a range of possible terms that can potentially more accurately define the richness within the interviewing process. Of these although the simple term semi-structured would also be an appropriate definition for the type of interview that I conducted, the terms ‘responsive’ (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p.37) and ‘focused’ (Flick, 2014, p.212) describe the approach taken during the interview stage far better. I was influenced by Rubin and Rubin’s definition of a responsive interviewing approach. This was so much so that I have included this extended quotation from them as it fully and succinctly describes my intention in terms of the conduct of these interviews:

Responsive interviewing is a style of qualitative interviewing. It emphasises the

importance of building a relationship of trust between the interviewer and interviewee that leads to more give and take in the conversation. The tone of questioning is gentle with little confrontation. The pattern of questioning is flexible; questions evolve in response to what the interviewees have just said, and new questions are designed to tap the experience and knowledge of each interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p.37).

I have quoted this in full because it enables a discussion of several aspects of the nature of the interviews that I conducted. As has been described earlier in the section on epistemology I wanted to be able to understand the lived experience of my participants as defined by their perception of their own professional identity and of the communities that they saw themselves as belonging to. Therefore, the building of trust and a perception that this would be a discussion among professional equals was of importance to me. As has also been mentioned above, in terms of the boundaries of this study, I had chosen three simple and clearly defined boundaries but otherwise I was seeking variety in terms of their lived experience and I wanted to create the opportunity for them to explore their experiences and perceptions.

The term responsive interviewing as defined by Rubin and Rubin (2012) includes a clear definition for the intended tone and atmosphere of the interview. These were fundamental aspects of the interview design. However, Flick's definition of a 'focused interview' was also important during the design process of the interviews (2014). According to Flick as all interviews are designed and therefore in some sense structured, this alternative typology may more accurately describe what an interviewer is attempting to achieve in what might more typically be called either a semi-structured or an unstructured interview. Typically starting with a prompt of some kind, possibly a visual prompt, the interviewer moves through a series of questions designed to elicit retrospective reflection. As has been explained above, the interviews that I conducted very much followed this structure, with the one significant addition being that the interviewees created their own initial prompt (Flick, 2014).

This design described above was constructed in order to fulfil certain criteria. The most significant of these being that the design needed to be: culturally sensitive to potentially very different educational, social and political cultures; must not lead the respondents' answers and must allow them to expand upon their answers freely (Rubin & Rubin, 2014). All these points needed to be considered within the context that I wanted to conduct the same interview process for all the participants and that although I am familiar with the country and culture that the teachers from the Macedonia come from it is not a country that I fully understand in a nuanced way. Equally nor could I be said to fully understand the individual school cultures that each of

the teachers from England came from (Denscombe, 2010).

My reasons for this simple schedule were also framed by the epistemological stance that I outlined at the start of this chapter, namely a qualitative methodology embedded within a broader interpretivist epistemological paradigm (Creswell, 2013). By asking the interviewees to draw the communities that they perceived themselves as belonging to, this enabled the linking of the phenomena that I was exploring: professional community and the sharing of knowledge within it, to be effectively realised. This then ensured that the interview would allow the participants personal interpretations of these concepts to be revealed (Creswell, 2013). In the next section to this chapter I discuss the ethical implications of this research design and also ways in which these were resolved.

Data collection: ethics

In this section I discuss ethical issues that arose while collecting data for this study: Specifically I discuss issues of: informed consent, how ethical considerations shaped the design of the data collection process and my role as a researcher. This dissertation was written and the research for it conducted in reference to the University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education Ethical Checklist (2013), which was submitted with the original viva report, and with reference to the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines (BERA, 2011). In the sections below I expand upon this further. There is also a further ethics section at the conclusion of the next half of this chapter, on data analysis. In this second ethics section I address ethical issues that specifically relate to the analysis and presentation of my data. These include: ensuring anonymity; dialogue with participants regarding my findings, and ethical issues that may emerge when writing up this data in various future forms.

The overall design of the study as it emerged was a low risk study in terms of the ethical issues that may arise (Robson & McCartan, 2016). However, it was still significant to attempt to minimise any potential harm. This process of minimising the risk of causing harm began with the design of the document collection stage. The pool that the documents were selected from consisted entirely of documents that had already been released into the public domain and therefore there was no risk of documents that had originally been written in a confidential capacity causing any form of harm by being discussed openly (Creswell, 2013).

In terms of the design of the sampling process the participants who were selected were all professionals working in institutions in which I play no role and were all highly qualified adults. Thus I felt confident that they would have enough understanding of the process, once clarified for them, to be able to refuse to offer or to withdraw their consent without concern for any negative consequence, also that they would fully understand the nature of informed consent (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Newby, (2014) notes that much education research involves children and that whilst this can be very valuable it is easy for researchers in this field to ignore the potential of research that solely investigates the experiences of teachers. This is not an ethical issue in and of itself as it is possible to conduct ethically sound research, with children. However, by choosing to focus on teachers as the population that the sample represented, this did mean that it was easier to ensure that relevant concepts were fully understood than if my participants had come from a higher risk population such as children.

The interviewees participating in this research were fully informed of the nature and purpose of the interviews. The nature of the study was also explained to them, along with their rights including the principle of informed consent and their right to withdraw from contributing to this study at any stage. These were specifically explained in writing before being interviewed; orally before the interview commenced and in writing again on receiving a summary of my draft dissertation. In this way I ensured that I had informed and continuing consent (Denscombe, 2010; BERA, 2011). The purpose of the interview was also explained, that is, that I was writing a doctoral dissertation. I asked permission for the interviews to be recorded and explained that these recordings would be securely stored by me until the completion of this study. I also explained that transcripts would be made and that they would be similarly kept (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Finally, the participants were also assured of anonymity during the process of writing up these interviews, at these same points as has been described above, this is discussed further in the next half of this chapter, which focuses on data analysis.

The interview process for this study was designed to ensure that participants were treated with fairness and honesty at all times. It fitted with Rubin and Rubin's (2012) basic ethical principles for a study for which responsive interviewing is the main form of data collection. That is that there was 'no deceit or pressure involved, that interviewees were treated with respect and that all promises were kept.' (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p.85). The two most significant promises made were regarding anonymity and dialogue with the participants. Overall this study was designed in such a way that it would minimise the risk of causing harm. Specifically: informed consent

was gained, there was no invasion of privacy beyond the asking of questions that participants could choose not to respond to (Robson & McCartan, 2016) and there was no deception involved as regards the purpose of the study or my role as a researcher.

My role in this research took different forms at different stages. In terms of listening to presentations at conferences I could be defined as having been either a complete observer or a marginal participant in that I do not believe my presence affected the presentations in any sense (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This is because although on every occasion my role was known by attendees at these events, the presentations were to large groups of people holding various roles: academic, professional or political of which mine was not particularly significant. My role as interviewer however was significantly different. I planned to be empathetic and uncritical and this is discussed further below. However, it is impossible to fully contextualise the impact my role may have had upon responses (Denscombe, 2010). The fact that I was conducting research as part of a doctoral programme supported by reputable university could give it considerable perceived status, which could potentially inhibit the participants' responses. To some extent these issues cannot be entirely ameliorated just acknowledged.

Responsive interviewing or focused interviewing involves the enabling of a fluid conversation with the participant. In order to ensure that this was maintained, I did not simply ask questions but rather allowed the teachers to discuss freely, occasionally prompting them so that I could gain more information or clarity. The questions that were asked were clear and related to the theme of the research, which the participants were already aware of (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). They were able therefore to participate in these interviews as equal and respected participants engaged in a professional dialogue, in which they could feel valued. If participants wished to pursue an explanatory line or a narrative I gave them the space to talk freely and similarly if any issues were ones that they did not want to discuss I was content for them to avoid that topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In all instances the interviews were conducted in a comfortable environment and in terms of the Macedonian cohort I was accompanied by a bilingual translator who was able to ensure that the teachers could feel confident that subtleties in meaning were accurately put forward. Thus I was able to ensure that even in the detail of the environment there was an implied respect for the participants, their generosity in giving up their time and for sharing their understanding and expertise (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Although British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011) and the University of Cambridge's ethical guidelines (2013) provide guidance that underpins the way

this research has been conducted. It is also important that they are problematised in terms of any study involving participants from another country, in this case Macedonia. This is especially the case when the researcher is English and working within the context of an English institution. I have adhered to BERA guidelines because there is no direct equivalent in Macedonia. However, by using these as the guidelines that I followed it could be argued that I was reinforcing the primacy of English and Western approaches to conducting research (Bray, 2014). Indeed, although I have discussed my role as a researcher above, this also needs to be further contextualised as being part of a potential discourse of inequality whereby researchers who are affiliated to Western institutions far more commonly research in other countries than vice versa (Foster, Addy, Samoff, 2012). Also the lack of discourse between BERA guidelines and a Macedonian equivalent means that I cannot contextualise the appropriacy of BERA guidelines for a non-English context. This is not to negate the importance of following BERA guidelines. However, these issues are worth noting even within the condition that BERA guidelines were still adhered to.

Overview of the data analysis process

In this, the second half to this chapter I discuss how I analysed the data that I collected during this study. This section is ordered in the following way and is divided into two distinct parts. The first addresses the process of data analysis the second addresses broader issues regarding the possibility of generalisation and contributing to academic debate with a study of this design. I begin with a discussion of how my reading of the literature produced within the context of the International Teacher Leadership initiative led to the development of the framework for coding the interviews. Secondly, I discuss the process that was used for analysing the interviews. In the following sections of this chapter I then discuss the challenges and opportunities for generalisation and theory generation when using an entirely qualitative method with a small sample. Following from this, I also discuss issues of validity and reliability in terms of a qualitative study of this kind. In the subsequent section I explore the ethical issues that emerged when analysing and presenting the data. This second ethics section therefore builds upon the ethics section above regarding data collection. The final section then explains how each form of data informs the eventual answer to each research question. There are therefore six further sections to this half of this chapter, each with the following titles:

- data analysis: documents
- data analysis: interviews
- generalisability and theory generation
- reliability and validity
- data analysis: ethics
- how the methodology and research questions interlink

In these next few paragraphs I give an overview of the data analysis process for this research study. In it I describe the process and I discuss the reasons behind my choices in design, both pragmatic and epistemologically driven. I place this research design within the context of other similar approaches. This includes responsive processes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), matrices approaches (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2015) and grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In terms of this latter I acknowledge how grounded theory influenced the design of this study and conversely I also explain why I have not defined this study as grounded theory and the alternative precedence I have referred to.

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the research that informed the writing of this dissertation was a three-stage process. The first stage involved the reading of research and theoretical writing, before I started the processes of documentary analysis and interviewing. This reading informed the building of the conceptual framework and shaped my understanding prior to analysing the documents that are discussed in the next chapter (Punch & Oancea, 2014). The analysis of these documents in combination with the conceptual framework generated by writing the first four chapters then shaped my approach towards the analysis of the interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews then formed the primary and most highly weighted form of data.

At the heart of the process of data analysis that runs throughout this dissertation and that I have summarised above is the ongoing iterative generation of a framework of categories each underpinned by a series of codes (Birks & Mills, 2015). This process began with the writing of the first four chapters, which provided an initial conceptual framework that gave shape to the initial analysis of the documentary and interview data (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). The analysis of the documents that had been produced from within the International Teacher Leadership initiative refined this framework further. Finally, the interviews were analysed in the context of this framework, during this process codes emerged inductively, with the process of identifying these informed by the conceptual framework, presented earlier (Flick, 2014).

The use of an initial conceptual framework, which is then allowed to evolve as inductive codes emerge has considerable precedence, within qualitative research in the social sciences. It is influenced by the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014). It can even be argued that any method that involves a detailed reading of transcripts in order to generate themes and codes has its basis in grounded theory even if this is not always fully acknowledged (Birks & Mills, 2015). However, I am not defining this research process in this way for three clear reasons (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Firstly, this is because the research design was fully in place prior to the research beginning and was not open-ended. Secondly because the potential for generalisable statements to be made, to the extent that it has been reached, has been achieved by the building of layers of evidence via a pre-designed structure not by returning repeatedly to the same source of data, Finally, I am not claiming to have reached a point of ‘saturation’ within the limits of this study (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

There are a range of definitions of exactly what constitutes a grounded theory methodology and as a term it is contested (Birks & Mills, 2015). Some define grounded theory in a more flexible way than others. Most significantly this includes Charmaz (2014) who emphasises how grounded theory is not as dogmatic as some critics suggest in terms of the necessity of reaching saturation before generating theory or the need for all codes to emerge inductively. However, even within this more flexible approach to the importance of reaching saturation via inductive coding, I am still not making a claim to be using grounded theory. This is because the first obstacle to making this claim is still valid. As has been mentioned above my overall plan for both the collection and analysis of data would need to be more flexible, with the stages of data collection and analysis not as firmly prescribed from the outset as they were with this research plan (Creswell, 2013).

Others however, also use evolving coding and do not necessarily feel the need to bind it to a single methodological title beyond stating that it is a qualitative methodology contained within an interpretivist frame. These include the responsive and participatory approach of Rubin and Rubin (2012) and the more rigorously bounded matrices approach of Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014). Therefore, these approaches also helped to frame this design for data analysis. Rubin and Rubin in their definition of a responsive interviewing process (2012) acknowledge a debt to grounded theory but importantly they neither explicitly demand saturation of data before they feel that it is possible to begin the process of theory generation nor do they reject the use of pre-designed research plans and pre-chosen samples. The possibility for theory

generation with a limited pool of deep data, which is entirely qualitative and involves a limited sample size is discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

The tables that I used to isolate and develop the categories during the analysis of the interviews are similar to those designed by Charmaz (2014) and Flick (2014) and also Miles, Huberman and Saldana's (2014) definition of matrix generation. In this dissertation however, I use the term table rather than matrices. This is to distance this approach from that of Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014), whose designs include an aspect of quantitative analysis, which I did not include in this research design. These tables of codes and categories in their simplest terms consisted of rows and columns that displayed the initial codes and included space for collating extracts from the interview data together with a further column that enabled memo-ing in a form that to me was clear and visual. A large number of tables were constructed during the process of document analysis and the subsequent process of interview analysis, which I used to guide me through this process. The way these tables were used during each stage of analysis is discussed further in the following paragraphs which address the separate processes of document analysis and of interview analysis in greater detail.

Data analysis: documents

The process of analysing the documents had three stages, these are described below. An example of a table that illustrates the analytical process used in the latter two stages in this process is included in the appendices. As has been discussed in the paragraphs above. The three stages were as follows.

- a close reading of a selection of texts produced within the context of the International Teacher Leadership initiative, with concepts and ideas being noted in the margins by hand.
- tabulating these extracts from these documents into groups based on concepts that repeatedly emerged in these texts.
- identifying in a further column on these tables ideas and themes that emerged from these groupings, assisted by the use of paraphrasing (Silverman, 2015).

A fourth and final stage was then using these tables and the themes that emerged in order to write Chapter Six. This is what Rubin and Rubin (2012) describe as the blurred stage at which

the process of analysis overlaps with and then becomes the process of writing. This design for this process was based on Flick (2014) but the use of tables with paraphrasing is also based on Miles, Hubermann & Saldana (2014). These three stages are expanded upon in the next three paragraphs.

As has been described earlier, I accessed a range of documents produced within the context of the International Teacher Leadership initiative. With the first stage, described above, I initially selected forty documents based on the following criteria, these were that: they each had a different author, were written in different years, they represented the range of countries involved in the International Teacher Leadership initiative including England and Macedonia, they were written by authors with a range of professional roles including teachers. These criteria and number were to some extent simply an initial structure to bring order to this process (Newby, 2014). However, it was also specifically based on the approach to constructing a structured review of documents used by Tian, Risku & Collin, (2015). This selection of documents was then read closely. Concepts were identified and as I did so I made notes at the side of what these were. These were then grouped together to identify codes that could be used in the next stage of tabulating text from different documents into a single new document.

In the next stage of analysis, extracts were taken from the texts and placed in tables, an example of this is included in the appendices. These tables consisted of two columns, one in which these extracts were collated and a second in which notes and paraphrasing were used in order to identify concepts that would build my understanding of the International Teacher Leadership initiative prior to analysing the interviews. This process was intended to enable a focused reading that would lead to a search for meanings and commonalities (Charmaz, 2014). This was appropriate because of the successive aspect of the data collection and analysis process, with the first set of data analysed informing the conceptual framework rather than leading to an answer to the research questions in its own right (Dirks & Mills, 2015). This process of tabulating and condensing (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014) was also accompanied by a process of writing notes and memos by hand, in order to ensure that it did not become a process done mechanically but remained focused on the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). It was also accompanied by the reading of further texts produced from within the International Teacher Leadership initiative, with passages from these also coded and cross-compared using the approach described above.

As this illustrates the documents were analysed in an entirely qualitative but systematic way. I

identify this as systematic because this involved a clear set of steps based on a methodological precedent (Flick, 2014). This is not to say that it was a systematic literature review, which would be on a different scale (Robson & McCartan, 2016), rather it is systematic because although small-scale the approach was both bounded and structured (Flick, 2014). The specific steps were as follows: setting boundaries for exclusion and inclusion of documents, accessing the documents, coding and in order to identify key categories producing an analytical account which synthesised these codes.

The documents selected, as has been discussed in earlier sections on data collection, consisted of a large but not complete sample of writing produced within the context of the International Teacher Leadership initiative. This included writing by teachers involved from both England and Macedonia. However, it also included other items written by teachers from other countries, academics connected to the initiative and others. The boundary therefore was simply documents produced as part of the International Teacher Leadership initiative (Newby, 2014). These were easily accessible via the International Teacher Leadership main website. However, I was also kindly provided with other documents that were in the public domain by request to those involved in this initiative.

My main goal, during the process of document analysis, was firstly to confirm whether the conceptual framework that had emerged from the writing of the first four chapters, was reflected in these documents. Secondly it was to begin the process of identifying categories for analysis, prior to analysing the interview data. The process of searching for categories, in these documents, was distinct to the one that was used when searching for codes and categories in the interview data. This is because this was a provisional and transitory stage (Charmaz, 2014), which began the process of movement from framing my understanding within a broad conceptual framework towards using analytical codes directly.

Data analysis: interviews

In this section I discuss my approach to analysing the data that was collected via interview. As has been mentioned throughout this dissertation the analysis of the interviews would form the final stage in the research process and I expected from the outset that these would yield the richest data. My intention therefore was that this data would be weighted highly when building towards the conclusions of this study (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014).

The process of analysing the interviews was in several respects similar to that used when analysing the documents. Again, as with that section these stages are described below. In this case two examples that illustrate this analytical process are included in the appendices. The process of analysing the interviews had the following stages.

- all the interviews were transcribed verbatim.
- they were carefully read with initial codes written in the margin by hand.
- extracts with identical or related codes were grouped together in tables (appendix B). At this stage I used NVIVO as a device for collating and tabulating these extracts.
- Finally, in a further column on these tables, ideas and themes that emerged from these groupings were identified, these became the categories that shaped the writing of Chapters Seven to Ten.

These steps are discussed further in the paragraphs below.

The process of initial coding that was used was based on models for analysing interview data described by Charmaz (2012), Rubin and Rubin (2012) and Silverman (2014). Charmaz writes within the context of grounded theory. Her approach therefore has a more rigorously structured format than the other writers mentioned above who position themselves more pragmatically. However, she delineates between grounded theory approaches that are fully realised and coding or analysis processes that are in part influenced by this. Within the latter perspective, she allows terms that she uses to define different coding practices to be blurred, with an acknowledgment that these may overlap and distinctions between them become less relevant, with the terms describing a thinking process rather than distinct stages (Flick, 2014). Therefore, this initial coding in the margin of the transcribed text is a simultaneous process of open and axial coding (Charmaz, 2012; Dirks & Mills, 2015).

To Charmaz (2012), this pragmatic approach if adopted inevitably positions a study outside a phenomenological paradigm. She argues that if a researcher claims to be conducting phenomenological research then a systematic approach, potentially conducted word by word is needed. This was one reason for not positioning this dissertation in this way. The analysis was not conducted on the basis of any given unit of words, but was based on each change of meaning or concept (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). This also positioned this process as distinctly qualitative and thereby avoided the risk, that as qualitative research is done in ways that attempt to be more repeatable and outwardly rigorous a quantitative element can potentially intrude,

changing the nature of the study (Silverman, 2015).

The next stage involved the selection of extracts that had been coded with the same or similar titles. These were placed in a table with two columns, a process based on that used by Charmaz (2012) and Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014). At this stage over-arching concepts that could accommodate what was said by the interviewees were sought and noted in the column on the table next to the extracts. This involved repeated paraphrasing, summarising and re-naming. Therefore during this stage a large number of similar tables were made and then re-made (Silverman, 2015). At this stage the over-arching concept framework provided a secure guide but was considerably refined and concepts that would become the sub-headings used in Chapters Seven to Ten emerged. As has been discussed earlier, this continual reference back to a previously created concept framework was one reason not to define this study as grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Final versions of these tables of extracts and parallel commentary were printed out and used during the writing of Chapters Seven to Ten.

As mentioned above, I transcribed all the interviews verbatim, in making this decision I was aware of arguments by Richards (2015) and others (Flick, 2014). In these they describe how the normalisation of transcribing as the usual approach to dealing with interviews has become so dominant that it can be hard to step back and consider whether in any instance this is the best approach and they question its universal appropriateness quite strongly. They argue instead that a systematic design based on the isolation of specific quotations and extracts could be just as useful especially when conducting a study in which the collection of interview data is just one part. Initially I saw this as an approach that would be likely to give me flexibility and depth, it would also mean the process of documentary analysis and interview analysis would more closely mirror each other. Rejecting this approach was therefore a significant moment in the research story of conducting this study. It was partly pragmatic reasons that led me to decide to transcribe and code the interviews in full as it gave me a practical way in which I could manage such rich data (Neuman, 2014). This included the need to have the ability to cross-reference detail from the interviews in depth.

During the process of analysis I compared across groups of teachers as well as across the entire sample of participants. This was where the flexibility enabled by the use of technology became significant (Bryman, 2016). The first stage in this process of cross comparison was based on the countries the teachers came from. This involved comparing the data from different teachers from the same country. Via this first stage I expected similar categories to emerge that were

pertinent to analysing the interviews from both countries. This I predicted would then suggest further potential dimensions for cross comparison (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Therefore, once several similar categories had emerged from both sets of interviews that could be used to compare between the two groups, the interview data was cross-compared between the two countries. For example: I cross compared those who had emphasised the importance of their role as civic leaders in their interviews. This is consistent with an interpretivist paradigm whereby the self-definitions of the participants define and shape the process of analysis (Charmaz, 2014).

When finally writing the chapters in which I analysed the interview data, the original themes that I had identified when writing the conceptual framework remained secure. However, nuanced, emerging codes that underpinned these gave more depth to the analysis, these were in turn synthesised into categories, which were used as tools to enable various dimensions of comparison, as described above. These categories in time became the section headings for Chapters Seven to Ten. In these chapters the data is first presented according to the two groups of participants from different countries. In the final two chapters I then cross compare these groups. This presentation of the data therefore mirrors the process of analysis that informed it. In the next section below I address the extent to which the design of this research process could lead to generalisable statements and enable theory generation and also the limitations to this. I then address issues of reliability and validity when using entirely qualitative methods.

Generalisability and theory generation

In the following paragraphs I discuss the potential and limitations for theory generation and generalisability within the boundaries of a doctoral study of the type that I have written. That is within an entirely qualitative study based on a small sample and framed within an interpretivist paradigm. This section is informed by writers whose perspectives on this shaped the design of this study. The following section involves a discussion on two further specific concepts: reliability and validity. I discuss these within the context of a dissertation of this type. I address differing definitions of validity and reliability and how these contested definitions informed the design of this study.

In terms of theory generation prior to building this research design I explored possible models and definitions for what can potentially constitute valid theory generation within the social

sciences. One simple definition that informed the design of this study is that a theory is any statement that potentially forms an explanatory definition for a phenomena (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In this case the difference between making an assertion based on research and generating a theory is deliberately blurred. This definition is compatible with an interpretivist epistemology (Creswell, 2013). As such it fits within a discourse of acknowledged subjectivity, within qualitative studies in the social sciences, which means that the validity of qualitative studies can be justified by their contribution to a wider discourse rather than because of the possibility for generalisability, based on a high degree of certainty (Gallagher, 2014).

Other writers also support this justification for making assertions that could potentially be generalised based on small-scale studies. Yin (2014) although writing within the specific context of case studies, explores these contested definitions in a way that informed the writing of this dissertation and that is broadly applicable to qualitative studies using small samples. He states that theory generation within these paradigms is valid but needs new language with which to define it, which is distinct from the language used in larger scale and often quantitative studies. Terms that he uses to address this include a 'generalizable theoretical proposition' and 'analytical generalizations' which may be presented for further debate and exploration within the academic field.

Such studies according to these definitions should attempt to suggest potential propositions that could be more broadly applicable, rather than simply telling the story of the individual case (Yin, 2014). Rubin and Rubin (2012) also make a distinction between a researcher limiting themselves to case-focused conclusions, which simply tell the narrative of an interesting case and potential generalisations. They suggest that by framing the latter in nuanced terms this presents the possibility of generating an innovative and significant contribution to academic debate from a small-scale qualitative study. These definitions present an alternative and valid potential discourse, which is more credible than striving for statistical generalisations within a study unsuited to making such claims (Yin, 2014).

I noted at the beginning of this chapter that although a grounded theory approach to the research design was one that I considered, in the end I developed a pre-structured research design (Robson & McCartan, 2016). It initially concerned me that this may limit the potential for generalisability or theory generation. This is because the strong claims made by some writers regarding grounded theory in terms of its potential for theory generation consequentially lead to the negation by them of the possibility of doing so via any other qualitative method outside

this approach. In these terms other qualitative methods are seen by some to be exclusively exploratory with only grounded theory being capable of theory generation and generalisability (Birks & Mills, 2015). However, a range of texts that discuss grounded theory indicate that this is not necessarily the case or at least that this is a contested area and that it would be possible for me to adopt an alternative stance based on precedence. These are discussed in the paragraph below.

Significantly, Charmaz (2014) draws a distinction between various epistemological positions from which grounded theory can be conducted. She perceives all as equally rigorous but the definition of validity that she uses within each is different. Although she was writing about differently defined forms of grounded theory research, her approach could be applied more widely. She puts forward differing claims to the nature of theory generation and statement making within different potential grounded theory paradigms. By accepting these as a precedent, it was possible to claim to be able to generate valid potential generalisations via this study by positioning myself within an interpretivist paradigm and by acknowledging the subjectivity of myself as writer.

Charmaz (2014) is also more realistic when writing about small scale studies than some critics of grounded theory suggest is possible within the boundaries of a grounded theory approach (Denscombe, 2010). She acknowledges that at some point interviewing can be brought to an end for practical reasons as long as one is realistic about the strength of the theory generated. Meanwhile Miles, Huberman and Saldana, (2014), define the possibility of theory generation as being dependent on the level of structure contained within the study, rather than the size or representativeness of the sample. This fitted with the methodological approach of this study because this emphasis on structure rather than sample size potentially opened up the possibility of theory generation, as long as the codes and categories were developed in a structured and replicable way and were used consistently throughout. They also claim that there is no significant difference between making assertions regarding perceptions of phenomena and generating theory through qualitative research as long as both are framed in nuanced ways (Miles, Huberman & Saldana), reflecting the similar perception of Rubin and Rubin (2012).

In conclusion to this discussion, I felt confident that my research design could produce a useful and valid contribution to knowledge in this field using the precedents discussed above in order to nuance the nature and limitations of theory generation and generalisability

Reliability and validity

The extent to which it is possible to claim that this research is either reliable or valid depends in part on how these contested terms are defined. In this section I explore possible ways of defining reliability that are applicable to this study and those that problematise it too. Following this I discuss validity similarly.

There is a definition of reliability by which reliability is defined as a near synonym with repeatability (Flick, 2014), I have to acknowledge that according to this definition it is impossible for this research to be reliable. This is largely because the interview sample of ten people is relatively small. Also even if the study were to be repeated the flexible nature of the research design means that it would be unlikely that precisely the same results would emerge. It may be that some conclusions would remain the same but this is not identical to replicating every result of the study. This issue of generalisability has already been dealt with in the section above.

Approaches to the definition of reliability within qualitative studies vary considerably though from this definition above, which is more appropriate to quantitative studies framed within a positivist or neo-positivist paradigm. Richards (2015) describes reliability as being identical to repeatability within qualitative research as a purely hypothetical concept while even within the highly rigorous grounded theory approach, Corbin and Strauss (2015) also emphasise that reproducibility is not the same as reliability in qualitative research. Therefore, whilst reliability remains important for qualitative research it can be conceptualised in a distinct and more appropriate way than a tight linkage to repeatability (Charmaz, 2014). One alternative way in which this can be defined comes from Bryman (2016) who suggests that with qualitative research, such as this study, reliability is defined by the consistent application of a method, albeit accepting that some methods have pre-designed flexibility and also by the researcher maintaining a thorough audit trail.

With this definition a closer synonym than repeatability to reliability is dependability (Bryman, 2016). This definition informed the design and application of the analytical approach to researching and writing this study. In relation to this: all interviews were conducted by me, transcribed verbatim by me and the coding and transcribing were conducted in the same way, using manual coding as a parallel strategy to coding using NVIVO to ensure that the coding was secure. The process of document analysis was also included as an interim stage to ensure

that both the conceptual framework and coding process were robust. A detailed audit trail of all data, including the recordings and transcripts, has been securely retained by me.

In terms of the validity of this research similar issues emerge. Internal validity can be defined as whether the conclusions drawn through this study are true for this study even if they are not generalisable (Robson & McCartan, 2016). As regards this definition of internal validity, the nature of a study such as this, with two forms of data collection: documents in the public domain and a single interview for each participant, meant that the threats that Robson and McCartan (2016) identify as regards issues of time and attrition with larger studies; such as changes to participants, or to the researchers, are not relevant. This is also a study into a largely non-contentious area, in which one could expect the participants would feel comfortable speaking freely and knowledgeably. Whilst making reference back to the paragraphs above regarding reliability, based on these procedures and the nature of this study I feel confident that this study is an accurate reflection of these teachers' perceptions and experiences (Newby, 2014).

In conclusion to these two sections, there is a live and vigorous debate regarding the possibility for theory generation from small-scale and qualitative studies. The fact that this is acknowledged as a possibility by a significant body of writers influenced the design of this study. Based on these competing definitions of theory generation and generalisability, I felt confident in claiming that it is possible for my conclusions to be potentially generalisable as long as I was cautious about the terms with which this was expressed. As regards the reliability and validity of this study, I feel confident that the research instruments and the design of this study yielded a true and accurate record of the participants' experiences and perceptions. In the next section I discuss ethical issues that emerged during the process of analysis and writing this dissertation. This develops ideas presented in the previous ethics section that focused on issues emerging from the process of data collection.

Data analysis: ethics

In this section I discuss ethical issues that relate to the process of data analysis, writing and dissemination. This builds from the earlier ethics section on data collection. Specific issues discussed here include: anonymity, interpretation of evidence and establishing a dialogue with participants.

As regards anonymity, the interviewees were informed twice, that when this study was written up their identity would be anonymised (Flick, 2014). These points were as follows: in writing prior to the interview commencing and orally at the start of the interview. As the interviewees were all highly qualified, adult, professionals I am confident that they understood the meaning of this. However, anonymity is a complicated and nuanced concept. I therefore explained at the beginning of the interviews what this would mean as regards this specific study. This was that their names and schools would be anonymised but not their country of origin, details of their career such as subject taught if pertinent to the study or their connection to the International Teacher Leadership initiative as this was central to contextualising the study. The participants were content with this, presumably because they perceived there to be no significant risks that may emerge from this contextual detail being revealed. This approach to both offering and defining the limits of anonymity was influenced by Rubin and Rubin (2012) who discuss how it is just as important to be clear about potential risks however minor and the meaning of terms, as it is to follow accepted procedures.

Another ethical aspect to the design of this study was that I decided to build into my research process an element of dialogue with participants regarding my findings. My reasons for doing so were as follows. Firstly, I wanted to ensure that this dissertation is a true reflection of the experiences and perceptions of these teachers. This also relates to my methods for achieving validity and reliability (Creswell, 2013), discussed in the sections above. Secondly, I was concerned that the interviewees may have consented to the collection of data, via interview, but that this did not necessarily mean that they had agreed to the accompanying process of extraction, selection and interpretation that is the next stage of research (Denscombe, 2010). This I perceived as a significant ethical issue. My current intention is to disseminate this dissertation, or aspects of this dissertation, quite widely, at least in summary form. I was therefore concerned that the status of any work produced under the name of a reputable university as part of a doctorate study is quite high and thus dissemination requires sensitivity and respect towards any possible impact on the participants (Denscombe, 2010, p.331). This is even though their names are and will be anonymised and I am not researching on a particularly contentious topic.

This approach to ensuring dialogue as regards my findings, was also influenced by Silvermann's (2014) views on the importance of avoiding deception or secrecy. An open-ness with participants meant to me that they had a right to see my interpretation of the data that they

provided by interview and express a viewpoint on it before it was disseminated. However, I only consulted participants once in this way as otherwise it could have become an infinitely circular process as responding to this myself in terms of modifying the dissertation in any way also involved a degree of selection and interpretation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The participants were all content with this. My greater initial concern, having engaged in asking people to reflect on things I have written previously, though was a simpler one. My experience had been that comments in response to the summary of a study are almost universally simple and positive and this was the case as regards these participants too. Even so I believe that dialogue with participants is valuable and reflects an important ethical principle.

In conclusion to this section, I felt confident that the design of this study avoided deception entirely and minimised harm. I also felt confident that addressing these ethical issues would enhance the validity of this study. In the next and concluding section to this chapter I discuss how each form of data collected informed the answer to each specific research question.

The methodology and the research questions

In this final section I provide a summary of how each research question was answered in terms of the data that fed into each one and the way that data was utilised.

Research question 1: In what ways do teachers perceive themselves as belonging to an international professional community of teachers?

The context for this was set by the discussion in Chapters Two and Three regarding: communities of practice, professional networks and other forms of professional communities, especially within the context of education. This context then shaped the first iteration of the conceptual framework within which I analysed the documents produced from within the ‘International Teacher Leadership initiative’. This document analysis provided insight into the vision of this initiative, giving an understanding of how it might be expected that teachers would perceive themselves and the professional communities that they belong to and thereby led to a further refining of the conceptual framework. The analysis of all the interviews then provided an answer to this question strong enough to make claims for provisional generalisability and theory generation albeit acknowledging the limits of this as discussed in this chapter. The answer to this research question also informed and contextualised the answer

to the other research questions.

Research question 2: How is the way teachers perceive their professional identity shaped by the experience of working with teachers from other countries?

The writing discussed in Chapter four, that explored the debates and challenges that exist when teachers work with teachers from other countries, was very pertinent to answering this question, whilst aspects of Chapters Two and Three, in which the nature of professional communities and networks are explored, were relevant too. The documents produced within the International Teacher Leadership initiative, that are analysed and discussed in the next chapter were useful, in that they refined the framework of expected perceptions prior to the analysis of the interview data. The codes and categories that emerged from the analysis of the interview data were cross-compared between teachers from the same country as well as across countries as regards all the questions. However, this was particularly significant when responding to this question as it was of as much interest to know whether individual perceptions corresponded to others from the same country and from different countries as it was to know whether they corresponded to the broader vision of the International Teacher Leadership initiative. Ideas that were generated by the building of the conceptual framework, such as whether as well as a community of shared classroom practice an international community of teachers consists of a community of affirmation, were answered as part of answering this research question and are discussed in further detail later in this dissertation.

Research question 3: Are there any significant obstacles or affordances to teachers perceiving themselves as members of an international professional community of teachers?

This research question contextualises the other research questions as well as standing as a question in its own right. The preliminary research that informed the answer to this at the stage of building the conceptual framework consisted of articles and books that explore differing conceptual models of professional communities and networking as well as those that address challenges and issues regarding teachers working with teachers across national borders. This discussion forms the basis of Chapters Two and Four. A focused interview approach was particularly significant in getting valid data via the interviews, in response to this research question. This is because a personal, narrative account was more likely to generate an open exposition regarding obstacles that had been faced. The answer to this research question contextualises and informs the answers to the other research questions. In terms of the last

research question this is because the presence of perceived obstacles may have led teachers to modify their definitions of success.

Research question 4: In what ways do teachers define success when working with colleagues from other countries?

As with question three, the participant's personal narratives as expressed through the interviews were particularly significant when answering this question as definitions of success were likely to be personal and idiographic. It was also very likely that teachers involved in international networking would by the very fact of their involvement perceive it as a positive experience. Therefore, the differences in what this meant for individual teachers, needed to be explored via individual stories that would explore potential definitions of success and also the process whereby these differing definitions emerged. This is addressed in the discussions that follow in Chapters Seven to Ten. All the participants contributed relevant data for answering all the research questions.

Conclusion

In conclusion this study can be described in summary as a small scale, entirely qualitative study, underpinned by an interpretivist methodological perspective. The data collection process was successive rather than concurrent with each stage informing the design of the next stage of data collection and of analysis. The primary form of data collection was in the form of interviews. The sample size was ten divided into two groups of five with the teachers' involvement in international initiatives and the country that they primarily teach in as the most significant boundary in defining these groups. The respective countries were England and Macedonia. Deciding on a small scale study based entirely on qualitative methods raises issues of defining reliability and validity and the extent to which I would be able to make generalisable conclusions and to engage in theory generation. There are significant precedents articulated by writers that define these terms in ways that are appropriate to this particular study and therefore on concluding my writing of the research design I felt confident that this remained an appropriate approach for investigating this topic.



Chapter 6

Document Analysis: the International Teacher Leadership initiative

In this chapter I present a discussion from the findings from the document analysis that preceded the interviews. As discussed in the previous chapter the purpose of this stage of the research process was to inform the design of the interview process and to deepen my contextual understanding before analysing the interview transcripts. This chapter is presented as a separate chapter to Chapter One, which briefly presents an overview of the International Teacher Leadership initiative, because its preparation was distinct. Whilst Chapter One focuses on the vision and approach of the International Teacher Leadership as defined in a small number of documents written by those involved in the creation of the initiative; this chapter is informed by a structured analysis of a range of documents produced by people involved in iterations of the International Teacher Leadership in roles that range from central to peripheral. This included reading articles written by academics, those working in non-governmental organisations, those written by teachers, conference papers and presentations, records of meetings and tools used within the initiative.

The structure of this chapter is based on the concept framework built via Chapters One to Four, which identified two broad over-arching themes of building communities and sharing knowledge. This concept framework once built was consistently used as the framework for this study. However, in the discussion below, themes that emerged from the analysis of these documents that would in turn inform the design and analysis of the interviews are identified. The diagram illustrating the conceptual framework is also returned to and revised in the conclusion. The sections to this chapter are called:

- The International Teacher Leadership initiative and professional communities
- The International Teacher Leadership initiative and knowledge sharing
- The International Teacher Leadership initiative and civic society

The International Teacher Leadership initiative and professional communities

The significance of the relationships built by teachers interacting together within International Teacher Leadership initiatives, was consistently expressed in those documents that were produced within the boundaries of the International Teacher Leadership initiative and that informed the writing of this study (Creaby, 2013; Vranješević & Čelebičić, 2014). This emerged from these documents in different ways, in some friendship was identified, in others the opportunity to lead others (Hill, 2014; Anderson et al., 2014). However, across a range of writing it became clear that within the context of the International Teacher Leadership initiative the relationships that are built between teachers are seen to be as important as the building and transference of knowledge and also link directly to this process (Joshevska & Kirandziska, 2015). This significance gave rise to the possibility that the international networks built via the International Teacher Leadership initiative may be communities of affirmation as much as they are communities of knowledge or practice.

Collective engagement and knowledge creation were frequently linked together within a range of texts. A significant driver in terms of building professional communities that emerged was the process of exchanging knowledge. Knowledge exchange and creation was repeatedly seen as both the result of teachers working together as a community and also the process whereby the community is built (Flores, 2013). Beyond the writing itself, this is demonstrated in a simple and concrete way by the existence of a canon of writing produced within this initiative. As one example: the texts accessed when writing this chapter included several records of events that brought teachers together (Frost et al., 2009). This particular type of writing was in the form of narrative accounts that are publicly disseminated by this organisation as a distinct type of academic paper (Mollison, 2012; Miljević, Herbert & Ball, 2014).

The dissemination of papers that describe individual teacher's development projects is also a fundamental aspect of all versions of the initiative (Chiriac et al., 2014). These have an important function in terms of building professional communities as much as they do in facilitating the transfer of practice and together constitute a unique type of writing. Frost states that the function of the public presentation both written and spoken of the development project is 'to inspire and to cultivate optimism as much as to share knowledge' (Frost, 2014, p.4). This viewpoint was reflected in the texts of these presentations, which consistently contained phrases that stressed optimism, change processes and non-positional leadership and were coded as such. The development project is also important as it manifests a definition of teacher led

development work which is framed as being distinct from action research processes, this distinction was clearly and repeatedly recognised in these texts. When this was expanded upon, it was explained that this is because action research contains the potential risk that the process of research gains dominance over the processes of: community building, knowledge exchange and exercising civic leadership (Murphy, 2014). In short: action research conducted by a teacher and guided by a university while valuable is seen to be potentially individual focused and limiting, whilst teacher leadership is seen to emphasise the shared and continuously emerging nature of knowledge creation (Anderson et al., 2014).

A parallel and connected dynamic is identified in a significant body of writing produced by the International Teacher Leadership initiative which focuses on building self-efficacy and professional confidence as well as the sharing of practice (Flores, 2013; Ramahi, 2015). These papers consistently emphasise the importance of, engagement in a professional community that values the innate leadership potential of all teachers and in turn builds that potential via this recognition in a cyclical process (Sejdini, 2014). According to these accounts as the potential for leadership is recognised by others in repeated and nuanced ways, confidence by each individual in this aspect of their professional identity is also built (Jones, 2014). This community of fellow professionals who perceive themselves as leaders is in turn seen to have the potential to facilitate concrete change in such things as classroom strategies, approaches to practice and also developments in the wider community (Bolat, 2012). As this illustrates, a simple transference of classroom strategies was not the primary goal identified by any writer who was read in the writing of this chapter. Instead a greater emphasis was placed on the idea that conversations on classroom strategy and practice can enable teachers to engage with the moral purpose of their professional actions and in their own leadership potential (Frost, 2015).

A central and distinct aspect of this teacher leadership model that also emerged was the concept of non-positionality (Teleshaliyev, 2013). Writers, writing from within the context of the International Teacher Leadership initiative, teachers and others, consistently articulated the linkages between: a methodology of teacher development work; a method of co-constructing knowledge, and a model for leadership (Yelke, 2014; Chiriac, 2014). These concepts were frequently linked together within the same paragraphs or sections of writing. When compared to other leadership models this relates to conceptual models of distributed leadership, especially Woods and Roberts' (2017) interpretation of this concept, which is also closely linked to Harris's (2013). Both of these interpretations of distributed leadership see distribution as

inevitable rather than being driven by the choice of people in formally created hierarchical positions. These writers acknowledge that leadership simply is distributed and that the choices that positional leaders have are whether to recognise this situation and if they do then how to work within this context in constructive ways. In connection to this the International Teacher Leadership initiative was consistently described as being an attempt to create a solution to this problem by grounding non-positionality in concrete practices (Rawlings, 2014). This then returns to the significance of the relationships that these practices enable. If teachers are to be empowered to achieve change through non-positional means then it is seen in these texts as vital that they perceive themselves as part of a community which gives them self-efficacy and an underpinning moral purpose (Frost, 2013; Steel, 2014).

In the writings of Frost (2011, 2012, 2015) a community that is built via this approach to building structured and supported teacher leadership is intended to be distinct from and even present a challenge to positionally defined communities and in doing so break down the commodification of practice and knowledge and protect teachers from external challenges over which they have no control. The forms of alternative community that are created are intended to enable non-positional leadership to be exercised, whether that be micro-level leadership within schools or, as the teacher moves from a more peripheral to a more confident role, macro-level leadership within a community and as an influencer of colleagues beyond their school (Frost, 2013, 2014). This is also reflected in the writings of others who describe how their reason for involvement in International Teacher Leadership initiatives is to enable them to free themselves from the pressures of top down hierarchies (Bolat, 2012; Vranješević & Čelebičić, 2014).

This emphasis on a journey towards a centrally positioned role through engagement with others rather than appointment to positionally defined posts, that emerged (Murphy, 2014) relates closely to the community of practice model discussed earlier in this dissertation. However, it emerged from these texts in a distinct way, as although Wenger (1998) in his model, that was discussed in Chapter Two, proposes work place structures that may enable communities to develop, the International Teacher Leadership initiative involves the use of a range of tools that are aimed at facilitating this process, that were frequently referred to by these writers and which also constitute a distinct genre of writing in their own right (Bangs, 2013). These tools have been designed with the explicitly stated intention of providing a structure in which communities

of leadership can be formed giving the important message that ‘people like us can solve problems like this’ (Frost, 2011, p.16)

In these communities the role of the audience of peers is also given primacy. The idea that through presenting to peers teachers experience being taken seriously and find themselves becoming influential (Anderson et al., 2014; Frost, 2014, p. 8) emerged strongly through a range of texts. Ramahi and Eltemamy (2014) write about this as the emancipatory and empowering potential of teachers working together within a community, whilst Joshevka and Kirandziska (2015) and others echo this, seeing the creation of such communities as providing an opportunity for teachers to reclaim control over the teaching profession by pulling teachers out of isolation. It has also been described by writers, writing within the context of International Teacher Leadership initiatives, as giving them a sense of ownership and an opportunity to celebrate achievements (Čelebičić & Vranješević, 2013).

One challenge repeatedly identified by a range of writers was that teachers work in buildings and in conditions that are more or less conducive for high level thinking depending on the teachers’ specific context. Due to this it is often difficult for teachers to perceive themselves as skilled professionals. Therefore, one goal of teacher leadership events is to create a series of interconnected moments where these teachers’ professionalism is fully recognised (Hill, 2014). This is acknowledged by such symbolic aspects of the process of meeting as: the building, the venue, the social aspects and others (Frost, 2014; Miljević, Herbert & Ball, 2014). The importance of these is reflected in the descriptions of these events that are made publicly available (Frost, 2009, Frost 2015). It also strongly emerged that it is during these events that teachers play the interlinked and interchanging role of expert presenter and expert audience (Anderson, 2014).

In conclusion to this section, it emerged from analysing these documents that the nature of teacher leadership communities relates closely to those expressed in various models of professional communities already discussed in Chapter Two. This includes most significantly Wenger’s (1998) model of communities of practice with its emphasis on the significant role an audience of peers can have in defining a professional identity and its description of a movement from a more peripheral position to a more central one, through others’ acknowledgment of expertise regardless of formally defined positionality. However, there are also distinct aspects to the professional community that is being defined. This includes aspects of practice within the community such as the tools that have been developed to facilitate its creation. Importantly

it also includes the perception that a community created in this way can then have social and political impact by redefining the role played by teachers in defining their own professionalism.

The International Teacher Leadership initiative and knowledge sharing

In this section I discuss perceptions of the ways that knowledge is built and shared within the teacher leadership approach. Firstly, I discuss the ways that the teacher leadership approach was compared by various writers to other models that involve teachers conducting research into their own practice. I then address the significance and implications of two concepts that emerged as fundamental to the International Teacher Leadership approach to teacher leadership. These are the co-construction of knowledge and knowledge validation. Finally, I discuss the implications of this approach to knowledge creation within the specific context of teachers working together with teachers from other countries.

One way in which the distinct methodological contribution of the teacher leadership approach, is expressed by those writing within the boundaries of this initiative, is by making a direct comparison with other approaches which are framed within the language of teacher research rather than development work when defining the goals of knowledge creation. Comparisons that are made include with action research models such as those put forward by McNiff (2010) and Wilson (2009). Distinctions that emerge include that there is a far greater emphasis within the International Teacher Leadership approach on the dissemination of knowledge rather than on the process of research itself (Jones, 2014; Frost, 2013). In opposition to this, McNiff's (2010) perspective is that the process of critical enquiry that teachers undergo when conducting research can potentially be an end in itself. While Wilson (2009) writes about different motives for conducting research including conducting research for personal growth. This therefore fits with a model of teacher led research which sees its primary function as the aspect of critical enquiry rather than the aspect of making public (Stenhouse, 1980). McNiff's (2010) approach especially, although framed within an action research perspective is epistemologically close to autoethnography.

This reflective aspect of research and the capacity for research to be used as a tool for personal growth, when the professional, the researcher, is engaged with the subject that they are researching, is contained within the canon of writing produced within the International Teacher Leadership approach (Yelke, 2014; Chiriac et al., 2014). However, it is almost always re-

framed as development rather than research or reflection. In doing so this clarifies that this is not a valid end point in itself as the goals of teacher leadership are explicitly described as being to identify common moral purposes and then build from these to produce educational change (Miljević, Herbert & Ball, 2014). Within this initiative, research as systematic reflective practice alone lacks the necessary ‘account of leadership’ (Frost, 2011, p.9).

Contained within this body of writing is also a belief that for knowledge to be relevant to teachers it must be co-constructed as a community via teachers exercising leadership (Bolat, 2013). It is not only that it must be shared in order to enable improvements in terms of classroom strategies (Steel, 2014). Knowledge must be shared in order to facilitate the process of building a positive professional identity and self-efficacy among teachers (Anderson et al., 2014; Frost, 2014). This is then seen to facilitate the enabling of embedded, long lasting changes (Hill, 2014). Again, in this way the teacher leadership philosophy is consistently defined in a way which is very close to definitions of communities of practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015), in which communities must by definition have a social aspect embedded within the process of sharing knowledge as this then enables the community’s members to be able to acknowledge each other and thus build each other’s conception of community membership.

Those who define themselves in their writing as belonging to teacher leadership initiatives tend to stress that the teacher leadership approach is expected to generate conversations and discussions among teachers who by being members of this community increasingly perceive themselves as experts (Redondo-Sama, 2015). Specifically, they are enabled to see themselves as experts with the ability to evaluate the value of strategies that emerge via development work or research through the lens of their own professional understanding and then work out its usefulness (Rawlings, 2014; Frost, 2013). Some describe how some teaching strategies that are exchanged through these knowledge communities are directly transferable and some are not but instead may inspire teachers to engage in their own creative journeys (Sejdini, 2014). Holding leadership, whether positional or non-positional implies having the confidence and freedom to exercise judgment, therefore within the International Teacher Leadership approach: the teacher is enabled to build their leadership skills and confidence so that they can be the researcher, disseminator and the interpreter of knowledge with all of this contained within the boundaries of a community of knowledge sharing professionals (Frost, 2015).

As discussed above, within the International Teacher Leadership approach teachers, who write about and disseminate their expertise, frequently describe how they were given the freedom and empowered to interpret and use the knowledge they share in the way that is appropriate for them (Chiriac, 2014) For this professional knowledge to be of value it therefore undergoes a process of ‘knowledge validation’ ((Anderson et al., 2014; Frost, 2013, p.17) with the teachers in the role of expert practitioner and expert audience. This was a theme that emerged through a range of writing. As Frost (2014) emphasises: this knowledge ‘exists or rather can be discerned in the flow of dialogue’ (2014, p.13). The knowledge that is co-constructed and then validated in the dialogue of teachers may on occasion be specific knowledge relating to classroom strategies but it may also be knowledge of how to exercise leadership, knowledge of purpose, or knowledge of one’s own professional significance: that is: knowledge that affirms (Hill, 2014; Frost (2013) takes this so far as to reject the goal of developing a distinct International Teacher Leadership pedagogy entirely as this would place boundaries on the process of co-construction. The knowledge that is created or released via the process of co-construction is ‘a mix of intuition, practical wisdom and habitual behaviours’ (Frost, 2011, p.13) and thus eludes an agreed single pedagogy as it is flexible to each teacher’s approaches and needs. This is also reflected in the writing of others which similarly universally avoid prescriptive pedagogy in favour of teachers’ stories of practice (Ramahi, 2013).

Within the International Teacher Leadership approach knowledge of how to function as a community that builds knowledge emerges as another significant form of co-constructed knowledge in its own right (Murphy, 2014, Teleshaliyev, 2014). This is reflected in the planned interventions, by those who sit outside these communities of teachers, that are central to all iterations of the International Teacher Leadership initiative, including those referred to in the following chapters. Frost (2011) states that what is needed from those supporting the development of teacher leadership is ‘appropriate social arrangements within which knowledge can be explored and constructed’ (Frost, 2011, p.14) and this is where university based academics and those working in non-governmental organisations can have a vital supporting role. The emphasis in this context is on innovation ‘if teachers are empowered to innovate they can experience deep learning about their practice’ (Frost, 2011, p.15). This has the result that the belief is inculcated among teachers that they can engage in leading change. This process of community building via the co-construction of knowledge potentially breaks down the isolation of teachers, whilst enabling them to keep the creative aspects of their professional individuality.

The significance of emphasising the co-construction of knowledge rather than the direct transfer of practice has implications when teachers work together across national borders. It is described by a range of writers, writing within the context of International Teacher Leadership initiatives as potentially breaking down the risk of strategies being rejected because of an unquestioning acceptance of approaches brought in from other countries, especially wealthier ones (Ramahi, 2015). Joshevska and Kirandziska (2015) writing in the context of Macedonia write about how the building of collective knowledge as opposed to only individual reflective knowledge enables forms of knowledge other than classroom practice to be exchanged by teachers. This in their experience includes knowledge of: personal agency, approaches to leading change and of teachers' own role as experts.

These are forms of knowledge that are clearly distinct from sharing classroom strategies alone. Similarly, according to Bolat (2013), in his case writing about teacher leadership in Turkey, the International Teacher Leadership approach enabled teachers to 'experience an epistemological shift from viewing themselves as passive receivers of knowledge to active constructors' (Bolat, 2013, p.3). International Teacher Leadership inspired projects rather than imposing a Western model of teaching strategies can provide 'an adaptable concept amenable to cross-cultural transfer and application' (Ramahi & Eltemamy, 2014, p.6). Thus, a knowledge base that can enable reform, and more significantly enable teachers to lead in the process of reform, is built rather than those reforms being imposed from outside.

The International Teacher Leadership initiative and civic society

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I presented the aims of the International Teacher Leadership initiative as articulated by Frost (2011). The final aim was 'to contribute to the development of democratic civil society. Sharing strategies and reflecting on teaching'. This illustrates how the vision for the initiative has broader social and political goals than simply impacting on classroom practice. It also illustrates how these are linked directly to knowledge exchange about the process of teaching and the role of teachers. Therefore, in this final section I discuss the civic and social role that teachers engaged in International Teacher Leadership initiatives may have. In doing so I return to the significance of non-positionality and link this to another important concept which emerged during this analysis of writing produced with the International Teacher Leadership initiative, which is the concept of teacher advocacy.

At the heart of the teacher leadership initiative is the importance of non-positionality. This is both a practice position and a political one. As a practice position I have discussed it earlier in this chapter. Therefore, I discuss it below solely in terms of how it emerged, through writing produced within the context of International Teacher Leadership initiatives, in terms of its relationship to a broader civic and political agenda. Projects connected to the International Teacher Leadership initiative have been supported in the Balkan states, financially by The Open Society Foundation and other organisations that have the explicit goal of building and maintaining civic society. Non-positionality relates to these goals because it places the teacher in a central role in changing and embedding societal norms and expectations and thereby in maintaining a functioning civic democracy. It achieves this by removing the dominance of hierarchical structures in affecting change (Bangs & Frost, 2011). It could of course be seen as overly ambitious in this regard as teachers alone are perhaps limited in their ability to significantly change society. This is still a pertinent goal though when bearing in mind that teachers' potential central role in the building of civic society is one that successive writers from the countries that emerged from the former Yugoslavia have acknowledged (Miljević, Herbert & Ball, 2014; Joshevka & Kirandziska, 2015).

Non-positionality in turn is frequently linked to the concept of teacher advocacy. However, this latter concept tends to move the depicted role of teachers into a more central one in a society's civic processes (Ramahi, 2013). Teachers are described as once having gained the shared confidence to create knowledge to then have the potential to disseminate this knowledge including that which impacts on or even challenges policy that exists beyond their school (Teleshaliyev, 2014). This explicit definition of teachers' professionalism as a fundamental part of a democratic way of life (Chiriak, 2014; Frost, 2015) leads to a requirement that teachers are enabled to have the confidence to exercise macro-level leadership (Bolat, 2012). This is seen as being a possible way for teachers to become agents of positive change and also to enable them to resist change enforced from outside (Ramahi, 2013). Bangs writes that: 'networking both nationally and internationally protects you from external challenges over which you have no control' (Bangs, 2013, p.7).

The International Teacher Leadership initiative has gained particular credence in a range of countries but especially in the countries that emerged from the former Yugoslavia. There are significant nuances in the nature of teacher leadership, which have perhaps made it particularly appealing in this region. The countries of the former Yugoslavia had a strong reputation for the

quality of education provision, compared to others in a similar state of economic development. This was challenged and undermined by the events that followed the break-up of this state. This in turn was accompanied by the very evident failure of civic society that occurred with the civil wars of the 1990s. Following this, school teachers in the Balkans today still need a way to define their professionalism (Joshevska & Kirandziska, 2015). Whilst simultaneously these countries are addressing the question of who can play a significant role in the rebuilding of civic society. One answer and model in response to both these challenges lies in enhancing teachers' professional status as societal leaders (Vranješević & Čelebičić, 2014).

Joshevska and Kirandziska (2015), echoing Fullan (1993), have written that in the Balkans 'scratch any educator and you will find moral purpose' (Joshevska & Kirandziska, 2015, p.21). However, they go on to write that this is an untapped resource because of the need for structures and support that would enable these teachers to exercise agency. The EFFeCT project describes, in depth, projects based on the International Teacher Leadership initiative that are in many fundamental aspects similar to the Macedonian project that the teachers interviewed as part of this study were part of. These include projects in nearby Serbia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Woods, Roberts & Chivers, 2016). The structure of these projects is very similar to International Teacher Leadership inspired projects elsewhere, including in Macedonia.

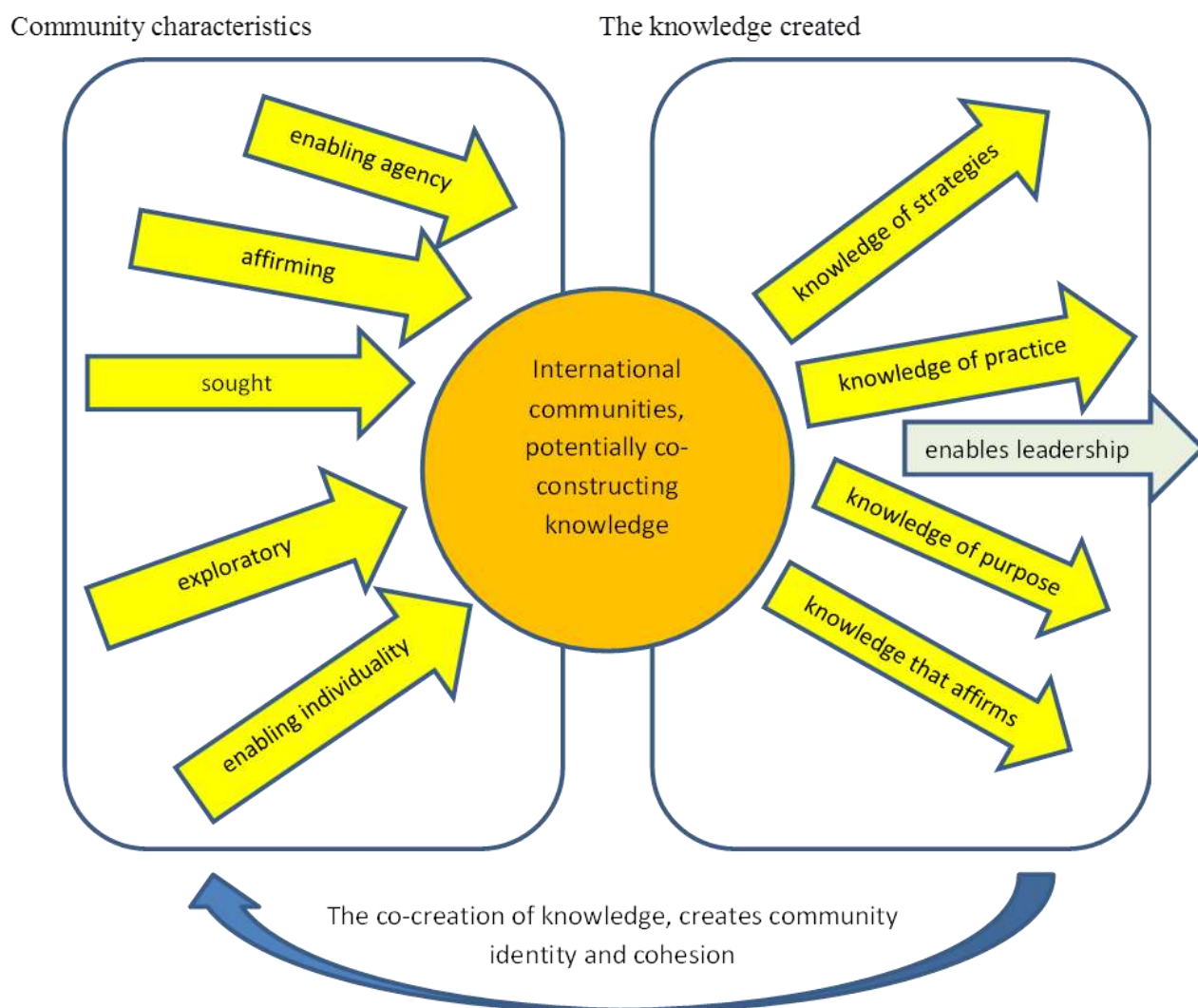
This work with schools in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, that is extensively described in a series of papers written by those involved in International Teacher Leadership initiatives in these countries, began with initial meetings in schools. These were aimed at informing school management and teachers about the project and establishing groups of teachers committed to working on development projects concerning parents' participation. The next step was to ask teachers to identify problems that they considered were important in relation to establishing partnerships with parents from different minority and marginalised groups, to identify problems they wished to solve and to link this to a broader moral purpose. From this a series of development projects were initiated and through these a broad dialogue among teachers leading change in these areas of building civic society was established (Vranješević & Čelebičić, 2014). Mentors also supported teachers and helped them to become pro-active by using the tools and methods of teacher leadership (Woods, Roberts & Chivers, 2016). This example illustrates how the creation of knowledge within a supported community was used for the achievement of concrete civic goals.

Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter the framework within which teacher led development work takes place within the International Teacher Leadership initiative is distinct and is perceived to be distinct by those many people who disseminate writing within the context of this initiative. The approach shares some common characteristics with a range of action research and practitioner research models. However, at the point at which the research is completed with these other methodologies further choices in terms of dissemination are not as clearly defined but tend to be left to the teacher or left unexplored. In contrast to this the International Teacher Leadership approach by defining the structured knowledge creation of teachers as development rather than research, involves the building of professional communities as well as the creation of knowledge. These are communities of support and communities of practice and in being so are also knowledge communities. They are also communities of affirmation. The building of these communities and the empowering of teachers also reflects a political perspective in terms of building civic society through the expertise of professionals engaged directly with communities. Frost's (2012) claim regarding the achievements of teacher leadership sums these up effectively. He identified two achievements: 'we have created a knowledge base for reform' and 'we have clarified a theory about educational change' (Frost, 2012, p.9).

In terms of the sharing and building of knowledge, the emphasis within the International Teacher Leadership initiative regarding co-construction enables flexibility and dialogue as regards the way that knowledge is interpreted and implemented. However, the exact form of the knowledge that is shared is left open to the decision of the teachers involved as is their reason for sharing knowledge both as a presenter and listener. One goal is to generate knowledge that can facilitate change through a process which stresses non-positional leadership, whilst another goal is the creation of a networked community. This networked community is such that it can enable improvement at classroom and school level and also in terms of developing civic society and democratic participation. The International Teacher Leadership approach therefore contains within it implied challenges and provocations towards positional models of leadership and to centralised education systems. It also presents a potential resolution to the risks of dominance by more developed countries in conversations with teachers from other countries. The ways in which the analysis of these documents refined the conceptual framework that provided structure to the analysis of the data gathered via interview is illustrated in the diagram below.

Diagram 6.1 the conceptual framework, iteration two



This diagram illustrates the ways in which this documentary analysis informed the development of the conceptual framework for this dissertation. Writing this chapter both reaffirmed and refined the conceptual framework. The addition of an account of leadership has been added to this diagram. This arrow breaks the boundaries of the diagram illustrating how this discourse on leadership moves this conceptual model beyond an explanation of the dynamics within a community of teachers itself into one that is about the wider civic and social impact such a community can potentially have.



Chapter 7

Perceptions of communities, the teachers from England

In the next four chapters I present the findings that emerged from the interview data. These four chapters are divided into two pairs. In the first pair, Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight, I analyse the interviews in relation to the nature of the professional communities that the teachers perceived themselves as belonging to. This initial analysis is based around an internal comparison within each sample group. The first of these chapters therefore focuses solely on the interviews with the teachers from England while the second focuses on the interviews with the teachers from Macedonia. These chapters mirror each other in terms of the sub-headings used and their overall structure. In the second pair of chapters, Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten, I focus on the process of knowledge exchange and the forms of knowledge exchanged by these groups of teachers. Again, I present two successive chapters each based on data from the two geographically framed participant groups. In a subsequent chapter, Chapter Eleven, I break the boundaries of this initial analysis and cross-compare between the two groups of participants. In this chapter, Chapter Seven, and the following chapter, Chapter Eight, I discuss and analyse the interview data under seven subheadings. They are as follows:

- communities defined by significance
- professional history and communities
- sought communities
- building identity within communities
- activism and innovation
- community boundaries
- cultural challenges to a perception of community

These respond to the concepts presented in the first four chapters of this dissertation and they are specifically based on the categories that emerged when the interviews were analysed. The first three sections address the nature of the communities that teachers perceive themselves as belonging to; the next three address the teachers' own role within such communities and the final two address challenges to the building of communities of various kinds. The way that the specifically international nature of the professional communities these teachers perceived

themselves as belonging to shaped their perceptions of these communities and their role in them runs through every chapter that follows. The table below illustrates the analytical process that led to the findings presented in these chapters. Firstly, over-arching conceptual themes, that were built via the writing of Chapters Two, Three and Four, framed the process of analysis, then a layer of underpinning codes were identified through the close analysis of the interview data. These were then synthesised into the categories that gave shape to the overall findings discussed below. These categories were then used as tools for the presentation of the data in the following chapters.

Table 7.1: table illustrating the process used when analysing the interviews

Over-arching conceptual themes.	Examples of codes that emerged during the analysis of the interviews.	Categories that emerged from the synthesis of the codes. These were used as subtitles for Chapters Seven to Ten.
Seeking, recognising and building professional communities	formally connected communities, personally significant communities, closely tied communities, loosely tied communities, virtual communities, personal-historical communities, subject defined communities, building significant relationships, creating communities, finding challenge, the need for audience, recognising expertise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communities defined by significance • professional history and communities • sought communities • building identity within communities • activism and innovation • community boundaries • cultural challenges to a perception of community
Sharing and co-constructing knowledge	sharing stories, sharing specific strategies, sharing practice, sharing meaning, sharing moral purpose, codified knowledge, craft knowledge, socially constructed knowledge, exclusivity of knowledge, mastery of knowledge, reflecting, researching, borrowing, sharing concepts of leadership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowledge of strategies • knowledge of practice • knowledge of purpose • knowledge and engagement

Also in this chapter, before I present an analysis of the findings from the interview data, I have presented below a short series of biographies that summarise the professional background of the participants in order to contextualise their interviews. All the teachers who I interviewed had been involved in international work through iterations of the International Teacher Leadership initiative which grew out of the HertsCam community. HertsCam is a professional community with a clear sense of values and ideals that have subsequently become the foundation of the values that underpin the International Teacher Leadership initiative. This specific set of values as related to these two initiatives has been discussed in the previous chapter, Chapter Six. Some of the teachers referred to in this chapter have also been involved in working with teachers from other countries via other initiatives. This is expanded upon further in the short biographies underneath. The way that the idiographic nature of this research shapes the nature of this study has been discussed earlier in Chapter Five.

Participant biographies

Monica: is a secondary school teacher. The subject that she teaches is geography. She has been involved in engaging with teachers internationally in terms of formally run initiatives since 2009. However this is just one small part of her broader experience engaging with teachers from other countries. She is Romanian by origin and began her teaching career in Romania before coming to England and gaining qualified teacher status via the overseas trained teacher route. At the time she was interviewed, she had been teaching in England for six years, which is longer than she had taught in Romania. Therefore, the majority of her career has been spent working in a professional environment different to the one that she trained in. On top of this at the time she was interviewed she was working in an international school in Kuwait. The main international initiative she has been involved in has been the International Teacher Leadership initiative. She became involved in this through being part of the HertsCam initiative, whilst working as a teacher in Hertfordshire.

Sonya: is a secondary school science teacher. Her career has been entirely spent teaching in state secondary schools in South East England with the longest time having been spent teaching in the city of Luton. Luton is a city with large populations from ethnic minority groups. More than with most English cities these different ethnic communities live in distinct areas of the city that are also reflected by local school catchment areas. She has taught in two schools in this town. In one school the majority of the student population was white and in the other the

majority of the student population were of Bangladeshi origin. As with Monica she has been a member of the HertsCam network for a significant number of years and through this became involved in the International Teacher Leadership initiative.

Cathy: is from Canada her first experience as a teacher was teaching dance in a dance studio. This involved teaching ballet, tap and contemporary dance at a high level. Having taken a dance degree she then trained to become a teacher. Her teaching degree was in arts integration ‘using the arts as a way to teach other subjects including science and maths.’ She then moved to England where she has since gained Qualified Teacher Status and has taught as a dance teacher in secondary schools. For her therefore, as with Monica, her main professional role is in itself engaging with a teaching culture other than the one of the country that she grew up within and indeed first taught within. At the point at which she was interviewed she had been involved in HertsCam and the International Teacher Leadership initiative for less than two years. She has also worked as a professional dancer. She is a member of the International Association of Dance Medicine and Science.

Sarah: is a British teacher in a secondary school in Southern England. She now holds a post on her school’s senior leadership team. She was the only one of the participants from England to hold a positionally defined senior leadership role. She first became involved in international work with other teachers via HertsCam, which then led to involvement in the International Teacher Leadership initiative. She has been involved in this initiative since 2008, which is the longest of any of the participants and spans its history as a developing project and a longer term initiative. In total, at the time she was interviewed, she had travelled out to work with teachers from the Balkan countries on five occasions. This has involved the building of long term relationships. In her first years doing this she became a mentor to a teacher from The Balkans who was also deeply interested in teacher leadership.

Claire: is also British. She teaches geography and had at the time she was interviewed taught in state secondary schools in South East England for seven years. She grew up in England and her experience in international projects has entirely come from her involvement in the International Teacher Leadership initiative, which she became involved in via HertsCam less than a year before being interviewed. Therefore, in terms of her involvement in education in countries other than England she has had the least experience, through either the International Teacher Leadership initiative or through other experiences in her professional life. Her involvement in the International Teacher Leadership initiative came from responding to an

invitation made at a HertsCam conference. She spoke about how out of a large room of people she was one of the few who volunteered to become involved in this initiative. Her motivation for doing so was, as she put it, so that she could see and understand ‘the differences and similarities to the UK’.

Having presented these brief biographies in the first two sections below I first explore the teachers’ perceptions of the professional communities they saw themselves as belonging to and that were particularly significant to them.

Communities defined by significance

In this section I first discuss the significance or not of the immediate workplace community to these teachers. I then contrast this with the importance they attributed to other professional communities. Within this I also discuss perceptions and expectations regarding communities that were sought out and brought into these teachers professional stories via their own agency.

All of the teachers acknowledged in their interviews that they belong to formally created communities and in every case included within this the school that they work in. However, none of them saw this community as being uniquely significant in terms of their working life. The interviewees who gave it the most significance were Sonya and Sarah. Sonya found that her current school was a particularly positive and conducive working environment that she very much enjoyed being part of. However, she also perceived this as exceptional. Whilst Sarah particularly acknowledged her role in maintaining and creating a collegiate atmosphere as a senior leader within the school that she worked in but also acknowledged the challenges of doing this and the risks of contrived collegiality. However, despite Sonya being one of the two participants who did ascribe significance to her immediate workplace this was not in exclusion to other communities that she had sought membership of and which had become important to her. This quotation from her interview illustrates this nuanced perception of the role of different communities in her professional life.

I mean I think I am really lucky, I think since 2000 I have never felt alone in this profession. And that is because since I did my MA Ed with HertsCam I have been part of that network, sometimes more involved than others. However, from that moment on I knew I had other people from other schools. So regardless of the school I was in, whether the culture there was something that was akin to my view of education or not I knew I had other people I could talk to and discuss professional issues with and I know

how important those two networks are to me, they are fundamental to my professional identity and my resilience really (interview with Sonya).

More than the other participants Sonya felt that the degree of collegiality in schools was highly variable. She also felt that this was dependent on attitudes and approaches coming from senior management. She had worked in schools with varying degrees of collegiality, including those with little sense of belonging to a supportive professional community. In her interview she used as a specific and positive example her current school which she feels has a ‘very collegial’ and ‘unthreateningly open’ culture. Importantly this includes an open-ness to admitting to faults and vulnerability. This had led her to reflect on what this means in terms of teacher identity. She now feels that a good teacher needs to be prepared to admit to vulnerability and that once a culture of this kind has been created then teaching can improve and equally a teacher can reach a form of non-defensive self-efficacy.

The other participants (Monica, Claire and Cathy) all clearly defined the communities that are most significant for them, as other than their immediate workplace, with an emphasis instead on the values of that alternative community and its function in developing their self-efficacy. However Monica’s definition of the communities that she belongs to and the way she drew the boundaries of these communities presented the most striking challenge to the dominance of the workplace as being the primary professional community that teachers belong to. To Monica a professional community is primarily defined by the values and beliefs of the members of such a community. Further still, to her a definition of a community as one that is geographically located and shares similar roles and functions is effectively a meaningless one, as she stated very clearly regarding her current school in Kuwait.

If the individual community around me is not synchronised to my professional beliefs I don’t feel that I belong to that community of teachers and I don’t feel like I belong to the community that I am currently in, in my school (interview with Monica).

However, despite this negative portrayal of her current circumstances, she still believes in the value of being a member of a professional community and indeed strives hard to be in one. This illustrates the exploratory and pro-active way in which these teachers consistently described how they sought to be members of a professional community. As she went on to state:

but I definitely feel like I belong to a community of teachers that are seeking for an impact and a change in education. Our group at HertsCam is such a group (interview with Monica).

It is noticeable here that she identified herself with a community of teachers who she had left in terms of physical proximity more than six months before this interview was conducted yet who in her own terms were more significant to her than her immediate colleagues. Alongside shared professional values, the teachers also spoke about the importance of friendship and respect in terms of identifying themselves as members of a community. Sarah spoke about this in terms of the International Teacher Leadership initiative, in this context she identified a very significant long term relationship that she had built with one colleague in The Balkans who she had mentored. This was to the extent that she had visited her as a friend and now perceived her as a very close colleague.

To summarise this section, it emerged that from these interviews that none of the teachers attached particular significance to their immediate workplace communities but instead built and found other communities, the significance of which they defined in other ways. For some of these teachers these significant communities that were alternative to their workplace were rooted in their personal history. This is explored further in the next section

Professional history and community

In this section I discuss the ways in which the teachers' perceptions of the communities, which they belong to was shaped by their personal and professional histories. In doing so I discuss the interviews of individual participants but also from these I isolate shared themes that emerged from this process of analysis.

Both Monica and Cathy defined the communities that they felt were most significant to them as being ones that they were not working closely with at the point in their career when they were interviewed but which were a significant part of their own professional history. These personal-historical communities could also be defined as one type of important but loosely tied community that emerged from these teachers' interviews. This concept which was presented in Chapter Four has been associated with communities that we attribute significance to in highly individualistic ways but that we do not engage closely with on a day to day basis.

In Monica's case as has been discussed above in the context of the International Teacher Leadership initiative these communities form part of her recent professional history. Cathy's case was interestingly different. In her case these were communities, which stretched back

many years through her professional past. These were also communities that she felt formed a significant part of her professional identity but which she had little contact with, with the exception of a few individuals. The next two paragraphs involve an exploration into Cathy's interview. This is because she chose to explore the way that the communities that were most significant to her were linked to her professional history in more depth than the other participants and therefore her experiences were to some extent representative but were explored in a more accentuated way.

Belonging to a community of 'dance teachers' and within this even a sub-community of 'Canadian trained dance teachers' was important to Cathy. Defining herself in this way she explained was important in terms of her confidence in her professional competence and expertise. Interestingly as with Monica she found challenges in building relationships with some colleagues that she is working closely with right now and found that at these moments making contact again with these longer term communities was very important for maintaining her resilience. She also saw herself as having close professional relationships with colleagues that she had worked with some time ago in the past. As an example her former university professor is still a source of advice, support and help. She also described how she frequently goes to friends and colleagues who are working in professional dance in Canada for advice, exemplifying the personal-historical nature of the community that she most closely associates with.

Cathy was also the only participant who gave primacy to the subject that she taught. However, she interlinked this with a sense of agency. Using the language of dance she described how to her it is important that 'her practice is fluid and not static' and how she actively seeks and then retains a connection with fellow professionals who inspire her. She perceives herself as having 'mastery' as a dance teacher and even used that specific word. She was clear that this is distinct from being a teacher of other subjects or being a dancer. She also described in her interview how the accumulation of this knowledge and confidence in her possession of this knowledge has built over time. Despite her assertion of the importance of this community, she also revealed that she has professional contact with only a few other dance teachers although she believes that 'when dance teachers meet, we are dealing with the same problems, we just have so much in common.' In saying this she illustrates how a perceived community membership may be based on distantly connected others as much as it is based on those we work with closely and regularly.

I have used Cathy's interview here as an illustrative example. However, the other interviewees also described communities that were significant to them in similar ways. Sonya spoke about the significance of being a teacher working in a city which has a multi-ethnic demographic and the affinity she felt with other teachers who are experienced at teaching in a multi-cultural environment. Monica, as described above, defined the HertsCam community that she had been part of as having primacy in terms of the community that she felt she belonged to, whilst Sarah spoke about the significance of international communities that she had worked with in the past. For Sarah this was also expressed in terms of a self-perception of being a leader of change. As she said:

I see myself in that international community as a leader in a community of fellow leaders and this helps me feel confident at school but also my confidence as a senior leader in schools helps me to feel confident in an international environment, so these things sort of come from each other (interview with Sarah).

She also went on to say that when working with teachers from other countries within internationally framed projects she felt less conscious of the inhibiting aspects of leadership and more able to discuss ideas freely. Sarah built upon this even further by discussing how her leadership role went beyond that of the school, so that it led to her seeing herself as a leader within the local community too. Claire didn't link her engagement in such initiatives and the communities that they generate far into her past but she did connect it to a consistent interest in engagement with others outside her school throughout her teaching career so far and she also linked it to a broader interest in global issues, which as a geography teacher runs through her entire professional career.

In conclusion to this section the significance of these communities that form part of these teachers' personal history and which they continue to attribute significance too is distinct from those communities that teachers find themselves in simply as part of their working lives. These communities are not merely memorable but form an active part of these teachers' current professional lives. However, the drivers that link these teachers together are less dependent on regular contact than might be expected considering the importance attributed to membership of these communities. Instead they were framed by these interviewees as to do with shared experiences and shared values. However, they are also different from communities, whether international or otherwise, that were sought as additions to these teachers' professional present. These actively sought communities are therefore discussed separately in the section below.

Sought communities

The significance of the participants own agency in terms of both seeking and defining the communities that they belong to is a thread that runs through this study. Indeed, the possibility of this was one reason for conducting this research. As was described in the first section: all the teachers felt that the most significant or some of the most significant professional communities that they were members of were ones that were unbounded by their workplace, including in all cases those that crossed national boundaries. It also emerged that the teachers had all shown considerable agency in terms of seeking membership of these communities. This theme is therefore addressed in the paragraphs below.

Sarah identified that some of the professional communities that had been most important for her even before she began to be involved in international work had not necessarily been communities that had been part of the school that she was working in. These were instead communities that she had actively sought membership of. Specifically she described how these other communities of which one was HertsCam gave her 'resilience' and also 'energy' as they provided a 'wider perspective'. She also described them as being 'important and refreshing'. She perceived such communities as being built on a shared 'moral purpose' and 'professional beliefs': two phrases that she repeatedly used. These echo the ideals expressed by literature produced within the International Teacher Leadership initiative. These values are also referred to in the next chapter on sharing knowledge. Therefore, to her the sense of belonging to an international community of teachers, a situation that she sought later, was a logical extension of this perception of belonging to a wider communities of teachers within the context of England.

She emphasised the different benefits she gains from membership of her workplace community and more distantly tied communities. This fits with theoretical modelling in terms of networks that suggests that closely tied and loosely tied geographical networks may have distinct but equally important roles. However, this was also more nuanced than these models suggest. Cathy articulated a similar viewpoint. This quotation clearly illustrates this complexity that emerged from both these interviews:

Working with colleagues in the same school can give us a commonality or it can be the case that working with teachers from other schools is a breath of fresh air. However, there are too many variables to say that one is always more true (interview with Cathy).

Her statement above suggests that it might often be the case that relationships within the

immediate local community provide support and engagement and that those within a more distant international community provide ideas and inspiration. However to her the nature of the relationships that were built was also highly dependent on individual aspects of those colleagues personality and professional values. As she explicitly said:

That doesn't mean we build strong relationships with all colleagues, whether we work with them a lot or a little (interview with Cathy).

Claire, as with all the other participants, saw the process of actively seeking communities to be affirming in its own right. She had also been involved in other initiatives of various kinds that involved engaging with teachers other than those based in her specific workplace. This had included initiatives in her role as an advanced skills teacher (AST) and as part of the HertsCam community. This was also discussed by Sonya, who spoke about how her perception of herself as a community leader within an international context had reinforced her confidence in her perception of herself as a leader within her local school community. One aspect that emerged clearly from all the interviews was that the process of seeking membership of communities that lay outside their workplace enabled them to see themselves as engaged professionals. Indeed this process of seeking and joining alternative communities was described as being as important as some of the actual gains of membership.

In relation to the section above therefore, there were two ways in which agency emerged in terms of the communities that these teachers saw as being most significant. The first was in choosing to emphasise the continuing role of communities that they had once belonged to but had since moved away from, the second was in seeking membership of communities outside their own workplace. For two of the participants there was a perception of still belonging to communities that they had not personally been part of for some time, while all found significance in communities that in terms of hours spent working together formed a relatively small part of their working lives but which they had sought for themselves. These value or knowledge based communities were based on different principles and formed by different drivers than the more pragmatic communities that exist within a workplace and that teachers have no choice but to be part of at that stage in their career. This is referred to again and expanded upon in the next chapter on sharing knowledge.

In conclusion to these first three sections in this chapter: all these participants perceived a fluid pattern of overlapping professional communities that they belonged to. However, none gave primacy to their immediate workplace community and Cathy and Monica in particular did not

see it as significant at all. Therefore, it emerged that communities other than the immediate workplace had a greater significance than may have been expected, these included communities from the teachers' pasts and communities that they had sought to become part of. Both these types of community involved a high degree of agency on the part of the teacher either in seeking to maintain contact with the community or seeking to find and join it.

Building identity within community

This section and the one that follows it relate closely. In the first I discuss the ways in which these teachers see their identity in these communities as being constructed within it. This includes the role of being an expert audience for others and of friendships. Then in the following section I discuss how part of the construction of an identity within these communities involved these participants perceiving themselves as innovative or even activist professionals. This following section overlaps with and provides a link to the final sections, in this chapter, in which challenges to building a community are addressed, including the ways in which these teachers defined the boundaries of community membership.

One significant aspect in terms of shaping their professional identity that emerged from the interviews with these teachers was the importance of the acknowledgment of others and the rewarding experience of being able to demonstrate expertise in front of an audience of expert peers. These aspects require regular although not necessarily frequent contact. These issues were expressed very clearly by all the participants. Sarah described how her role in international initiatives enabled her to develop self-confidence as a leader of educational change. This was because she was able to demonstrate leadership and receive acknowledgement for her skills in doing so, Claire although holding a subject focused rather than whole school leadership role also felt the same way. Sonya described how it had enabled her to discuss her deep expertise in teaching science with others and Cathy had described her experiences as a dance teacher working in an international context in similar ways.

The other side of the significance of having an audience of expert peers was expressed by Monica, who as has been mentioned above described her sense of belonging to the HertsCam and International Teacher Leadership communities as increasingly being an aspiration rather than a reality. She expressed concerns that although she still perceives these communities as her ideal professional community, as her desired 'home', she had doubts as to whether others

felt the same way. This had therefore presented challenging reflective questions in her mind as recognition as an expert member in this community, to her, involved by necessity playing a full and active part. This quotation illustrates these worries that she was having very clearly, as she moved towards what she perceived as being a more peripheral role in these communities.

I hope that I still belong to such a community but I now feel removed from it. One has to continue to be active to say one still belongs to a community to be recognised within it, to still be seen as an expert. In my mind I still feel that I belong to this community but I don't any longer feel like I am active in it, raising the question in my mind do I still belong? (interview with Monica).

These were issues to which she had not yet developed a clear answer although she felt that it was her 'responsibility to find [her] way back into such a community of teachers.' This movement outwards from a central role to a more peripheral role, once she had been removed from working at a close geographical distance, perhaps indicates that strong ties do require frequent contact if not geographical proximity. However, the emphasis on finding her own way back in, illustrates how these teachers perceived themselves as actively involved in constructing the communities that they saw themselves as belonging to.

This also illustrates how for these teachers their identity within a community is built and reinforced by the recognition of others. This social aspect to the forming of an assured professional identity was also present in the other interviews. Cathy spoke about the significance of sharing her expertise as a teacher, as did Claire, whilst Sonya spoke of how her confidence had been built by recognition from peers that she respected and perceived as equals. This also overlapped with the significance of professional relationships that also became professional friendships. All the participants described friendships that they had built within the context of international initiatives. In relation to this three of the participants described further journeys they had made to visit colleagues in other countries, on the basis of personal friendship, who they had first met through engagement in the International Teacher leadership initiative.

In conclusion to this section it emerged that for these teachers being both expert and audience in a community of peers was a very important experience for them. The implications of this in terms of sharing knowledge are addressed in the next chapter. This also connected to the building of professional friendships of deep personal significance, although it would be hard to see this as a pre-designed goal of such initiatives, it was still clearly a significant outcome for these teachers.

Activism and innovation

In the next few paragraphs I discuss a theme which emerged clearly from all the interviews which was a self-perception of being an innovative or even activist teacher. I explore this in this section in terms of the extent to which the teachers identified themselves in this way. In the following section I link this to the ways in which teachers used these self-definitions in order to build boundaries and the challenges this potentially presents to recognising the existence of a community of fellow professionals. These two terms activist and innovative although related were used as separate codes when analysing the interviews. This was because they reflected an important and nuanced distinction in the ways in which these teachers perceived the communities that they belonged to. To illustrate this I interpreted Sonya, Claire and Cathy as perceiving themselves as innovative teachers whilst both Monica and Sarah perceived themselves as activist teachers.

I identified Sonya's, Cathy's and Claire's self-perception as innovative rather than activist for the following reasons. They all spoke about their commitment to attending extra sessions and meetings if it enabled them to be involved in different initiatives that excited them and they also spoke about how much they enjoyed reflecting on practice with others and embracing the opportunity to be part of international initiatives. Cathy specifically spoke about how her long term journey from Canada to England and her engagement in international initiatives was in order to reflect upon and develop her own teaching, whilst Claire spoke about her constant drive to develop as a geography teacher. They therefore perceived themselves as distinctly innovative in comparison to other teachers and also described a continual seeking of communities that inspired such innovation. However, they consistently framed this within the boundaries of developing innovative teaching within their classroom or school. This quotation from Claire illustrates this perception:

I think my innovation is about the classroom. I think that is where I can have an influence as a teacher. Yes, there is a civic, a political aspect, to that if I am educating citizens or helping teachers to be better teachers but it is in the walls of my classroom, That is where I am focussing my energies (interview with Claire).

Sarah and Monica on the other hand defined themselves as having a leadership role which went beyond the boundaries of their own school and which was not even necessarily primarily focused on teaching. Their main area of innovation was not their own school but was the broader community that the International Teacher Leadership initiative brought together, which included the community that the teachers' schools are based within and even globally. This

may reflect Sarah's role as a senior leader in an English school and it may equally reflect their longer involvement in the International Teacher Leadership initiative. These quotations from Sarah and Monica, successively, illustrate this very clearly:

I was passionate about teacher leadership and knew what it had done for many groups that I had led over the years. So I was very passionate about being part of sharing that with other people. And I thought oh Belgrade, the Balkans, goodness I know what they have been through, even though my own understanding is really very limited general knowledge, and I thought it would be interesting to go there. So I guess my reason would be definitely sharing teacher leadership with others in the world, which is what I continue to want to do. However, I think going to an area of the world that had recently gone through a lot of problems, I think that made it seem more important, yes I felt that was a good thing to want to do and be part of (interview with Sarah).

Romania is still very dear to me, the educational system there. It is where I belong, those are my roots. I thought I can still see teacher leadership as one of the solutions for reform in Romania and in the Romanian system. So the more I got to learn about it, the more I knew about teacher leadership and what it promotes and the programme, it is not just a theory is it, it is almost a recipe (interview with Monica).

As with all the teachers interviewed Sarah also felt that her reasons for involvement in international work were partially based on chance and opportunity. However, also as with all these teachers, she recognised in herself certain personality traits that could perhaps be defined as risk-taking that meant that when opportunities were presented she grasped them eagerly. To her as well, as the initiative with the Balkans progressed, she found that she increasingly tied the goal of developing teacher leadership with broader emancipatory and democratic goals, as is illustrated by the quotation above. She did not see herself as the main driving force in this. She perceived her own role in the initiative as having more limited aims. However, she did speak about how participating in international initiatives had built her confidence as a teacher and as a school and civic leader. Similarly Monica, as illustrated by the quotation from her, saw her engagement in international initiatives as part of a long term vision as regards her potential role in Romanian education and society.

In conclusion to this section, all these participants saw themselves as distinctly innovative as compared to other teachers. In the case of two of the teachers this perception of themselves as innovators and leaders of change was also connected to their view of the broader societal role that they could potentially play. However, these self-definitions were also based on comparing themselves to other less innovative teachers. The way new boundaries were built, as geographical and workplace defined boundaries were loosened, by these teachers, is discussed in the next section.

Community boundaries

Part of defining their identity within the professional communities that they work within, for these teachers, also involved defining the people outside the boundaries of the communities that they perceived themselves as belonging to. This was not necessarily shaped in predominantly negative ways. Others could be seen as outside the community boundaries but also be respected for their role. This process of defining boundaries is discussed in the next few paragraphs.

These participants were all respectful of the role others in education such as academics, and members of non-governmental organisations played in supporting a professional community of teachers. However, in expressing this respect they also implicitly recognised two communities: a community of professionals involved in education and a community of teachers. However, beyond this commonality, perceptions of this varied. Cathy, Claire and Sonya saw the specific community of teachers as the most significant to them, whilst in contrast Monica and Sarah saw the distinction between teachers and those who work in other professions in the field of education as being less significant. This quotation from Sonya's interview articulates this viewpoint very clearly:

We mark books we do the same things. There is a community of fire fighters but I can't be in it. We understand what a hard day is but we can't understand what their hard day is. Essentially teaching is the same profession, deep down it is the same job, we are educators in our classroom (interview with Sonya).

Further to this though, this perception of belonging to a community primarily made up of teachers did not mean that it included all teachers, alternative conceptual boundaries were also drawn based on these teachers perceptions of themselves as innovative, committed and reflective professionals; definitions which gained validity by the perceived existence of other teachers who did not fit these terms. As Claire very clearly put it:

There is a subset of teachers who will engage in initiatives in and out of the school and there is another subset who will never do that, almost resist that. I find I want to find and work with teachers from any school in any nation who fit that first group (interview with Claire).

In a similar vein Cathy saw the building of communities locally as focussed on specific individuals. As she said in her interview: 'in every country I find someone to identify with'. In her current school she sees the staff as split between those who are embracing and those resisting current change. She however, finds it very hard to identify with those teachers who

are actively resisting change. In fact she went as far as to say that she would not want to identify with them, because this would implicitly mean accepting their values and work ethic. This however does not affect her ability to build friendships with these colleagues. However, this is limited to a personal and not a professional relationship.

For the other teachers the significance of this community being made up of teachers was replaced by a perception that a greater sense of community and commonality can come from shared ideals and values regarding the nature of education and the place and role of teachers. The significance of sharing values is discussed further in the next chapter. However, in short to these interviewees, some teachers may not be members of this community and others who are not teachers but who believe in the value of teacher leadership may be, with the professional role held when the person is outside this community, having very little significance. This quotation from Sarah illustrates this very clearly:

I believe there is a commonality in being a teacher. But I don't think the people that I have met in the International Teacher Leadership initiative. I don't make the distinction - oh you work in a non-governmental organisation or oh you are a teacher or oh you are a head teacher. I do believe that there is a commonality based on what we believe in and think about teaching so I have not really experienced a gap with the roles that each of us have at that table or at those discussions (interview with Sarah).

This difference in the ways that the boundaries of these communities were defined by each of these teachers was also reflected in differences regarding the way these teachers perceived their own role in these communities. The teachers who drew the boundaries of the community that they saw themselves as belonging to around the fact of being a teacher also defined their role in a knowledge sharing community as that of teacher. The participants who defined these boundaries more broadly saw their role more broadly as leaders of educational change and used the words 'leader' and 'leadership' in their interviews. This is discussed further in the next chapter. This division does have to be nuanced though. Even these teachers acknowledged that there are some ways in which teachers have an understanding and empathy for each other that cannot be replicated by others. This valuing of the role of those in non-teaching professions such as those working in non-governmental organisations more highly, by these particular participants, may also come from having a more nuanced understanding of the role of such professionals.

In conclusion in this section above I have discussed the conceptual boundaries these teachers described that prevented them from perceiving all the colleagues who they worked with locally

as belonging to a professional community that they identified with. In the next I discuss obstacles to such perceptions that the participants felt emerged when working with teachers from other countries.

Cultural challenges to a perception of community

In this final section to this chapter before concluding, I discuss the participants' views regarding the challenge of perceiving themselves as part of a community that crosses cultural boundaries as well as national ones

Unlike other participants Sonya saw the differences in approaches to education in different countries as significant as to whether a community of teachers that crosses borders can be seen to exist. She felt that cultural differences between educational systems may mean that a sense of community with teachers from these other countries may be elusive as once teachers from these countries begin discussing education in depth, the experiences they describe and their interpretations of them may just be too different. Interestingly though this was not just a theme that emerged in terms of her experience working with other countries. She had also recently started working in a predominantly Muslim state school in England and had been surprised by the stereotypical views expressed by some colleagues working in other schools. This surprised her more than the behaviour and attitudes of her students, which she had found to not be significantly different from that of students in other schools that she had taught in.

She had therefore personally concluded that in her professional experience it is the children who create a commonality within school communities, more than it is the adults. She described how the culture of the classroom is surprisingly consistent across different cultures both within and between different countries, the adult response to this however, she saw as varying considerably. In relation to this she also felt that the cultural differences within even the same town can be almost as great as between countries. So for example she found that children in the predominantly Muslim school that she has moved to work in: 'are very open about their faith, not just the Muslims, all.' She has also found the depth of stereotyping to be as strong.

Their perceptions of heavily white schools are almost the same as white perceptions of Muslim schools (interview with Sonya).

These perceptions included an expectation of poor behaviour and a lack of aspiration in

predominantly white schools.

This extended discussion within her interview is reflective of ideas explored in Chapter Four, where I have discussed how some writers such as Bray (2014) perceive there to be as much similarity or difference between schools that are geographically close to each other as there can be between schools in entirely separate countries. Sarah also saw potential cultural obstacles to identifying with a professional community that involves teachers from different countries. These hadn't revealed themselves during her work with teachers and education professionals from the Balkans. However, during an initiative for Cambridge University that she was involved in later, involving training teacher trainers in a different region outside Europe, she had found that the higher levels of deference towards people with positions of a perceived higher status meant that developing the discursive and empowered dialogue that she associated with the international work that she had been involved in, in the Balkans had proved to be impossible.

Monica however had a different view. She felt that the English education system had similar weaknesses in terms of quality of teaching as schools in Romania do. Whilst she had also found that there was often a highly idealised view of the English education system among teachers from other countries. However, she found that this idealism was often based on a superficial and stereotypical view of the English education system that was also very dated. To illustrate this she described during her interview how she had worked in a long term relationship with a colleague in Spain which was entirely internet based. This colleague had had a highly idealised view of English education based on media, often referring to private schools. It included such things as emphasising the importance of traditional uniforms. Interestingly he saw these surface things as significant, rather than a deeper ethos within the education system, believing as she said that uniforms 'would solve all discipline problems'. However, the deeper meaning of this was that she found that 'an English education has status', when meeting people from other countries. This is also reflected in the way some people she has worked with have even moved to England to study but again she described this as often being based on highly idealised perceptions.

Claire initially expressed very similar views to Monica. However, she then developed these in more positive ways. Claire explained that although this highly idealised view of English education exists that there is a more complex picture too. There is also a rival portrayal of education influenced by such programmes as Educating Essex and also a genuinely

international dialogue via such sites as Pinterest and Twitter that she felt has to some extent at least removed some of the naivety as regards how teachers are perceived in other countries and which has created a community of shared ideas even if face to face relationships between teachers are not built. To her therefore even when international initiatives involve face to face meetings this is merely part of a longer process involving building relationships using the internet as well. As is discussed further in the next chapter, from these teachers' experiences and the experiences of the teachers from Macedonia, it emerged that a simple neo-colonialist model in relation to perceptions of education in England and therefore teachers from England is not quite adequate as a way of describing the experiences of any of the participants.

In conclusion to this section the significance of cultural obstacles was perceived in differing ways by these teachers. Difficulties in perceiving a shared commonality as part of a single community were expressed regarding countries where teaching as a profession is defined very differently. However, significant differences were identified between schools in differing contexts in the same country. There was a perception that education in England is sometimes highly idealised. However, there was also a perception that communication via the internet increasingly breaks down these stereotypes.

Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter: it seems teachers perceive the communities that they belong to in nuanced ways. They recognise the value of the professional community that they work in on a day to day basis. However, they also find and build communities in exploratory and pro-active ways. They recognise an element of chance in this but they also recognise that there is still a significant aspect of volition because they choose to seek opportunities or to take opportunities that are offered. In every case the most valued professional communities that these teachers saw themselves as belonging too was not that of their immediate workplace colleagues.

Reasons for why they valued other more disparate communities included that they found that they affirmed a perception that they had of themselves as educational leaders and that they found them stimulating and challenging environments during a mid-point in their career, when they had already moved into a central position of mastery within the workplace community. However, some of the participants also related their membership of these communities to a long view into their personal history. All the participants also had colleagues who were

personally significant to them and who worked in education systems in other countries, although these varied from colleagues who they had met through the International Teacher Leadership initiative to those they had met for other reasons, possibly connected to earlier stages in their career.

There were also obstacles to perceiving themselves as belonging to an international community, these largely emerged from practical issues of involvement within a community that they felt distant from. However, this also related to different cultural perceptions regarding the nature of education and the process of teaching. This varied very much between the different interviewees. So for example Monica perceived there to be little difference between teachers in other countries she had worked with. She thought that teaching varies between individuals far more than it does between different systems. For Monica this fitted with her perception that she belonged to a community of shared values that crosses boundaries.

The most significant challenge that was presented involved the way alternative boundaries were drawn by these teachers. As the geographical and spatial boundaries were drawn wider, conceptual boundaries that were defined in terms of values and beliefs about teaching and education were seen to be drawn narrower. Therefore, it emerged that although there may be teachers who perceive themselves as globalised teachers who are members of a widely drawn international community, this is not perceived as incorporating a wide population of teachers but rather is seen as reflective of distinct professional traits in a minority of teachers who are sought after as colleagues.

From the interviews it emerged therefore that although there is a sense of professional community amongst teachers it is more complicated and nuanced than models which emphasise the primacy of the immediate working environment suggest. These communities that are significant but further removed, perhaps could be better described by more specific and nuanced term such as communities of professional ideals or values, communities of professional efficacy or communities of affirmation.



Chapter 8

Perceptions of communities, the Macedonian teachers

In this chapter I present a discussion and analysis of the findings from the interviews with the five participants from Macedonia. This chapter mirrors the chapter above in which the interview data from the teachers from England was presented and discussed. In it therefore I specifically address a series of categories under the over-arching theme of communities. The sub-headings are the same as were used when discussing the interviews with the teachers from England in Chapter Seven. They therefore are as follows:

- communities defined by significance
- professional history and communities
- sought communities
- building identity within communities
- activism and innovation
- community boundaries
- cultural challenges to a perception of community

As with the chapter regarding the interviews with the English teachers, which addressed the same over-arching theme of communities the first three sections therefore address the nature of the communities that teachers perceive themselves as belonging to; the next two address teachers' own perceived roles within such communities and the final two address challenges to the perception of community of various kinds. Again, the specifically international nature of the professional communities these teachers perceive themselves as belonging to shapes the analysis.

Before I discuss the interview data, I have presented below a short series of biographies illustrating the professional background of the participants in order to contextualise their interviews. All the teachers who were interviewed had been involved in internationally framed initiatives through iterations of the Teacher Leadership Initiative, as have been developed in Macedonia, primarily via the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded non-governmental organisation called 'Step by Step'. The terminology here is complicated: the over-arching funding comes from USAID, the non-governmental organisation

channelling this into local initiatives linked to and influenced by the International Teacher Leadership initiative is Step by Step. Each individual component of Step by Step's work with schools also has a distinct title such as: Readers are Leaders, which functions on principles established by the International Teacher Leadership initiative. The participants when interviewed tended to use these terms fluidly and this is reflected in the quotations in this chapter. Some of the teachers referred to in this chapter though have also been involved in other internationally orientated communities and projects of various kinds. As with the previous chapter names have been changed.

Participant biographies

Jana: is an education professional working in a senior position in a non-governmental organisation. However, she has also worked in schools and has taught at secondary level. She has lived and studied in both the USA and in England. She has been involved in international networking through a variety of initiatives including those connected to the International Teacher Leadership initiative. Her experiences working and living abroad pre-date her first working as a teacher. She lived in the USA and went to high school there for two years. She also studied for a masters' in Education at the University of Cambridge in England. All these experiences were prior to becoming a teacher. Following this she taught for two years in an international school in Skopje before moving to a leadership position in a non-governmental organisation called Step by Step, which is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). At present she works for Step by Step as a Component Coordinator. In this role at the time of interview she was in charge of setting up learning communities of teachers from sixty primary schools, although this initiative potentially includes all 356 schools in Macedonia and is a growing project.

Ivana: is an experienced primary teacher working in Macedonia, who has also been involved in international networking through a variety of initiatives including those connected to the International Teacher Leadership initiative. She has worked as a mentor for the USA supported Step by Step programme which bases its approach to teachers' continuing professional development on models developed from the HertsCam initiative and the International Teacher Leadership initiative. In her current school she teaches children age six to eleven years old. The age range of the entire school is six to fourteen years old. It is a moderately large school with

more than 800 students on roll and about sixty teachers. It is located in Skopje. It is state-funded. She has been working there for eleven years, always as a teacher.

Martina: is an experienced primary teacher, working outside the capital Skopje, and is thus the only teacher from this sample not working in the metropolitan centre of Macedonia. She trained to teach in and has worked her entire career in a small village school in what is a moderately remote area of Macedonia, in terms of such things as public transport connections. She teaches a class of nine to ten year olds in a state primary school, a role she has had for fourteen years, and is a mentor on Step by Step led projects in Macedonia. She has worked in connection to the International Teacher Leadership initiative only in its iteration within Macedonia via Step by Step. However, she has developed a considerable online presence internationally, through the use of social media, and was nominated for a prestigious international teaching award, a nomination which gained considerable press attention in Macedonia and some worldwide. This means that although her main professional position is teaching in a small Macedonian village primary school she has many hundreds of online followers.

Leana: is a secondary school teacher based in the capital city of Skopje. She works in an international school, which teaches towards the International Baccalaureate exam. The children that she teaches include Macedonians but also children from families connected to business and diplomacy who are living in Skopje but who have origins elsewhere. She therefore teaches in a highly internationalised environment. She has only been involved at the periphery of the International Teacher Leadership initiative in its Macedonian iteration. However, she has also studied and taught in the USA and for her being part of this initiative forms a smaller part of a broader internationally oriented career in education. Her broader international experience has included working for Step-by-Step as a language teacher; working in private language schools; and conducting postgraduate research at masters' and doctoral level in the USA and England. She finds the processes of international engagement very interesting and links this to the development of innovative approaches to teaching. She was specifically attracted towards working in her current school because of the international dimension of working in a school teaching within the International Baccalaureate structure.

Suzana: is a primary teacher in a state school in Skopje. The school has a broad social intake. Her involvement in international initiatives is solely through involvement in the International Teacher Leadership initiative, which she has only been involved in through its Macedonian iteration as run by Step by Step. She has not travelled as part of this initiative, other than to

other Balkan countries. However, although the school that she works in is not an international school it follows an international programme, based on that designed by the International Baccalaureate Organisation for early years. She teaches grade one, which she describes as her favourite age to teach. As is discussed further below she finds her school to be a positive and collaborative workplace.

Communities defined by significance

In this section I discuss the significance these teachers gave to the different communities that they perceived themselves to be members of and also the reasons as to why they attributed significance to these communities or not.

When asked to define the communities of teachers that they belonged to all the teachers identified themselves as belonging to a geographically bounded community framed by their own workplace. However, just as with the teachers from England none gave specific significance to this community. Indeed two of the teachers, Ivana and Martina, described how their immediate workplace was not a collegiate and supportive environment to work in and described this as one reason why they sought involvement in initiatives that would enable them to become members of potentially more conducive communities. Ivana defined this alternative more flexibly bounded community that she had sought, as a community of more innovative and globally engaged teachers. In Ivana's case this community did include teachers within her own school but it did not include all of them and this also included others working in other schools in Macedonia and in other countries, who she had met, as this quotation below illustrates:

There is a group within the school that is more open minded and they just don't have problems with their experience and knowledge and everything, they discuss, they are asking just as I am discussing and asking, so we are on the same level, we can talk about it but it is not all of them and in many ways my school is a bit closed, not supportive. But most of my experiences, I don't know. I think that I am taking ideas away from innovative and creative teachers that I am meeting all around: in my school or at some different event where I am meeting them. Step by Step, things like that (interview with Ivana).

Martina similarly described how she felt more closely connected to the international community of teachers that she primarily liaised with online and also to the teachers who she

has mentored as part of her role with Step by Step than she did to her immediate colleagues in her workplace.

In fact all the teachers identified themselves as belonging to a perceived community of outward looking teachers and in describing this used such terms as ‘outward looking’, ‘innovative’ and ‘creative’. This was an interesting definition of a community because it indicated that similarly to the teachers from England, whose interviews were discussed in the previous chapter, these teachers from Macedonia were prepared to define the concept of a community in fluid terms unbounded by the institution that they work in. It also indicated a preparedness to perceive themselves as part of a community of which they would not necessarily expect to know all of the members well. In this sense this therefore is a definition of a community that is loosely tied and matches with the definitions of significant communities that emerged from the interviews with the teachers from England.

Martina’s professional story is particularly interesting in this case as she had shown a large degree of autonomy and action in seeking communities to belong to. This had been partly via engagement in initiatives such as those led by Step by Step but it had also been achieved by building an online community of followers on social media and engaging as a follower of others. Martina’s commitment to developing an online community that to her was as significant as any face-to-face one was unique among the interviewees, although Leana and Sonya had engaged in similar processes but in a less developed way. It may, in Martina’s case have reflected her more remote location and lack of local opportunities. However, it may also reflect a unique and idiosyncratic approach to finding and working with colleagues. Interestingly several of these contacts of hers that were initially online have now developed into working with her in other ways, as this quotation illustrates:

I have cooperation with colleagues from Austria. One is in a big school and I have cooperation with colleagues from Serbia constantly. I work with many friends, we found each other on Facebook but now we share, we support each other and that is how we start to cooperate, and now I travel every year a couple of times (interview with Martina).

Leana and Suzana saw their own school community in a more positive light than either Martina or Ivana. Both felt that they were fortunate in that they worked with creative and internationally minded teachers. In Leana’s case, part of that international mindedness was that the school community had porous boundaries and welcomed building relationship with teachers from other schools. This was partly because of a perception by the staff that this school belonged as

much to a community of international schools and more specifically International Baccalaureate schools as it did to the local community of Macedonian schools. Interestingly Suzana had a positive view on the community of Macedonian teachers more broadly, which she identified as a ‘cooperative’ community that she was proud to be able to identify as part of. Suzana also described how she enjoys working in her school because of its embracing of a diverse range of international influences, as this quotation illustrates:

So we are trying to build the local mentality to a greater international ethos in a sense. The tradition in our school has always been, ‘get out your textbook’, ‘get out your notebooks and start writing’ whereas what we want to do is to make textbooks together and to inspire children to look for knowledge rather than just give it to them, and to inspire them to arrive at their own conclusions, to build knowledge on their own. So as you know there has been a big reform in the national science and maths curriculum, they have on a state level, they have incorporated the International Cambridge board initiative, so they are now trying to actually to do this for all subjects not just maths and natural sciences. We as an IB [International Baccalaureate] school, we will have to do both. So both the Cambridge initiative and IB, even though they are very similar (interview with Suzana).

As this shows progressive and innovative teaching to her is linked to developments in the curriculum that are primarily coming from Western countries, although this was a position that she nuanced later in her interview. This was not a viewpoint shared entirely by other participants and the implications of this are discussed in further sections.

Jana although having worked as a teacher, in her interview, spoke about her experiences in a leadership position within the Step by Step initiative. This contextualised the themes that emerged from the teachers interviews in interesting ways. As this quotation illustrates:

I would take it a bit further. I think it is much more difficult to be innovative in your own school, many times. Not always but a lot of times, I have seen very good teachers, who are not so respected by everyone in their schools, but they are praised and highly valued by other teachers from other schools. I don’t know if that is a mentality thing. There is a saying that it is very difficult to be the first in your own village (interview with Jana).

As this illustrates she felt that for some teachers there could be very different social experiences within a professional context and within the different professional communities that a teacher may belong too. As was discussed in Chapter Two this would be very likely to affect their self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy in each context. It could therefore be expected that these teachers would choose to identify more closely with the community which responded to them more positively and which gives them an experience of positive affirmation.

In conclusion to this section, just as with the teachers from England all the participants from Macedonia gave pre-eminence to communities other than the immediate workplace community. Although experiences of the workplace community varied, all still emphasised the importance of alternative professional communities, which were defined by educational values or approaches to teaching or lesson design. In the next two sections therefore I discuss the ways in which these teachers chose to identify with or sought out these alternative communities.

Professional history and communities

In this section I discuss how the communities that these teachers defined themselves as belonging to reflected their interpretation of their personal and professional histories. Two of the five interviewees described how the process whereby they became a teacher was influenced by a family history within the profession. Three of the five participants also linked their interest in engaging with teachers from other countries with other experiences engaging with an international academic or education community that stretched back before their formal involvement with Step by Step. Therefore, in this section I address first these familial connections and how these teachers used these to define their identity as teachers and I then discuss these long term international experiences similarly.

This quotation from Leana illustrates the significance attached to family history very clearly as does the subsequent quotation from Martina's interview:

My maternal grandmother was the very first woman in the Macedonia to obtain a PhD in Macedonian literature. And now that I think about it, everything that my childhood was about was getting me ready to enter the teaching profession without actually being told that I would possibly enter the teaching profession (interview with Leana).

My mother was a teacher, my grandmother was a teacher, my grandfather was a teacher and I grew up with books on the table, like that was my childhood, reading books every day. She was taking me to the school where she was working, that was the same school where I work now (interview with Martina).

As this shows these teachers linked their membership of teaching communities to personal history. These two interviewees also mentioned the significant role that their parents or grandparents had played in community building within the local community. These stories were generated unprompted and were stories the teachers were keen to tell, illustrating the significance that these had for them. In Martina's case this also reflected a distinction that she

drew between her family and others. The pride she took in being able to identify herself with a more academic community via holding the professional position of teacher, reflects similar perceptions that were expressed by participants from England such as Cathy. However, they were accentuated as these Macedonian participants also linked them to their heritage and childhood experiences of seeing first-hand the role teachers could play as community leaders.

An interesting different illustration of linking belonging to a professional community to personal history came from Leana, Jana and Ivana. This was in terms of referring to international experiences that pre-dated their professional teaching career. In Leana's case her Macedonian heritage, linked to experiences of learning in the USA were fused with a confident perception of her role in an international community of teachers. Together these created a distinct identity that gave her professional confidence. Jana similarly identified how her international childhood experiences, which had included following her mother to live in the USA for several years had given her a global perspective. Her experience studying in England had built upon this further.

Ivana too, although her international experiences had been fewer, defined her interest in engaging with teachers internationally on the basis of her personal history. This included a long term affiliation with the scouts movement, which then led to engaging her school in international initiatives and then to involvement with Step by Step. She was keen to stress how her involvement in this international organisation had incrementally built a perception of herself as an unusually globally aware teacher and readied her for the role of mentor within an international initiative. These four teachers also defined themselves in this way in oppositional terms to those teachers who had not had these experiences. This was not necessarily critical as it was understood that such experiences could be fortunate as much as sought. However, it did present a potential alternative boundary to defining community membership for those communities that are more porous geographically.

In conclusion to this section it emerged from these interviews that four out of five of these teachers identified themselves as distinct from other fellow professionals by referencing their professional past and upbringing. This to them was clearly affirming. However, as is discussed later, it could also be problematic as it suggests boundaries in defining themselves in opposition to others. This is explored further later in this chapter.

Sought communities

In the first section I discussed how definitions of the communities that these teachers attached significance to, as with the teachers from England, did not emphasise the immediate workplace community to any significant degree. I followed this with a discussion regarding how they rooted their identity as internationally engaged teachers in terms of their personal and professional history. In this section I build from these and I discuss the extent this means that these teachers demonstrated agency in the ways that they sought and built the communities that they perceive themselves as belonging to.

These teachers from Macedonia, as with the teachers from England showed considerable agency in terms of seeking, and in Martina's case even creating, communities that they found conducive to belong to and that they took pride in perceiving themselves as belonging to. Martina's story although untypical, in that it demonstrated a degree of agency that was not reflected in the professional experiences of the other teachers to such an extent, is worth discussing in some depth as although distinct it revealed in a more accentuated form themes that emerged throughout all the interviews. I therefore start this section with quite an extended discussion regarding her experiences of seeking and building communities.

Martina was the most isolated teacher among any of the participants in geographic terms and in terms of the structure of her workplace, which has a small staff. She had addressed these issues of isolation by creating a significant online presence and simultaneously being an online audience for others. She was in fact the only teacher who was prepared to perceive herself as being as fully embedded in online communities; of which the only form of contact with others was facilitated by social media, as she was in those that involved personal contact. As was discussed earlier this may relate to the circumstances in which she is working, which may mean that such a perception is more of a necessity. However, even with this caveat it is still clear that she showed considerable agency in finding and even creating these communities and in choosing to perceive herself in this way.

These aspects of agency and action although accentuated in Martina's case were reflected in way that all the teachers described the process whereby they moved to perceiving themselves as part of an international community of teachers. It also emerged from these interviews that, with the sole exception of Sonya, the teachers from Macedonia were more prepared to see online communities as closer to being equal and equivalent to the face to face communities

they belong to than the teachers from England had been. For example: Leana described people she had contacted and worked with exclusively online as ‘close friends’ and ‘important colleagues’. However, Martina was more actively engaged in the development of online communities than any other.

For all the teachers the role of mentor that they held within the International Teacher Leadership initiative in the iteration led by Step by Step was significant in building their confidence as professionals. All described the process towards involvement in this initiative in terms of their own agency. This was either that they had approached the initiative leaders or if they had not that they had been approached, after demonstrating significant interest and skill in working on other initiatives that extended beyond their own school. In terms of the ways in which alternative communities could be built all the interviewees, except one, acknowledged the need for some form of formalised structure, which could provide the framework for enabling a supportive professional community to be built.

The exception was Martina who saw herself as an active agent in this process and who had created alternative communities via online methods entirely of her own devising, which she now perceived of as developed and embedded communities. She also described how she had taught herself to be an expert in developing online communities and how she had achieved this by developing several that centred around her as a leader of innovation. Even in this case however, she valued being part of a formally created community, run by others than herself, via her role as a mentor for Step by Step. This was because it gave her personal contact with other teachers and an audience for her work that she could more clearly visualise. She was also ‘proud’ to have been invited into these roles.

Within these communities that these teachers sought, all the teachers felt that there were commonalities which led to mutual recognition of each other as professionals. This quotation from Suzana describes this well, all the participants from Macedonia expressed similar feelings:

There are a lot more commonalities than there are tensions. In fact, once you disclose to each other that you are teachers, it is as if you know you are sisters from another mother. The frustrations are the same, what is interesting is that we usually end up discussing the same things (interview with Suzana).

Jana also developed on this and described how the teachers who had mentorship roles within Step by Step were distinct and had built their professional confidence via prior involvement in

initiatives that demanded they demonstrate expertise outside their school environment. Leadership within a community is distinct from membership of a community. However, those who had attained leadership roles, she perceived as having had to cross hurdles that were both challenging and affirming:

I think because we said everyone can join, there is the initial curiosity that makes people join different things, but I think there is an implied selection criteria of who stays in the community. And if you have forty people in the beginning and at the end you have ten, for me that is actually quite successful because they have battled through some intensive stuff and because they have shown that they are quite committed professionals. So in that sense there is this kind of selection or self-selection (interview with Jana).

As this discussion above shows these teachers from Macedonia, just as with the participants from England demonstrated considerable agency in the ways that they sought, built and defined the communities that they belonged too. However, there was a significant difference in that although the teachers from Macedonia identified an international aspect to these initiatives that they had been involved with, this was more in terms of an international root rather than in terms of an expectation of working with teachers from other countries directly. The two exceptions were Martina and Leana. In both these cases the roots of this greater engagement were distinct. In Martina's case it was her own commitment to building online links and in Leana's it was rooted in her professional and personal history of living in Anglophone countries.

Building identity within communities

Having discussed in the sections above the ways in which these teachers perceive the communities they belong to, in this section I discuss ways in which these teachers built professional identities and adopted professional roles in alternative communities to their workplace community. All the Macedonian participants spoke about how they perceived themselves as belonging to a community of fellow professionals that crossed national boundaries. They also spoke about the fact that this was a community that they both expected to exist and one that once revealed to them they felt comfortable as defining themselves as belonging to. There was also a considerable degree of self-confidence that within this community they would find an audience for their own expertise and that they would also meet and work with like-minded individuals.

Just as with the teachers from England one significant aspect in terms of shaping their

professional identity was the importance of the acknowledgment of others and the rewarding experience of being able to demonstrate expertise in front of an audience of expert peers. However, this was expressed in a subtly different way, when compared to the teachers from England. With these teachers from Macedonia it became clear that, with the sole exception of Martina, they saw this potential audience as largely being other Macedonian teacher who were internationally engaged rather than teachers from other countries. In relation to this, the practice that they saw as being imported from the West and that was of most value to them was not teaching practice but was instead the practice of sharing their teaching stories and of perceiving this as a valid process. They associated this with the International Teacher Leadership approach as directed through the Step by Step Initiative. These differences may well reflect their definition of involvement within an international initiative, which was welcoming in terms of acknowledging membership of a community with an international dimension but without an expectation of working as directly and as frequently with teachers from the other country.

This perception discussed in the paragraph above was balanced however, by an even more proactive seeking of communities than the teachers from England had demonstrated. This seeking of communities often went beyond the initiatives that they were formally involved in. It specifically involved building online networks in a way that was only mirrored by Sonya from amongst the teachers from England. All the teachers valued being part of the international initiatives that they had been involved in and had the self-confidence to take on leadership roles. However, as is discussed below this was not primarily because of the opportunity that this gave them to share strategies. Indeed, as has been mentioned in the section above, they all had a very high degree of self-confidence in their abilities as teachers and lesson designers. This was more because of the freedom it gave them to publicly demonstrate and share expertise than a high value being placed on Western approaches to teaching. For example, Suzana, Martina and Leana all stressed their own creativity in terms of the lessons that they designed and all felt that the introduction of the curriculum designed by Cambridge International Examinations had at best merely facilitated this further and at worst had inhibited their creativity.

Having discussed the themes that emerged in terms of the building of identity within the communities that they belong to, in the next few lines I discuss Jana's views on this, as expressed through her interview. Jana, due to her role, had an interesting overview of the International Teacher Leadership initiative within Macedonia and therefore provided an

illuminating comparison with the interviews with the teachers from England. This is because she had worked closely with HertsCam and the International Teacher Leadership initiative during a year spent studying at Cambridge and has been a teacher in Macedonia but has also held a significant role in developing International Teacher Leadership iterations via Step by Step. This quotation is illustrative and is discussed further below:

With the first group, with the pilot group we had a lot of that kind of change, we had testimonials from a lot of people that say I have learnt to love my profession again, or I have realised why I became a teacher in the first place, which are very powerful and show a change in self-perception, or identity. And I think, that it had a lot to do with the fact that teachers were free to choose whatever they wanted to work on, they are not simply told: you are going to work on literacy and numeracy. That was a factor, maybe it wasn't the most important thing, but it was an important thing. So one of the things we also do in the component is that we set up networking meetings in several schools. They really enjoyed these, because they get out of the town or the villages. We especially have been most successful with, smaller rural schools and such (interview with Jana).

I have presented this long quotation here to conclude this section because it illustrates several themes that were significant in their own right and also links to the themes that emerged from the interviews with the teachers from England. These include the affirmation gained from membership of more dispersed communities, the way this affirmation is linked to holding leadership roles and the ability to take control and responsibility for the developments that the teacher leads. The significance of teachers being prepared to play the role of both expert and audience to each other's expertise also emerges from this quotation. This also emerged from the interviews with all the participants. The implications for this in terms of the teaching knowledge that is shared in these roles is discussed in the next chapter.

Activism and innovation

In the section above I discussed the ways that these teachers defined their role and identity within international initiatives. In summary this was with a high degree of self-efficacy and confidence in their ability and right to exercise agency. In this section I nuance this further by discussing the extent to which these teachers perceived themselves to be innovative or even activist in their approaches to teaching. Martina described herself and her approach to lesson design as follows,

I research materials, I research what I can reuse, what I can buy, it has to not be

expensive and then I use it. We must research everything, in order to do things our way (interview with Martina).

Following from this she then went on to say that she felt that other teachers did not demonstrate the same levels of innovation because they lacked ‘courage’. As this illustrates she linked her own confidence and abilities at researching and designing lessons, to gaining for herself the freedom to design lessons in innovative ways. Contained within this is also an emphasis on the fact that at the concluding stage of research the lesson design will still be hers.

All the other teachers also perceived themselves as being distinct from other colleagues in that they were more rebellious or innovative with their teaching. These two concepts were perceived as synonymous, which therefore potentially links them in turn to the concept of teaching as an activist profession as was discussed in Chapter Two. This also links further to two themes discussed throughout this dissertation. The first of these is the building of relationships locally with those within a limited geographical region but outside their own school. The second is the significance of having an audience of fellow professionals for their work as teachers: designing and implementing innovative lessons.

Suzana and Leana saw themselves as members of innovative and cooperative teaching communities within their own workplace, whilst Ivana felt that there was a degree of conservatism within her school in that the teachers who worked there she saw as being reluctant to embrace change. She perceived herself as an innovative teacher but expanded upon this in interesting ways. She felt there could be such a thing as a limited form of innovation, which reflects a desire to seem innovative without underpinning this with pedagogical understanding. She saw this being revealed in such things as the production of appealing lesson materials that were then only used to teach in unimaginative ways. She specifically connected this to teachers responding to the new Cambridge International Examinations designed curriculum.

I think that it is very low level. They are just implementing and they think that everything is great but I think that the main point, it is not achieved. They think that if you have coloured numbers they have done something bigger than they have but they are not giving it to the students to express themselves and think and make different strategies (interview with Ivana).

Therefore, as this illustrates two perceptions of innovation emerged from these interviews. The first is innovation in opposition to centralised structures demanding change. The second is innovation within a school culture which resists change and thus is inhibiting. Leana and Martina also referred to this in their interviews. These twin pressures on these teachers perhaps

are a reason for these teachers placing significance on being part of communities that allow them to exercise both leadership and creativity. Jana, was again able to provide an interesting overview to this wider context.

At the beginning, when I say at the beginning I mean when teacher leadership was first piloted in 2009 or something. Teachers had quite a little bit of issue with the word leadership because leadership in these countries is considered a political term, is considered something to do with politics. It is more about power that teachers don't really feel they have. I think that would be more of a next step to convince people that they have that power to change things initially in their own profession, kind of to impose themselves or to be heard, or to shape the curriculum, or to have real autonomy, or whatever, and then the next step would be being an activist teacher, holding an activist teacher's identity. We are a long way from that, and specifically because people are still very much dependent on, you know, teaching is a government job, it is a state sanctioned job I mean it is very much rooted into the whole administrative system (interview with Leana).

As this illustrates the political confidence demonstrated by Sarah and Monica among the interviewees from England was not reflected in entirely the same form among the Macedonian participants. This is discussed further in the next chapter. However, in conclusion to this section: conformity and rebellion were more nuanced concepts when expressed by the teachers from Macedonia because to develop materials and teaching approaches that conformed to government directives could mean a need to push against school cultures. Even this though is a simplification because in responding to these outside pressures the most innovative teachers also wanted to take possession of changes and define them in their own way. As Jana interestingly described it, innovation is occurring and so is the implicit challenging of government strictures. However, the teacher as activist is not an accurate description of teachers in Macedonia at present.

Community boundaries

As has already been alluded to above, all of the teachers from Macedonia spoke positively about involvement in initiatives which gave them the opportunity to work with other teachers from different countries or with similarly internationally minded colleagues from Macedonia. However, all also described how they themselves and the teachers who they worked with were distinct and part of a smaller community of 'innovative' or 'outward looking' teachers. Again therefore a similar challenge was thrown up as had been through the interviews with the teachers from England, as by defining themselves as part of a wider community of innovative

teachers they simultaneously created alternative boundaries that excluded other teachers. These boundaries were primarily defined by their perception of their approach to practice and were expressed in exactly the same language as the teachers from England had used.

Within this general pattern however there were a wide range of different perceptions regarding the schools that they were each individually working in. Leana and Suzana saw their schools as cooperative and innovative environments but felt that the school and the teachers, including themselves, were unusual for Macedonia. Meanwhile, both Ivana and Martina felt that their environment was one where innovation was not welcomed. Indeed, both felt that this was so much the case that by trying to innovate in terms of lesson design it could create tension with other colleagues. Martina felt her nomination for a significant teaching award for example had led to a degree of resentment among colleagues. This quotation from Leana illustrates how she perceived the teachers in her school to be distinct from others in terms of their preparedness to engage with people and ideas in positive and innovative ways:

The sad circumstances is that nowadays a lot of phenomenal teachers who after twenty, twenty-five years, you know how salaries work, right, who have checked out, who are saying 'ok, if this is what the local ministry, what the sort of verification agency wants, we will do that', and who treat their job sadly as if they work in a bank, or as if they are a civil servant, checks in and then checks out, which is very, very sad (interview with Leana).

Martina had responded to this by creating social networks in which she was both a participant and a leader within a wider community of globalised teachers, world-wide. To her distance or even not being able to meet these teachers face to face was not of great significance. She also acknowledged, indeed took pride, in the fact that she had created these communities for herself, this illustrates in a more accentuated form how all of these teachers actively sought and created the communities that they perceived as being most significant to them, as has been discussed in the sections above. However, it also illustrates how boundaries were created by such a process. Martina also saw herself as being exceptional in this regard and did not regard this as common practice across the population of teachers as a whole. Consistently as geographical boundaries became wider, the conceptual boundaries of the community that these teachers defined themselves as belonging to became narrower, as these successive quotations from Ivana and Suzana illustrate.

With the other schools maybe it is the same thing but with my school there is a lot of teachers who, they have a lack of life experience. They just haven't travelled or are not following any current cultural events, things that are happening on a global scale or

even a more local scale. They are more like a closed group that are living there and not going much further outside that little community where they live. So maybe this is the problem, that they can't be open minded because of the way they are living (interview with Ivana).

The thing is that I set up my mind not to worry about what is going on in my whole school and that is why I am working in my classroom and everything, my energy and creativity and everything, is focused on my classroom (interview with Suzana).

As these quotations above illustrate, the participants from Macedonia consistently defined themselves and those colleagues they liked working with closely in oppositional ways to other colleagues. In doing so they built community boundaries based around the perceived outlook and values of others; approaches to teaching and lesson design, and also around their perceptions of others' commitment to the profession. Jana similarly identified this and described how some teachers might be attracted to identify as part of more disparate, alternative communities and others not although she approached this in a pragmatic way and still saw significance in communities that brought teachers together even when this did not include all teachers.

In conclusion to this section as with the teachers from England, the participants from Macedonia all agreed that they had found that involvement in the International Teacher Leadership initiative had led them to perceive themselves as part of a community of internationally minded teachers that was based locally in Macedonia. With one exception, which was Leana, they saw themselves as in a minority of teachers in the school, that they worked in, who were part of this community of shared values and beliefs. For all these teachers international mindedness was linked directly to other positives such as innovation in lesson design, a depth of interest in pastoral care and a commitment to the moral purpose of the profession. In this sense an international outlook was seen to be related to a positive perspective on teaching practice more broadly. However, as community boundaries were constructed to include increasingly dispersed members, qualities that they desired and expected from these fellow community members were also asserted more strongly.

Cultural challenges to a perception of community

In this final section to this chapter, before concluding I discuss these teachers' perceptions regarding whether working within initiatives with an international dimension involved

addressing cultural barriers so great that it became difficult for them to relate as equals or have a meaningful dialogue within a single shared community. Two issues are addressed that emerged from the interviews. The first was a perception that when sharing teaching strategies the difference in available resources meant that meaningful, direct exchange of teaching approaches was difficult. All these teachers related this specifically to the introduction of a new national curriculum and assessment system designed by Cambridge International Exams. The second is a broader perception that Western approaches to teaching are seen as having greater value generally but a questioning or at least a nuancing of this by all the interviewees. An interesting additional aspect that emerged was that these teachers did not perceive working with the countries that emerged from the break up of the former Yugoslavia as working internationally, as Ivana stated:

Sometimes our closest countries I don't recognise as international because we have a lot of similar problems and similar issues (interview with Ivana).

This illustrates how basing a defining characteristic on the nation state is problematic when the nation state itself is a changeable and problematic concept and cultural differences between countries may be quite narrow and within countries may be quite broad.

In terms of the first theme defined above, this quotation from Ivana is illustrative:

This is a very complicated issue because yes, Macedonian policy is changing and this incorporates international programmes and everything but the biggest problem is that there are no other changes to help with adapting for the Macedonian context and conditions that teachers are facing. So there are teachers who are not implementing these initiatives even though they say they have on paper. Some ideas coming from the change to the Cambridge syllabus are something that you cannot just implement in these conditions. By conditions we also mean about how many resources teachers have available to them and when I say resources I mean from very basic things that you can work with in the classroom to more complicated literature (interview with Ivana).

As has been discussed above and is illustrated by this quotation, the participants had very pragmatic concerns regarding the possibility of sharing strategies directly when engaging in international initiatives with Western countries. These concerns were based on the problem of transferring strategies between countries with different levels and kinds of resources. To these teachers this did not in and of itself necessarily negate the value of attempting to do so. Instead they felt that it may be that a community is built but that the primary goal is not the direct sharing of strategies. These issues and the potential for this are discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

Leana presented another alternative perspective to the challenges of building a community across national boundaries:

I think that most higher education nowadays, no matter where in the world that it is implemented or branded, is extensively Western. It is about one particular type of literacy, knowledge and teaching. So I think that, most higher education is already very Western-oriented and still very career oriented which is the reason why I said it is still very 19th century. Most national systems worldwide have some sort of paper exam in the first language and some sort of paper exam which traditionally has been English, some sort of paper exam in mathematics (interview with Leana).

As this illustrates she felt that it was possible to exchange knowledge about teaching as equals but on the basis that education as a process worldwide is already an inherently Westernised process. However, interestingly she did not see this as necessarily associated with those terms that have often been associated with research literature written in the West on Western teaching such as; child-centred, democratic and creative. Instead she saw Westernisation in this context as about rigorous examination especially within a few subjects that are given a distinct precedence. All the participants however felt that when working with teachers and when given the opportunity to share their expertise that potential cultural barriers dissipated. In these circumstances a conversation between equals was possible. Martina strongly asserted this in regard to the online communities that she was part of and had created. Concerns regarding over-idealisation of the West were therefore very much focused on government policy rather than the dialogue between teachers.

In conclusion to this section it was certainly a perception of these participants that there were significant obstacles in terms of sharing strategies and also that the valuing of Western approaches to teaching could make it difficult to engage as equal contributors in such discussions. However, rather than meaning identification as members of a common community was not possible, it could mean that the goals of such a community would not be focused on the sharing of strategies. This is explored in more depth in the next chapter.

Conclusion

In my conclusion to the parallel chapter to this one in which I discussed the interviews with the teachers from England I concluded by writing that teachers perceive the communities that they belong to in nuanced ways. They recognise the value of the professional community that they

work in on a day to day basis. However, they do not necessarily attach special significance to this community. Instead they also find and build communities in exploratory and pro-active ways. The reasons that they give for why they value these other more disparate communities included that they found that they affirmed a perception that they had of themselves as educational leaders and innovators. They linked these to values and perspectives on education that they perceived members of these alternative communities to share and they also related their membership of these communities to a long view into their own personal history. I also described how the most significant challenge that was presented to recognising a shared membership of communities that crossed national boundaries was the alternative boundaries that were drawn by these teachers. As the geographical and spatial boundaries were drawn wider, the conceptual boundaries that were defined in terms of values and beliefs about teaching and education tended to be drawn narrower.

The interviews with the Macedonian teachers revealed very much the same commonalities. However, there were also subtle differences. Significantly, the importance of membership of online communities of teachers was more significant for the Macedonian participants. Online communities were sought, created and maintained by these teachers with little external support. International engagement was also defined more in terms of being part of larger umbrella initiatives, whereby engagement may primarily be with internationally minded colleagues from the same country rather than with colleagues from other countries.

There was resistance to the idea that importing strategies should be a primary goal of being part of internationally inspired initiatives. This was based on pragmatic reasons connected to levels of resources. However, there was also resistance to the idea that Western methods were necessarily better and the nature of Westernised teaching was a contested concept. Finally, there was a deep interest in engaging in conversations about teaching, indeed this was the one process that was universally identified as being both Western influenced and positive. However, the purpose of these conversations and expectations regarding the forms of knowledge that may be shared varied considerably. This raises very significant questions regarding the purpose of working across national boundaries for the teachers involved and the nature and forms of knowledge they would expect to be usefully exchanged.

In the next two chapters I explore the way knowledge is shared within perceived communities of teachers that cross national boundaries. Within this discussion I also explore whether there is a political or civic aspect to these communities and if there is what the boundaries to this are

and how this is defined. The next two chapters are based on data from the interviews with these same participants from England and Macedonia.



Chapter 9

Perceptions of knowledge sharing, the teachers from England

This is the second data analysis chapter in which I discuss the interview data collected from the English teachers. The previous chapter, in which I discussed that which had emerged from the interviews with these participants, dealt with three themes these were: perceptions of community, identity within a community and challenges to community. This chapter addresses categories that are based on aspects of sharing knowledge.

In the first section I discuss the ways in which specific classroom strategies are shared within an international community of teachers. This is a significant part of this study. Indeed as has been referred to in the introduction, debates around whether teachers share classroom strategies when working across countries or in initiatives with an international dimension, and if they do so what the value of this is to teachers and schools were the starting point to researching and writing this study in the first place. In the subsequent sections I discuss sharing practice, which I identify as being distinct from sharing strategies as it refers to approaches to lesson design and teaching rather than specific teaching acts. In the final two sections I discuss sharing values, sharing affirmation and sharing moral purpose under the title: sharing purpose. Finally I respond to the possibility that teachers perceive themselves as having a civic role, and explore how this is defined. This chapter is therefore divided into four sections with the following titles:

- knowledge of strategies
- knowledge of practice
- knowledge of purpose
- knowledge and engagement

Knowledge of strategies

All the participants from England felt that learning concrete teaching strategies could be a result of working with teachers from other countries. However, none of them saw this as the primary goal of involvement in such initiatives nor did they think that this was a significant way of

defining whether working with teachers from other countries had been successful for them or not. This was a significant finding from this data. I therefore present this section successively working through the different teachers' perspectives and drawing out a series of interconnected themes. I also present a set of extended quotations. This is because this finding is contentious and needs to be nuanced at a close textual level. I start by discussing Claire's, Sonya's and Cathy's interviews. I discuss these together as they largely said very similar things regarding sharing classroom strategies. This is followed by a discussion of the interviews with Monica and Sarah. This is due to the common themes that emerged in the first of these groupings and the distinct but nuanced differences that emerged with the latter.

Claire's interview contained within it much that reflected commonalities found across all the interviews with the teachers from England. She clearly described herself as being open to learning new strategies. However, she saw this very much as a reflective process and did not prioritise it. I have included this quotation from her in full as it illustrates interlinked perceptions and expectations very clearly and serves as an illustrative introduction to this entire section:

I kind of just wanted to find out more about it. Colleagues have been abroad before and found it really interesting to hear about teaching in other countries but particularly the obstacles to teaching and how we take it for granted over here. I saw this as a form of professional development, a chance for involvement in something. I expected it to have some kind of influence on my teaching but that isn't the same as learning teaching strategies, it was something less direct that I expected to gain. The vast majority of your time is spent in your classroom by yourself and you are the identity in your classroom. The activities, the lessons have your stamp on them. My lessons have the stamp of other individuals who inspire me. Although I think you could come into my lesson and see a Ms xxxxx lesson, there are other ideas that have fed into that particular lesson and yes that is what I expected or at least hoped for (interview with Claire).

As this clearly shows the ways in which she was defining her expectations did not fit with a narrow critical model perhaps akin to neo-colonialist approaches, whereby she expected that her expertise as a teacher in England would be useful to others and would be easily transferred. Instead she clearly describes herself as being open and willing to learn from others and looked forward to being an audience for their work. However, even so, she did not prioritise the learning of teaching strategies. In relation to this, contained within this quotation above there are also indications of a perception of teaching as an individualistic and idiographic profession and also high levels of self-efficacy are implied by reference to her own lessons. Finally, there is also reference here to the idea of teachers shared knowledge being similar to knowledge in

the arts, reflecting this debate as was discussed in Chapter Three, whereby according to this analogy it may be expected that approaches are shared but the mechanics of teaching may not be. Sonya said very much the same things, with the only significance difference being that she emphasised even more than Claire that even in a collegial and supportive setting, as she perceives her school to be, that the lesson design aspect of teaching remains a highly individual and idiosyncratic process.

Similarly, Cathy even though she was the most subject focussed of the participants in her interview saw engaging with people from other countries in short term initiatives as primarily a reflective rather than a learning process. She was unique in that she described how she had learned concrete strategies especially in terms of teaching dance when she had moved from Canada to England. However, despite this Cathy even went so far as to state that ‘whether she took concrete strategies with her was irrelevant’. However, she then followed this by saying that seeing what other teachers in other countries do ‘intrigued’ her and that this was the aspect of being involved in such a initiative that she was ‘most looking forward to.’ Sonya, meanwhile said very much the same thing. She is also quoted at length below:

One thing: there is a problem that British education outside Britain is seen as a model of excellence. There is the expectation that we will have the answers, and that this will prevent a two way conversation. However, first time I was involved I didn't feel this way. From personal experience it was the first time I was going, so I felt out of my comfort zone. Others had been there numerous times and knew many colleagues. Within the groups I was working with, some of them (especially newer colleagues) were very much looking to me for answers. How do we do things better? How do we run leadership initiatives in the UK? Then on the other hand there was also a very strong set of teacher leaders over there who almost didn't want your help or input because you didn't know the context of their country. I did find a bit of a mixture (interview with Sonya).

I have again quoted this in full as there is much contained within this. The expectations of there being practice to import from the England but also resistance to this and conflict within Sonya's perception of what her role might be within such a process. Other aspects that are brought out through this quotation are the significance of personal relationships and the discomfoting initial experience of attempting to define one's own role in such a community.

Monica, as with the three other participants discussed above also did not see the learning of concrete strategies as a meaningful or practical goal, for international engagement with fellow teachers, although she did accept that it could occur, she did not see it as necessary if defining working with teachers from other countries as successful. However, her perspective although

similar to the one described above, in this regard, also contained further subtle distinctions.

She described how she had worked as a professional within education systems that are not perceived to be as successful as the system in England and indeed where this perception is reflected in such things as the fact that these systems are less well-funded, less well-resourced and not all teachers are university graduates. In doing so she was specifically referring to the earlier part of her career, teaching in Romania. However, she also linked this to her experiences working with teachers from the Balkan countries as part of the International Teacher Leadership initiative. In both these cases she saw this as having a direct impact on the likelihood of learning strategies for her classroom. Therefore, when discussing learning teaching strategies Monica stated quite bluntly that the few ‘concrete examples I can give are from British teachers’ and stressed that this was even when she had been engaged in an international initiative at the time.

These comments above by Monica, need to be further nuanced though. Significantly, although clearly stating that she had only learnt teaching strategies from teachers from England. She then went on to state that she did not see that the education systems across Eastern Europe and in England were as substantially different as the superficial differences of funding and teacher status may suggest. This quotation illustrates her view very clearly and builds upon the discussion contained in the paragraph above.

I think I have learnt a lot from the West, I have not learnt from the East not because they aren't doing interesting things but because they aren't displaying this to a public audience. In Romania I see a lot of modern Western methods but I hear in other schools about rote-learning. However I have also seen teachers asking children to copy from a book in this country the UK too (interview with Monica).

As this quotation illustrates, to her the most significant differences between the culture of teaching in other countries as opposed to England is not the teaching strategies but is the status of teachers which enables or inhibits the possibility of these strategies being disseminated more widely. This is significant because it may suggest that access to a knowledgeable audience outside one's own workplace is vital in creating self-efficacy among teachers. This would reinforce the possibility that sharing strategies cannot and should not be the primary goal of teachers working together across international borders but that despite this the sharing of expertise and examples of such expertise is still important.

In conclusion to this section therefore it emerged that none of the teachers perceived learning

teaching strategies as a particularly significant aspect of professional engagement with teachers from other countries, this was despite the importance that they put on hearing stories about teaching. Therefore, from this apparent dissonance, it emerged that other forms of professional knowledge would have more primacy than would initially have been expected. In the following sections I explore this further, in the next I discuss what types of knowledge about teaching other than specific teaching strategies may be shared in such contexts.

Knowledge of practice

In this section I discuss other forms of knowledge that the teachers felt they shared via the process of working with teachers from other countries. I then link this back to the way that they perceive these communities and also to the way this shaped their perception of their identity or role within such communities. In this section the discussion starts with the dissonance presented at the conclusion of the last section by looking at processes of shared reflection and story-telling, but without the intention of sharing the detailed mechanics of teaching. I define this as sharing practice. It is distinct from sharing strategies as it is about the process of sharing approaches to designing lessons or views on teaching rather than specific planned acts of teaching within a lesson. This section then links to a further section on sharing affirmation, building shared efficacy and co-constructing moral purpose. This quotation from Claire, although short, illustrates several concepts that emerged throughout the interviews.

In a teaching network experience you are always going to pick up ideas even if it is just how people have managed to inspire a certain group of pupils or how they manage to merge communities or even behind the scenes how teachers work together to try and make a change or embed something. So I kind of expected I would pick up one of those things (interview with Claire).

Contained within this quotation there is open-ness to the ideas of other teachers. However, the expectation of which kinds of knowledge may be exchanged is more sophisticated than merely exchanging knowledge about the mechanics of teaching. It is about community building, finding ways of inspiring others, and means of building collegiality.

Sarah felt that all teachers can be defined by a set of shared values including a reflective approach to teaching and learning; a desire to improve the teaching of children, and commitment to the profession. However, she also felt that the pressures of time on teachers as well as other pressures meant that sometimes these ideals were challenged or lost. Therefore,

for her the existence of professional friendships outside the school, which involve the sharing of teaching knowledge and the telling of stories about teaching, built resilience within a professional context. In her interview she used the word ‘resilience’ on two occasions when discussing what she gained from talking about teaching. Indeed Sarah believed that shared reflection through sharing stories about teaching was so integral to the identity of being a teacher that it was habitual. However, she also felt that acting upon reflection could and in some cases needed to be a potentially isolated process stating that:

Solutions are found more quickly if you can undertake reflection with other colleagues but the final design of a lesson needs to be something personal (interview with Sarah).

She built upon this with a direct reference to an arts and craft based view of teaching, comparing teaching to both dance and pottery whereby strategies are learnt through constant repetition and gradual development but are then inevitably developed and modified in increasingly diverse ways by individual teachers.

Cathy also identified the significance of sharing stories about teaching. She described this after first having stated how when engaged in working with teachers from other countries, she found that she moved rapidly in conversations with these other teachers between two contrasting positions. The first was a perception that teaching is so different in terms of its practicalities and context that there is often almost nothing that can be learned but then at other moments within the same conversation she could find interest in the degree of commonality. In both cases though she found that she was frequently engaged in:

very interesting and inspiring conversations about teaching, about their schools, about building community links, so many things (interview with Cathy).

This was important to her, indeed she used the words refreshing and liberating to describe this process of sharing teaching stories.

Monica similarly saw value in the process of sharing stories and sharing reflections on approaches to teaching that went beyond the value of sharing teaching strategies, which as has been discussed above she was quite critical of. Monica just as with Sarah described how ‘reflection can kind of build resilience’. She also implicitly challenged the possibility of exporting practice from the West, as she said:

For success to be success it must be sustainable. They [the non UK nation] must grow their own expertise. Then they must make us look critically at our own practice

(interview with Monica).

However, interestingly she did not believe that the teachers she worked with outside the United Kingdom had developed the confidence or self-efficacy needed to play this role of critic to Western approaches yet. Sonya also put across the same perspective but in simpler terms, describing how at the moment the richest conversations are informal:

It is more behind the scenes stuff – working with others, how to move forward when there are obstacles, collaborations between schools, sharing our experiences, these are the best conversations (interview with Sonya).

One specific aspect of the sharing of both strategies and practice that these teachers engaged in was in defining the role for themselves of what could conventionally be defined as research and also in resisting or exploring alternative definitions of this term. Claire, and Monica rejected this term referring back instead to the idea of critical reflection and development. Meanwhile Sarah defined teacher research in terms of the methodical, structured and public aspects of it. This possibly reflects her greater experience of conducting formally produced academic research. Sonya's response had a lot of interest contained within it. This quotation below is from the interview with Sonya:

Teachers do research: facebook, chatting to colleagues, etc. However it isn't named research because it is so innate. We are constantly researching, refining. We do an incredible amount of research by tapping into each other's ideas, a pool of expertise (interview with Sonya).

As this illustrates Sonya as with the other teachers perceived research as closely related to reflection. However, instead of choosing the term reflection she chose to frame a definition of research that was distinct from conventional academic practice. As this quotation clearly states the most significant networking processes and learning conversations according to her occur in informal time with other teachers and the most significant researching processes are similarly achieved through networking with other teachers. In relation to this latter point Cathy also perceived the process of engagement with teachers from other countries as integral to her own self-development, professional development and the process of reflection. She described herself as constantly seeking to expand her practice and believes that experiencing variety in terms of teaching is vital to this and as with Sonya, she saw teaching as being about passing on an enthusiasm with passion. To Cathy a professional community of teachers:

Supports teachers, takes advice, supports each other and recognises that we never stop learning and it extends beyond the boundaries of the school (interview with Cathy).

In conclusion to this section, so far I have discussed these participants views on the significance or otherwise of sharing strategies and for sharing classroom practice. These were important sections because debates among politicians as expressed in the popular media have tended to focus on the primacy of sharing strategies, when teachers engage with teachers from other countries. This had been a spur to conducting this study in the first place. In summary however, the teachers were open to this possibility but did not prioritise it or see it as fundamental to their definition of success when working with others across national boundaries. They did though find the sharing of approaches to teaching and lesson design to be very significant.

Knowledge of purpose

Another aspect of shared knowledge that emerged from the interviews with the teachers was the sharing of knowledge regarding the value and significance of each other as professionals and through this the co-construction of moral purpose. This is discussed in the next few paragraphs below. I then conclude this section by suggesting that rather than a community of practice, the professional community of teachers may be better defined as a community of shared affirmation or empowerment and that its value lies in the know-why knowledge that is shared by teachers rather than in more mechanistic know-how.

Cathy in her interview strongly identified with the teaching community as a professional community that she is part of. She took a significant amount of pride in this. One form of knowledge that she therefore perceived as being shared when working with other teachers, in her eyes, was knowledge of themselves as professionals. This is a form of knowledge that builds coherently and iteratively towards collective efficacy. To Cathy there is a certain amount of education and a perception of herself as an academic that comes with defining herself as a teacher. She therefore finds being able to define herself this way ‘very attractive’. By identifying herself with this profession she defines herself as being distinct from other members of the community of dancers, the other significant community that she identified herself as belonging too.

Membership of this apparently more academic community has very positive connotations for her. This is especially important for her as she has her whole career felt that she is ‘fighting against the stereotype that dancers are dumb’. Therefore, aligning herself this way gives her confidence and means that to her ‘she is doing her little bit to break down the negative

stereotype of dancers'. Her consistent interlinking between the identity given to her by her subject and the identity given to her by her professional role was unique among the participants. One thing she welcomed from the opportunity to engage in an international initiative was the opportunity to demonstrate her expertise to a knowledgeable audience outside her school and to have this expertise recognised.

Sarah had a related but subtly different perspective regarding how her role in such initiatives built her confidence as a professional and enabled her to define herself as a member of multiple communities, in her case a community of teachers and a community of societal leaders, which interlink. As with the other participants she felt that the professionals who she had worked with, including those working in leadership roles or academic roles outside teaching, she had met as equals. This process of having an audience of professional equals who she engaged with had been deeply rewarding. However, more openly than the others did, she stated that the teachers from England had more specific strategies to give to educational professionals from other countries than vice versa. However, these strategies were not teaching strategies but could be better described as management strategies or enabling strategies and related to the model of teacher leadership promulgated by the International Teacher Leadership initiative. Significantly though, Sarah also felt that the HertsCam and International Teacher Leadership initiatives were unusual for England too and therefore that this was not reflective of the nature of the English education system as a whole. Therefore, she did not see herself or present herself as being representative of the English educational system in a broader sense but rather of the HertsCam approach as a distinct phenomena. This quotation illustrates these contrasting perspective:

I think that I and other teachers from England do have a model to put forward, something very distinct in the way that we have used teacher leadership to improve schools but this is the HertsCam model, the ITL model. It isn't an English thing it is a very specific thing (interview with Sarah).

She also saw the dialogue that international engagement could bring about between countries as ideally being critical and discursive. She felt that the end goal of such processes should be for the professionals from all the countries involved to be empowered to critique the model that they were being presented with but she did not believe that the initiative that she had been involved in, in its iteration in other countries had reached that stage yet.

To this extent she defined herself in her role within the International Teacher Leadership initiative as both a teacher and an enabler of teachers. The deepest areas of professional gain

for her therefore was in terms of learning about how and why teachers felt dis-empowered within the systems that they were working within and to learn ways to empower them. Because of this perspective, to her, learning about educational context was more significant than learning classroom strategies. Indeed she felt that one of the strengths of the HertsCam teacher leadership model was that as teachers they were empowered to work as equals with professionals in education who in the context of their countries would perhaps normally be perceived to be of a higher status.

To Claire and Monica as well, the recognition that they gained from fellow teachers was also important. Also and beyond this they recognised that the recognition they could give to others was also likely to be significant to them. Claire recognised that teachers were often placed under similar pressures regardless of the nation that they may work in and that building collective-efficacy by being an audience for each other's expertise could be a positive way of managing these stresses. These successive quotations from Monica and Claire are illustrative of the way in which sharing a sense of purpose and of collective efficacy was significant to the interviewees:

I have built relationships within the International Teacher Leadership, you know I really felt for xxxxx and what she was doing in Macedonia and how important this was. There are so many involved and dear to me. The initiative gels people together but the individual relationship is more significant still. We synchronised about teacher leadership around having the same values, realising how important what we are doing was, but I definitely feel like I belong to a community of teachers that are seeking for an impact and a change in education (interview with Claire).

Absolutely, that is why I am passionate about teacher led development work. You have to go to a certain number of sessions etc. but it makes you sit down and reflect on who you are as a teacher and your profession and values and why you went into teaching in the first place. It is another thing at the end of the day and another place on a dark windy night but when they get out they are so inspired and it generates so much valuable discussion. More time should be set aside through the year for teachers to do that (interview with Monica).

As these illustrate Monica deeply valued the friendship that she had built with a colleague from another nation and also valued the sense of professional recognition that this gave her and that she was able to reciprocate. Claire found inspiration in the possibility of discussing teaching with fellow professionals.

In conclusion to this section, all the participants found the process of sharing stories from their classrooms to be of significance. However, this was not necessarily about the process of sharing

ways of teaching, either the mechanics of strategy or the broader design approaches of practice. More importantly it was about the sense of affirmation they gained from working with fellow professionals. They also understood the importance of being prepared to fulfil this role of being an audience themselves and of interchanging between the roles of expert and of expert-audience. On this basis it may therefore be that it is more appropriate to define these communities that are built as communities of affirmation or empowerment rather than communities of practice.

Knowledge and engagement

These next few paragraphs address the extent to which these teachers perceive themselves as having a civic or in some sense political role within the teaching communities that they belong to. This therefore refers both to the role of the community and their role as individual members of such a community. This is a significant aspect that emerged because as was discussed in Chapter Six, in which writing from the International Teacher Leadership initiative was analysed, a specific element of this initiative is a perception that teachers who work together in communities that share knowledge are societal leaders engaging in a process of civic change. The ways in which these participants saw themselves as having leadership roles has already been discussed in the section above. Whether this means the same as having a civic or political role is discussed further below.

Sarah spoke at length about the value of teacher leadership and when she travelled she did so with the express goal of disseminating these values to a wider audience. Going to these countries with other colleagues involved in the International Teacher Leadership initiative was her first experience in working with teachers from other countries. Therefore, this first experience was also closely linked to a desire to promulgate the values of teacher leadership widely. She says of this that she was passionate about teacher leadership and had seen the amazing effect it had had in schools that she had worked in England.

She also saw the community of professionals that existed between these teachers from The Balkans and England as a vibrant professional community. She described it as a 'meeting of minds' who all had 'a shared professional concern regarding teacher leadership.' and that the moral purpose of teacher leadership 'bound people together'. However, she also described it as a very close knit community and spoke about how she would meet the same people repeatedly,

people who shared her passion for teacher leadership. Although she spoke about this positively it did raise doubts in her mind regarding how far this initiative, or any initiative involving teachers working with teachers from other countries, could potentially reach in terms of the teaching community of any given country as a whole. These issues she felt could be as potentially significant in England as they were in the Balkan countries that made up the international aspect of this initiative.

As described above Sarah identified that the International Teacher Leadership initiative had built a small community of professionals that had a specific set of values, in her terms 'a shared moral purpose' in each country that was involved. Therefore, to her although she recognised the disadvantages that the building of such a small specific community would bring, she saw this as a strength as well, as it enabled this community to be bonded and tightly knit. Sarah unlike others saw herself as directly involved in a process of political change when she travelled to the Balkan countries as part of the International Teacher Leadership initiative. This she associated directly with the process of democratisation that has taken place in these countries in recent years.

For Claire the experience of travelling was linked to the desire to work with fellow professionals with similar ideals. However, this was explicitly not a purely personal experience. What impressed her about those that she worked with was their desire to improve the education system of their country. This was also linked in her mind to the expansion of democracy in The Balkans and the rebuilding of civil society. Indeed it was partly the fact that this initiative was working with The Balkan countries that drew her to choose to become involved at an early stage although she sees her understanding of this region at the time as being in hindsight very naïve.

To her therefore, the bond that joined the professionals that she worked with was not primarily the shared experience of being teachers but was also the values that they held. Indeed as she noted many of the professionals that she was working with were not teachers. What she did identify however was a community of people who are passionate about their being a better way to release the potential of all teachers to lead change. This ideal regarding the role and function of teachers was for her therefore a more powerful bond than whether anyone was a teacher specifically. For her the broader professional identity of working in education, if values were shared, was strong enough to enable a community to be created.

Monica discussed a very significant practical problem that she confronted when engaging in international initiatives. This was the fact that when working on international initiatives she often found that she wasn't working with teachers directly, again this perhaps reflects that teachers in many countries outside the West have a lower professional status. As she said: 'in only one I have been in have there been teachers talking about their work.' However, importantly despite identifying these obstacles to learning strategies from other teachers, she did not see this as negating the value of running or being involved in such initiatives. In fact she saw her own identity as being quite fluid and found that moving between the roles of teacher and leader in education was personally rewarding. In the roles that she had held she saw herself as a leader and manager of an international initiative rather than specifically a teacher and it was approaches to this that she wished to share and learn from. This quotation illustrates this very clearly. It also interlinks with the discussion of strategies referred to in the previous sections:

I have also learnt managerial and leadership strategies. My brain was more focussed on how I would bring all this to Romania and to the UK, than on teaching strategies, I gain a sense of vision or a degree of reflection more than I do concrete strategies, partly this is just because I am already an innovative teacher, partly because I was mostly meeting people from non-governmental organisations (interview with Monica).

As this quotation suggests this plurality of purposes was related to a plurality of identities including specifically both teacher and manager or leader of educational change. It also illustrates the high level of self-efficacy that was found among all the participants. Monica perceived herself as having a variety of professional identities, which meant that although she did not see herself as having learnt concrete teaching strategies, this did not, to her, negate the value of the international initiatives that she had been engaged with. She felt that there were other equally valid reasons for involvement, potential definitions of success and forms of knowledge that may be exchanged via such processes.

In relation to this she stated that having worked in and with a variety of educational systems she had often come into conflict with the concept of reform. To teachers worldwide reform it seemed to her often had negative connotations of intrusion. However, she stated that she believed that reform should be more about 'mentality' and 'self-perception'. In defining it this way she acknowledged though the debt that she owed to her time as part of HertsCam. An organisation that she had seen as being fundamental in articulating a set of values that she had previously held to but had not been able to define with clarity. Therefore, as with all of the

teachers who came to working with teachers across borders via their experience in the HertsCam structure, a set of values had been exported into their perceptions of international work that would not necessarily be found among teachers working with teachers from other countries for other reasons.

In conclusion to this section, the teachers certainly identified a political or civic aspect to their engagement with colleagues from other countries. This was expressed in concrete terms, in terms of engaging with those who teach in countries that are building democracy and civil society in the Balkans. However, it also involved recognising and affirming the role of teachers as societal leaders and also building a community strong and coherent enough that it could cope with educational reforms and respond with agency towards them.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the data that emerged from interviews with teachers from England regarding their perceptions of their experiences of working with teachers from other countries. In terms of sharing practice it seems that via international networking some knowledge is exchanged in terms of know-how. These teachers were interested in learning from the practice of others and were open to interesting ideas for lessons. However, it also emerged that these teachers who took part in such initiatives were a self-defining group of innovative teachers with high self-efficacy, therefore their confidence in their own practice was high and their belief in their skills as teachers and lesson designers also noticeably strong. So although they were interested in learning about moments of teaching, specific classroom acts, for them this was not the greatest goal of involvement in such processes.

The sharing of teaching stories that they described was often spontaneous, informal and was linked to the building of personal relationships. This was of significance to these teachers. However, the forms of knowledge exchanged seemed to be far more nuanced than a relatively mechanistic sharing of classroom strategies. Two main other forms of knowledge were being shared and these were given greater significance by these teachers. The first of these was knowledge of practice, this involved understanding the values and thought processes that underlay others' lesson design or leadership strategies rather than a desire to mimic classroom strategies in mechanical detail. This was reflected in an interest in the process of lesson planning, teaching or leadership as much as in the end result itself. The second alternative form

of knowledge shared was knowledge of purpose and the sharing of affirmation. This could be defined as knowledge of our shared value as well as our shared values.

I have defined knowledge of practice as being distinct from sharing strategies as it refers to developing a reflective discursive approach to design rather than to learning specific teaching acts. Knowledge of purpose involves the co-construction of moral purpose and a mutual recognition of the significant role that teachers can play. Together these two forms of knowledge link to the final theme that I have presented in this chapter, which is the identification by these teachers of having a civic or political role. Influencing politics, and civic society on a local and national scale was clearly expressed as a goal by some of the participants. All also saw the significance of international networking, and local networking, in terms of building a perception of belonging to a global professional community as inherently political in a more nuanced sense too. This perception of the process of building a community as a political act in itself with subsequent impact for the schools and communities that they belonged to, then influenced the nature of the community that these teachers saw themselves as belonging to. This community rather than a community of practice could perhaps be better defined as a community of affirmation or of empowerment.

In short it seems that for teachers in dialogue with teachers from other countries, the learning of know-how is important. However, by sharing practice with others who they do not commonly work with teachers also develop know-why, this is perhaps more significant in terms of creating community identity and potentially in sustaining them throughout their career.



Chapter 10

Perceptions of knowledge sharing, the Macedonian teachers

This is the last of the four chapters in which I present an analysis of the interview data based on the separate sample groups. In this chapter I discuss the ways in which the teachers from Macedonia shared knowledge, within the communities that they perceived themselves to belong to, and the types of knowledge that these teachers exchanged and perceived to be valuable. It mirrors the chapter that addresses the sharing of knowledge as discussed by the teachers from England.

Therefore, in the first section I discuss the ways in which specific classroom strategies are shared within an international community of teachers and then in the subsequent sections I discuss sharing practice, which I identify as being distinct from sharing strategies as it refers to approaches to design and leadership rather than to specific teaching acts. In the final two sections I discuss sharing values, sharing affirmation and whether teachers perceive themselves as having a civic or political role that looks out beyond schools and the processes of teaching, and if so how this is defined. The nature of the international community these participants perceived themselves as belonging to also underpins this discussion. This chapter just as with the parallel chapter regarding the teachers from England is divided into four sections with the following titles:

- knowledge of strategies
- knowledge of practice
- knowledge of purpose
- knowledge and engagement

Knowledge of strategies

In several significant ways the interviews with the teachers from Macedonia revealed very similar themes as had emerged from the interviews with the teachers from England. Specifically, all of them felt that learning concrete teaching strategies could be a result of

working with teachers from other countries. However, once again none of them saw this as the primary goal of involvement in such initiatives and nor did they think that this was a significant way of defining whether working with teachers from other countries had been successful for them or not. This was therefore an important finding from this data. However, with these teachers from Macedonia this was nuanced further due to the context in which this was expressed, which in some ways made this finding more surprising still. This additional context is that all of the Macedonian interviewees linked an expectation that strategies could be learned from other countries with current policy within Macedonia. The current policy in Macedonia is quite controversial. It is to buy in a national curriculum and interlinked assessment system from Cambridge International Examinations, a private company affiliated to the University of Cambridge. The implications of this in terms of developing new teaching strategies, was explored by all the teachers in their interviews.

All of the participants saw the process of lesson design as highly personal and individual. They all stated that the lessons that they taught reflected themselves and their individuality in a way that went beyond simply the practice of teaching. These quotations from Ivana, Martina and Suzana respectively are illustrative and representative of this. They also illustrate the high degree of commonality that emerged regarding how these teachers approach designing their lessons. I have included three quotations here because of the significance of this confidence as independent lesson designers, which had implications for several other aspects of this study:

Well I would have to think a little bit but most of the time it is something that is just coming from inside of me and I am motivated by the students, by their questions, by their facial expressions, by how much they understood or how much they are interested. So I am prepared with creative teaching lessons for the day but also flexible (interview with Ivana).

What kind of teacher am I? I am a happy teacher. I like kids to be happy and I like to be happy when I am with them and when they are happy, I know I do the right thing. Because we all function better when we are happy when we are interested in what is going on. I use research, I ask them about their opinion, I often ask them if I have some idea for some class for tomorrow, some activity for tomorrow. I often ask them to be like my partners to help me to be better, this idea. My ideas are from kids and all kinds of other things and materials around me (interview with Martina).

Ideas for lessons: this mostly comes from the students. So I might start with something, with an idea about how I might be teaching that day, and then they can end in a completely different direction. Yes, I do search the internet as well but not only, I don't get many ideas by only using the internet or from others (interview with Suzana).

These quotations all illustrate, these teachers perception of lesson design as individual and as

reflective of a teacher's personality. They also all show how they see children as partners in the process of lesson design. This is interesting because as has been discussed in Chapter Four, there is a common association within Western countries that there is a higher degree of student centred-ness in the West than there is in East European countries. However, in the interviews this student-centred approach to lesson design was actually more explicitly expressed by the teachers from Macedonia than those from England.

Beyond this, these quotations also illustrate the high levels of self-confidence all the teachers from Macedonia had in themselves as designers of innovative lessons and their lack of dependency on others for ideas. Interestingly Martina, although very active in presenting her ideas to others via the internet, did not expect to learn strategies from participating in internet communities. Instead she expressed a viewpoint that her role in the wider education community was as an innovator and leader of change. Therefore, to maintain this with authenticity she felt that this required that she consistently design new and imaginative lessons.

I never use the internet for ideas, because I record my lessons and I picture them. I publish them. So I need to always be creative (interview with Martina).

She did acknowledge that she could often be inspired by ideas discovered via online communities. However, she never used these in their entirety without modifying and developing them further and in these processes she perceived herself as having as much to give in this dialogue as she had to learn. Interestingly this viewpoint was expressed even in the specific context of working directly with a colleague from another country.

We are here for these teachers, to help them to work together, to cooperate together, to work, to find creative solutions, interesting solutions and our aim is to guide them in how to use their own experience, their own ideas and other colleagues' opinions, others' experiences and resources from the internet, from other teachers around the world and everywhere and there are great results. I have cooperation with a colleague from Austria. She is in a big school. I work with my friend, we found each other on Facebook. I share, we support each other and that is how we start to cooperate and we work on an initiative which is a UNESCO initiative together and I travel every year a couple of times (interview with Martina).

This view, as described above, was also expressed by the other teachers, although without the addition of the need for originality due to the pressures of publication and building a public profile. This quotation from Ivana, similarly illustrates the variety of places these teachers took inspiration from but also the importance they placed on taking possession of the process of lesson design for themselves.

I am inspired from the internet, from colleagues, from the children, from maybe some TV show or movie or just a witness to some discussion or something like that. It is different. Every time it is different (interview with Ivana).

Interestingly the expectation that these teachers would have this level of confidence in their ability to design lessons was also expressed by Jana when describing how the Step by Step initiative was designed:

So we figured that after about twenty plus years, of professional development trainings, seminars, workshops that have been going on in Macedonia in the past twenty five years, teachers have enough kind of tricks of the trade to plan and execute, to choose and properly modify these techniques to suit their classrooms, to suit a specific group of students that sort of thing. But they still need some kind of structure, some kind of support system (interview with Jana).

As was mentioned at the start of this section: although the themes that emerged from these interviews were similar between the two groups of participants: the English and Macedonian teachers, the political circumstances in which these groups of teachers were working are subtly but significantly different. Both countries had seen political pressures emerge since 2010 in terms of an expectation of improving the teaching in the respective country via international borrowing. However, whilst in England this was diffuse and sporadic with various initiatives using China, Finland, Singapore and others as a potential model. In Macedonia this was much more focused and concrete, specifically the national curriculum and assessment processes were, at the time these interviews were conducted, being re-designed by Cambridge International Examinations, with teaching towards this having already begun with children aged up to eleven. This quotation from the interview with Leana is illustrative and this same issue was discussed in similar ways by all the interviewees.

There is lots of tension, particularly when something is not home grown, or when something is being implemented without the people who are supposed to be implementing it, understanding it fully and understanding it long term. Now the Cambridge experience, if I can call it that, is not being a positive one because it is a top down type of hierarchy, the textbooks were being translated, by people who just are translators, who are not practitioners in a particular discipline. There are only a handful of disciplines, maths being one of them, when actual bilingual mathematicians were able to practice it. But the teachers who were implementing them, are not receiving adequate support and they don't quite know where it's going to go because every year there are new changes. It is a big experiment because a lot of the things that are in there, in the initiative, in the curriculum, very simple things such as figuring out how a bean grows, you plant it and if it doesn't, you know you follow it up and so forth, are not being done because there are no resources (interview with Leana).

This quotation above illustrates several of the tensions that can emerge when trying to import

strategies directly and that these teachers perceived. These include: resentment or at least concern regarding models of top down imposition; concerns that those responsible for the change do not understand the reality of teaching in these circumstances, identification of a skill set that is unique to teachers and practical concerns regarding resources. Leana also went on to explain that teachers had not yet taken ‘ownership’ of these changes and until they did how she thought they would still seem ‘temporary’ and ‘fragile’.

In conclusion to this section therefore it emerged that none of the teachers within this group of participants perceived learning teaching strategies as a particularly significant aspect of international engagement. This was despite the importance placed upon this by those in positions of authority in education policy development. Therefore, it emerged with both groups of interviewees that other forms of professional knowledge would have more primacy than would initially have been expected. As with the parallel chapter regarding the teachers from England, in the following section I discuss what types of knowledge other than specific teaching strategies may therefore be shared.

Knowledge of practice

In this section I discuss ways in which the sharing of stories about teaching and discussing approaches to lesson design was seen as beneficial by these teachers. I discuss this in the light of the previous section in which I concluded that the sharing of teaching strategies in a highly specific form, in terms of specific teaching acts, was not seen as a priority by any of the participants.

Despite relatively little significance being placed on sharing precise teaching strategies these teachers certainly shared a perception that there were models of excellence within the English education system. However, this was perceived by all the interviewees in a nuanced way. As has already been discussed, all the Macedonian teachers who were interviewed had considerable confidence in their abilities as teachers and therefore whilst interested in the practice of English colleagues did not expect there to be significant changes to their teaching strategies, that would be brought about by a dialogue with teachers working in English schools.

This is not to say that they rejected dialogue, indeed they embraced it. However, they saw it primarily as a positive reflective and developmental process. Interestingly, the only aspect of

practice from England that was universally seen as distinct, positive and transferable was the methodology that shapes the International Teacher Leadership initiative, that is: the process of teachers taking ownership of the processes of lesson design and teaching via being both expert and expert-audience for each other. This was unexpectedly most clearly affirmed by the participants who had been most deeply involved in such initiatives, as this quotation from Ivana illustrates:

There was an initiative seven years ago, we were in that initiative, and they taught us that it is great to share your ideas and that was the aim of that workshop and they taught us how to film, to record our classes and to share and that is great, really inspiring, but it was the doing of it that inspired me, to be honest I didn't then copy a lot of lessons but I made friends, interesting people I still talk about teaching to (interview with Ivana).

Similar views were expressed by the other interviewees and with these participants therefore similar themes emerged as had with the teachers from England. Specifically they enjoyed hearing stories about teaching because of the way it inspired new approaches and also because of the way it resonated with their current teaching practices. Being a participant in discussions about teaching that reflected their own ways of thinking about lesson design also affirmed their confidence in themselves as skilled teachers, as this quotation from Ivana illustrates:

All the time I am collecting experiences from everywhere around, from the internet, from other teachers, so a lesson is mine but isn't just my creation. Sometimes maybe it is something I just put together, different pieces from inside of me and it becomes something interesting and new but talking to other teachers that is a starting point (interview with Ivana).

Although looking for inspiration from others she also saw herself as an inspirational teacher and saw the process of being leader and audience as related, interchangeable and reciprocal. In relation to this, those teachers who were more engaged in international dialogue were also seen by these participants to be those teachers who would be more prepared to cope with the challenges of working within the new Cambridge International Examinations curriculum. Therefore although they shared with their colleagues concerns about the imposition of this system they also saw themselves as among those teachers who would most assuredly move on from rejectionism and thereby be able to find a way to manage this change.

Jana's interview gave an interesting insight into the distinction between sharing teaching strategies and sharing stories that enabled reflection on professional practice in a broader sense. It was particularly illuminating because of the way it was framed by her experiences in leading

the teacher leadership initiative influenced Readers are Leaders component. She described how one thing that was engaging for these teachers was a chance to simply discuss the process of teaching.

There is something about Macedonian teachers that they never really sit down to properly talk about their teaching. So I think this provides a unique opportunity to talk (interview with Jana).

She also identified the significance of having an audience of expert peers and the professional affirmation that grows from this.

So one of the things we also do in the component is that we set up networking meetings in one school for several schools that are joined. They have a chance to show off, to celebrate their success, something that is very lacking in the teaching profession in general or in Macedonia specifically (interview with Jana).

What she did not describe was a strong expectation that strategies would be transferred by such processes. This perspective was also asserted by Suzana who was enthusiastic about listening to teachers' stories about teaching and who also defined herself as an expert practitioner with distinct skills and expertise that she could share with others.

I don't want to go somewhere and pretend I know everything, as if I appear as smart to people who have done their work as well. I would first of all like to hear good practices, but what people have to learn from me is the way I connect with children (interview with Suzana).

In conclusion to this section, similarly to the teachers from England, these teachers enjoyed hearing and sharing stories about teaching and discussing the process of teaching. They recognised that there is a very high level of expertise among teachers from Macedonia and they also had confidence in their own expertise. They were willing to be both expert and expert-audience for each other. There was an acknowledgment that the initiatives that they were part of had further international aspects. However, the way in which this was significant was expressed in subtly different ways compared to the teachers from England. For these teachers from Macedonia shared recognition of a local community of globally interested teachers that they held values and approaches to lesson design in common with was of more significance than finding an opportunity to work directly with teachers from other countries.

Knowledge of purpose

As was discussed in the parallel chapter regarding the teachers from England and the forms of knowledge that they perceived as being transferred, another aspect of shared knowledge that emerged from the interviews with these teachers was the sharing of knowledge regarding the value and significance of each other as professionals. This is discussed in the next few paragraphs below. I then conclude this section by reaffirming that, based on both sets of interviewees, rather than a community of practice an internationally framed professional community of teachers may be better defined as a community of shared affirmation.

To all the teachers' recognition of their expertise by other teachers was significant to them. They emphasised knowledge of purpose as a distinct form of knowledge that could be transferred by the process of working within international initiatives. This sense of purpose included a recognition of the unique skills set innovative teachers have, their role in building civic society and the importance of resisting becoming mechanistic as regards approaches to teaching. All the interviewees described how this was primarily achieved through the sharing of stories about teaching. However, although the style of transmission is the same, the gain of such a process is distinct, compared to when sharing strategies.

Martina's perceptions of the knowledge community that is created when teachers from different countries work together strongly reflects Cathy's among the interviewees from England. Just as with hers it provides an accentuated but still representative case as regards all the teachers. In her interview Martina strongly identified with the teaching community as a professional community that she takes considerable pride in being part of. One form of knowledge that she therefore perceived as being shared when working with other teachers, in her perception, was knowledge of themselves as professionals and of their shared collective efficacy. One thing she welcomed, from the opportunity to engage in international dialogue, was the opportunity to demonstrate her expertise to a knowledgeable audience outside her school and to have this expertise recognised. Thus for her one of the gains of working on initiatives with other teachers in this way was the process of being affirmed and of affirming others.

Because the group, the environment is different with this initiative that we are working on, that is the great thing we are offering teachers we are asking them for opinions and to make many other suggestions. And that is how I can see that the teachers are thrilled. They are thrilled because we ask their opinion, putting them in a position to cooperate with others, to find solutions (interview with Martina).

As this quotation illustrates Martina perceived the existence of a community within Macedonia, linked by an international initiative, which has strong and positive traits, and which she takes considerable pride in belonging too. It is also a community, as she went on to explain, that she found built her confidence simply via the process of membership. She also saw significance in perceiving herself as a member of such a community in terms of enabling her to build the resilience needed to manage in a period of rapid and significant changes to education policy in Macedonia.

The other teachers approached the sharing of purpose in similar ways. Suzana saw her role as a mentor within Step by Step led initiatives as partly being about giving teachers the confidence and affirmation to happily fulfil their professional role, just as much or more than it is about sharing specific teaching strategies.

Maybe different experiences and examples are going to inspire them because I think that philosophy is not inspiring teachers who are just listening to a lot of philosophy. I want to convince them that if I can do it, you can do it also (interview with Suzana).

If philosophy in this paragraph is understood to mean theoretical approaches to pedagogy then a lot is revealed in this quotation. Firstly, this includes her own confidence in terms of her role inspiring other teachers. However, more significantly it also reveals the unique role that she perceives teachers to potentially have in terms of giving a sense of purpose to others. To her the stories teachers tell are not simply informative but are purposeful and inspiring in a way that other types of discussion on pedagogy or practice cannot be. Ivana similarly attributed significance to the specific role of sharing teaching stories. Indeed even in her interview she was keen to share stories in terms of the process of lesson design and the lessons she had taught or had heard about from others. However, each time she took pride in the distinct ways that the teachers she worked with re-worked and re-designed teaching ideas.

Jana's interview again gave an interesting perspective on this from the viewpoint of working with these teachers and coordinating initiatives of this kind. As it illustrates, for her, the reason for working with teachers in this way is about generating a sense of collective moral purpose. However, as this quotation also illustrates she perceived limitations to the possibility of doing this at least over a short term period:

This could be the platform to basically start that process of raising awareness in teachers about the very unique type of work that they do, the very unique role that they have in society. I think that the main issue now is that they don't think that they have

the power or anything similar. There needs to be a little bit, like a new generation, kind of rebellious, if we can say that of teachers (interview with Jana).

In conclusion to this section, just as with the participants from England all the Macedonian participants found the process of sharing stories from their classrooms with fellow teachers, unconnected to their workplace, to be engaging and significant. However, rather than emphasising the learning of strategies this was primarily about the sense of affirmation they gained from working with fellow professionals. They also understood the importance of being prepared to fulfil this role of being an audience themselves and of inter-changing flexibly between the role of expert and expert-audience.

Knowledge and engagement

In this section I discuss the extent to which these teachers from Macedonia perceived themselves as having a role as agents of civic change and how they would define this. The perceptions of the Macedonian teachers were distinct from those of the teachers from England and also more homogenous. As has been written about in the previous chapter, some of the teachers from England did not perceive themselves as having a civic or political role, while others saw this as a strong feature of their identity as teachers and educational leaders to the extent that they perceived this role as a global one. The teachers from Macedonia all perceived themselves as having a role in terms of building civic society. However, in all cases this was primarily or solely linked to and focused on the local community. In this way it was linked to preparing their students to be citizens in terms of contributing to the community. However, it was also defined in terms of personal success. To contextualise this, it should be noted that Macedonia has high unemployment and successfully remaining in the country to be part of its development means building a personally successful economic future in potentially challenging circumstances. This quotation from Ivana is illustrative:

Yes, of course. It is very important for the teacher in my opinion to prepare the students for life. So it means how to be a good citizen, how to be a good person, and how to communicate with others and how to live in the community, how to express themselves and how to sell themselves when they are going to be in the labour market. It is also how to achieve the things that they are going to want to achieve. So that is my goal as a teacher. But to achieve this goal I have to be a good teacher. I have to know my students. All of my initiatives with the students are focused on this topic, how to make a better citizen or person for the future (interview with Ivana).

She went on to describe how this purpose was also reflected in her teaching. She specifically described teaching skills of public speaking and designing activities for the purpose of developing the students' confidence.

The other Macedonian participants also saw themselves as having a remit in building social cohesion but they saw this as being more closely linked to teaching, with both being an aspect of a common process. In Martina's case this was seen as linked to the entire process of classroom interaction, of building respectful and discursive relationships with children together and of teaching strategies that enabled the children's voice. Suzana expressed a very similar view as these two quotations below illustrate:

We work with little kids we create in some way the future citizens. So we teach interaction in group cooperation, in groups that is the first way how to be a great citizen. What I am trying to achieve is that, I try to teach children to become good human beings (interview with Suzana).

This perspective may reflect the fact that both these teachers teach at the primary age range, where any political debate or discussion is more likely to be expressed in terms of being kind and caring citizens within a community rather than as political discussion. However, it could equally reflect the initiatives that they had been part of. As has been discussed earlier in Chapter Six, the International Teacher Leadership initiative embeds civic discourse deeply within the teaching process, as is reflected by the central concept of the teacher as leader of change.

Leana was even more assertive in terms of asserting the civic and political roles that she held as a teacher and was the only teacher among the Macedonian interviewees who expressed her role in global terms, possibly reflecting her personal history living in the USA:

At the end of the day, I am a power of the oppressed type of teacher, and when I am seeing that sort of being marginalised further down the road and only one type of literacy being taught, that is disconcerting. I am concerned about standardisation. I am also really concerned about standard-based grading. Because what are you building towards, ok, you are building towards certain standards and certain skills, but where can you apply that, can you get a job with that, you know, can you enjoy that, and our local culture, to answer a part of your question, is still very um, it's a culture driven by academic success (interview with Leana).

As this illustrates she linked this perception, of having a role in enabling the oppressed, to a viewpoint on teaching, examining and the design of curriculums and she went on to say that 'teachers have a civic role for sure. But truth be told, political for me is ethical'.

Jana's interview addressed this issue at length from the perspective of someone co-ordinating an initiative that brings teachers together outside the boundaries of their own school. She described how the exact terminology used can raise challenges and discussion among teachers. She felt that Macedonian teachers do see themselves as civic leaders. However, she also described her perception that the term 'teacher leadership' had been problematic for many. She then described how if other language is used teachers may feel confident in defining themselves as having a political or civic role. Such terms she stated might include 'autonomy, citizenship or civic society'.

In conclusion to this section, all of the teachers felt that teachers play a vital role in the building of civic society. The teachers chose to use this term and that may well be because the concept of building civic society has a greater currency in Macedonia than other comparable terms. This is especially in response to Macedonia's nature as a state that has recently emerged as an independent entity, following its peripheral role in regional wars.

Conclusion

Throughout these last four chapters I have presented two potential goals that may be achieved by facilitating networking and dialogue between teachers from different countries, these are the exchanging of knowledge and the building of communities. In terms of the first of these it seems that via international networking, knowledge is exchanged in terms of know-how. Teachers are interested in learning from the practice of others and are open to interesting ideas for lessons. However, those teachers who take part in such initiatives also tend to be a self-defining group of innovative teachers with high self-efficacy, therefore their confidence in their own practice is high and their belief in their skills as teachers and lesson designers also noticeably strong. So although they are interested in practice, for them the greater goal is a developmental goal. They are interested in stories about teaching and they are happy to be an audience for others expertise and to share theirs too. However, this consistently emerged as being distinct from having the learning of concrete teaching strategies as a primary goal.

Rather than concrete strategies therefore it emerged that other forms of knowledge have equal or even greater significance for these teachers. These other alternative forms of knowledge include sharing approaches to teaching and sharing a knowledge of purpose and of their own professional value. For these Macedonian teachers the international element of the initiatives

that they were engaged with was of significant interest. However, they did not give it primacy in the way that the teachers from England had. Nor did they expect greater amounts or specific forms of knowledge to be gained by working with teachers from other countries even those that are more economically developed. However, it was important to them to have the opportunity to work with colleagues other than those that they worked with in their immediate workplace in order to find like-minded colleagues with whom to co-construct knowledge. This built their perception of being part of a community with a common moral purpose and also stimulated new teaching ideas. These interactions affirmed their confidence as highly skilled professionals able to exercise leadership within their classrooms and civic leadership on a broader scale.

In short: it seems that for these teachers know-how is gained through dialogue with teachers from other schools and countries. However, by sharing practice with others who they do not commonly work with the more significant form of knowledge that these teachers developed was know-why. This form of co-constructed knowledge was more important to them in enabling them to articulate a shared moral purpose that in turn built resilience and self-efficacy.



Chapter 11

Discussion and contribution to theory

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first of these I explore the perceptions of the professional communities that were built by the participants, their characteristics and their significance. The second explores the forms of knowledge that were shared and the teachers' perceptions of the value of this. In the final section to this chapter I conclude by presenting the theoretical contribution made by this study. There are therefore three sections in this chapter, with the following titles:

- building communities
- sharing knowledge
- contribution to theoretical understanding

Building communities

In this first section I discuss the significance to the participants of those professional communities that they perceived themselves to be members of; the importance of agency in terms of building these communities; the commonalities they found to exist when engaging with teachers from other countries and also the obstacles and boundaries that likewise they perceived to exist.

All of the teachers acknowledged in their interviews that they belong to formally created communities and in every case included within these the school that they work in. However, one significant finding that emerged from this study was that none of them saw this community as being uniquely significant in terms of their working life. Instead they consistently identified that the most significant professional communities that they belonged to were those in which they were working with fellow professionals with whom they shared professional values and moral purpose (Frost, 2014) and in all cases these were unbounded by the workplace. Of these, the types of community that were consistently described as most significant were ones that they had actively sought. Another commonality that emerged was that the participants had sought

these communities because they were seeking professional discourse that broke the boundaries of the school that they worked in. These included those that they belonged to as part of International Teacher Leadership initiatives but also in some cases included others. The potential for significance to be particularly attributed to communities other than the workplace is contained within models of communities of practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015; Hart et al., 2013). However, the importance to these teachers of seeking membership of these communities is not, yet this was a strong theme that emerged from all of the interviews.

Another significant form of community that some of the teachers from both countries saw themselves as belonging to was communities that reflected their professional past. Although these were distinct from those that they had actively sought membership of, they still showed considerable agency in their attempts to maintain a continuing relationship with these communities. The stories that the teachers told are similar to Cin and Walker's (2013) definition of personal-historic communities. However, again unlike this model, emphasis was placed by these teachers on the process of retaining contact as much as it was on membership itself. There were therefore two distinct ways in which agency emerged in terms of the communities that these teachers saw themselves as belonging to and that were important to them. The first was in choosing to retain connections with and emphasise the continuing significance of communities that they had once belonged to but had since moved away from, the second was in seeking membership of new communities outside their own workplace including communities that had an international aspect.

In these alternative communities that were not focused on the workplace, especially it seems when these communities had an international dimension, these teachers described how they felt less inhibited in terms of publicly exercising leadership and more able to discuss ideas freely, including building and identifying shared professional values (Fullam, 1997; Frost, 2013). Alongside shared professional values, the teachers also spoke about the importance of friendship and mutual respect in terms of identifying themselves as members of such a community. The teachers also saw their personal investment in these communities as a long-term process. They described a process that saw them move towards the centre of these communities, from a peripheral position to one of mastery relatively quickly in comparison to this similar process within a workplace (Hodkinson, 2009). Then once confident of this position within such a community they felt able to adopt leadership roles that went beyond that of the school, an experience that they found to be deeply affirming.

This movement reflects that described in the communities of practice model (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015), albeit over a shorter time span. However, while this communities of practice model richly describes this process of movement, the element of agency in terms of seeking out these communities is not developed. Harden and Loving (2013) describe the importance of having an audience with which to share and demonstrate expertise and how this can be a driver in building a community, however, as with other writers they describe this as a gradual process, involving a movement over time towards mastery (Wenger, 1998; Pillen, Den Brok and Beijaard; 2013). In the case of the participants it was noticeable that this process was much faster than is suggested by this model.

The process of being enabled to exercise leadership was important to the participants. This linked to the importance of having an audience for their expertise, something that all these teachers spoke about. The participants emphasised the importance of the acknowledgment of others and the rewarding experience of being able to demonstrate expertise in front of an audience of expert peers. This also enabled the building of a shared sense of moral purpose, thereby also strengthening this aspect of their professional identity. In relation to this several of the participants described how their role in international initiatives enabled them to develop self-confidence as leaders of educational and civic change (Frost, 2014). This they recognised was only possible because they were able to demonstrate leadership and receive acknowledgement for their skills in doing so within this community of fellow professionals. Performing the role of both expert audience and expert presenter is commonly presented as one that requires regular, if not frequent, contact, and therefore emphasises the importance of the workplace (Stoll & Louis, 2007). However, the participants did not feel this way. Some from both England and Macedonia saw no significant distinction between an audience of peers that they largely engaged with online and one they met directly, whilst all felt that demonstrating expertise with peers that were more distantly connected and that they only occasionally met with was still important for them.

There was an interaction between involvement in international dialogue with fellow teachers and resilience to cope with local pressures. The teachers perceived that the alternative communities that they belonged to, of which one was in all cases an iteration of the International Teacher Leadership initiative, were built via the process of co-constructing moral purpose and professional beliefs. Although expressed in varied and nuanced ways, the participants consistently articulated the different benefits that they gained from membership of

their workplace community as compared to more distantly tied communities. In most cases relationships within the immediate local community provided support and regular engagement, whilst those within a more distant international community provided ideas, inspiration and dialogue regarding the professional roles of teachers and the purpose of education. This fits with most studies into networking over a prolonged period of time (Granovetter, 1983; Hord & Sommers, 2008). However, the nature of these relationships was also highly dependent on individual aspects of the participants' personality, their colleagues and their professional context. In some cases the school that the teachers worked in was a less conducive environment than others. In these instances the importance of these alternate more affirming communities tended to be magnified.

All the participants saw themselves as distinctly innovative as compared to other teachers. This was a positive and affirming self-perception and this perception of themselves as innovators and leaders of change was also connected to their view of the broader societal role that they could potentially play (Frost, 2012). However, these self-definitions were also articulated by comparing themselves to other less innovative teachers. Thus new boundaries were built as geographical and workplace defined boundaries were loosened. Part of defining their identity within the professional communities that they had created or sought, for these teachers, also involved defining the people outside the boundaries of the communities that they perceived themselves as belonging to. This creation of boundaries is predicted by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner when a community of practice is created (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). However, the conceptual nature of the boundaries these participants created is distinct. This perception of belonging to a community primarily made up of teachers did not mean that it included all teachers. Alternative conceptual boundaries were also drawn based on these teachers' perceptions of themselves as innovative, committed and reflective professionals; definitions which gained validity by the perceived existence of other teachers who did not fit these terms.

In connection to this idea, in the four previous chapters, in which the interview data was discussed, I defined some teachers, as innovative and others as activist (Frost, 2011). Those I defined as innovative spoke about their commitment to attending extra sessions and meetings if it enabled them to be involved in different initiatives that excited them, a definition that links to the concept of the extended professional (Hoyle & Wallace, 2009). Consistent with this concept: the participants spoke about how much they enjoyed reflecting on practice and sharing

knowledge with others and embracing the opportunity to be part of international initiatives. They perceived themselves as distinctly innovative in comparison to other teachers and also described a continual seeking of professional relationships that inspired such innovation. However, they consistently framed this within the boundaries of developing innovative teaching within their classroom or school. For others, who I defined as activist teachers, their main area of innovation went beyond their own school. This included playing leadership roles within the community that their schools are based in and even within civic society in the country as a whole. This in some cases reflected their roles as senior leaders but it tended to more strongly reflect their longer involvement in International Teacher Leadership initiatives.

This self-perception though was also linked to boundary building (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Several of the teachers spoke about how they find it very hard to identify with some teachers who they work with. This was related to a perception, discussed above, that a greater sense of community and commonality can come from shared ideals and values regarding the nature of education and the place and role of teachers rather than simply from the fact of working together. Some of the participants also saw themselves as part of a larger community of those working in education more broadly including: academics, writers, political figures and others.

The teachers who drew the boundaries of the community that they saw themselves as belonging to around the fact of being a teacher also defined their role in a knowledge sharing community as that of teacher. Those who defined these boundaries more broadly also saw their own role more broadly as leaders of educational change and tended to use the words ‘leader’ and ‘leadership’ in their interviews. The significance of cultural obstacles was perceived in differing ways by these teachers. Potential difficulties in perceiving a shared commonality as part of a single community were expressed regarding countries where teaching as a profession is defined very differently. This was expected (Steiner-Khamisi, 2013). However, significant differences were identified between schools in differing contexts in the same country and there was a perception that education in England is sometimes highly idealised or the differences between countries, within Europe at least, over-stressed.

In conclusion to this section: professional communities that are not defined by workplace boundaries were of significance to the teachers, from both countries, who participated in this study. The seeking, creating and maintaining of such communities was affirming in and of itself. Membership of such communities was seen as beneficial in that it enhanced these

teachers' sense of moral purpose and enabled them to perceive themselves as part of a values driven community in which they are an expert able to exercise leadership. An international aspect to such communities affirmed their significance even further, even if the alternative community being created primarily consisted of teachers from the same country, with a shared international outlook. However, boundaries were constructed in terms of the perception of who would wish to be or could be members of such a community. These boundaries were based on professional characteristics and values. Therefore, as boundaries based on proximity became more fluid, alternative conceptual boundaries became more fixed.

Knowledge sharing

In this section I discuss the forms of knowledge that were exchanged by these teachers and the value they put on these experiences. I firstly discuss their views on exchanging knowledge of teaching strategies specifically, I then explore other forms of knowledge that were exchanged and ways in which they valued this being done. Finally, I discuss how these perceptions of belonging to a network of teachers exchanging knowledge impacted upon the role these teachers saw themselves playing in terms of being leaders within civic society.

None of the interviewees from either country saw the learning of concrete strategies as an especially meaningful or practical goal for international engagement with fellow teachers. However, the emphasis on engaging with people from other countries in short term initiatives was not simply perceived to be a reflective process. In line with the broader vision of the International Teacher Leadership initiative, reflection was perceived by these teachers as not being adequate in itself as a final goal for engagement in such initiatives (Frost, 2012). This apparent tension regarding rejecting the simple and mechanistic learning of teaching strategies whilst maintaining the goal of achieving concrete change through dialogue with other teachers was present in all the interviews.

In relation to this, although none of the teachers perceived learning teaching strategies as a particularly significant aspect of professional engagement with teachers from other countries, they did find hearing stories about teaching to be a vital and stimulating aspect of engaging with teachers from other countries. Therefore, from this apparent dissonance, it emerged that other forms of professional knowledge that could also be communicated through stories about teaching had primacy. This fits closely with models of knowledge sharing that describe

knowledge as being present in the dialogue between teachers, which is articulated through writing produced within the context of the International Teacher Leadership initiative (Creaby 2013; Frost, 2014). As discussed in the section before, there was an expectation among these teachers that the kinds of knowledge exchanged would be more sophisticated than merely about the mechanics of teaching. The knowledge they sought to build through engagement in communities of teachers included: knowledge of how to build communities, knowledge of moral purpose, and knowledge of the thought processes of other teachers when designing approaches to teaching and other aspects of their practice. All of these in turn were linked to improvements in teaching within their school but in a more nuanced way than the simple importing of strategies.

The participants saw the dialogue that international engagement could bring about between teachers from different countries as ideally being critical, discursive and co-constructed. They felt that the end goal of such processes should be for the professionals from any country involved to be empowered to critique the ideas that they were being presented with. A perception of teaching as an individualistic or idiographic profession and also high levels of self-efficacy were implied in all the interviews. However, this did not negate the possibility of community membership, as long as the expectation was that the knowledge shared would not simply be mechanistic know-how. There was contained within this expectation explicit reference to the idea of teachers shared knowledge being similar to knowledge in the arts, whereby according to this analogy it may be expected that techniques, approaches and perspectives are shared in order to then enable personal innovation (Lupton, 2013; Oancea, 2014). Significantly though, despite their overwhelmingly positive views regarding the international initiatives that they had been involved in, these teachers also felt that the International Teacher Leadership initiative, in all the various iterations that they had been involved in, was not reflective of the education system that they worked in as a whole, either in England or in Macedonia.

On the few occasions where learning specific teaching strategies was mentioned, the participants from both countries felt that the teachers from England had more specific strategies to give to education professionals from other countries than vice versa. However, these strategies were not those of classroom practice but could better be described as management strategies or enabling strategies which related to the model of teacher leadership promulgated by the International Teacher Leadership initiative (Frost, 2014). This therefore reflected the

greater depth of embedding of the International Teacher Leadership initiative in England rather than a perception that education in England was superior in any more general sense. Contrary to the conceptual framework that was initially built that included the possibility that there would be an expectation that strategies may be imported from the West (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014; Oyewole, 2016) all of the Macedonian participants perceived there to be no significant difference in quality or approach to teaching between the two nations. This perception was demonstrated in the critique that these teachers presented regarding the importing of a syllabus wholesale from England, via the Cambridge International Examinations organisation. The validity of this policy was questioned but this was nuanced by the clearly expressed belief that teachers from Macedonia would have the skills and depth of understanding needed to manage and interpret this change, thereby ensuring appropriacy for their local context.

For all the teachers the experience of travelling, when this was possible, was linked to the desire to work with fellow professionals with similar ideals. This is consistent with the core aims of the International Teacher Leadership initiative (Frost, 2011) and also with the good intentions of those from the West working with other countries that Steiner-Khamsi writes about (2016). However, while all the teachers spoke about the pleasure of travel in its own right, in this professional context, this was not seen as an entirely personal experience. What impressed the teachers from England about those that they had worked with from other countries was their desire to improve the education system of their country. This was also linked in their minds to the expansion of democracy in The Balkans and the rebuilding of civic society. Indeed, it was partly the fact that this initiative was working with these countries that drew some of the teachers from England to choose to become involved at an early stage. As regards their role as leaders of civic change, the perceptions of the Macedonian teachers were distinct from the teachers from England and also more homogenous. Some of the teachers from England did not perceive themselves as having a wider civic or political role beyond their school, while others saw this as a strong feature of their identity as teachers and educational leaders to the extent that they perceived this role as a global one.

The teachers from Macedonia all perceived themselves as having a role in terms of building civic society. This was also articulated in documents produced by Macedonian writers, linked to the International Teacher Leadership initiative (Joshevska & Kirandziska, 2016). However, in all cases this was primarily or solely linked to and focused on the local community. In relation to this it was also linked to preparing their students to be citizens in terms of

contributing to the community and was also defined in terms of ensuring personal academic success. The Macedonian participants saw themselves as having a remit in terms of building social cohesion, one that was again reflected in the perceptions of Macedonian academics too (Stojanovska & Barakoska, 2014). However, they saw this as being even more closely linked to teaching than the teachers from England did, with both being an aspect of a common process. The Macedonian teachers certainly saw themselves as civic leaders. However, the term ‘teacher leadership’ was potentially problematic due to the connotations contained within the term. These connotations were that it evoked a simplistic model of charismatic, individual focused leadership.

All of the teachers felt that teachers play a vital role in the building of civic society but they were more nuanced when discussing their own role as leaders. They saw their role as part of a collective and community focused enterprise with that community being the school, local community, country and region. A phrase that was frequently used to articulate this was ‘civic change’, a phrase that is also used by Macedonian writers, writing in an academic context (Joshevska & Kirandziska, 2017). The teachers described themselves as facilitators and enablers of this. This rejection of the specific term leadership was not accompanied by the wider rejection of other language and terminology used within the International Teacher Leadership model (Frost, 2015). In fact the resonance of this language was reflected in the teachers’ interviews. The teachers from both England and Macedonia used the phrase ‘moral purpose’ and when expanding upon this a common understanding emerged that linked this closely to ideas of collective-efficacy and empowerment. This nuanced and varied response to these different terms and concepts may in part be in response to Macedonia’s recent history as a state that has emerged as an independent nation, following its peripheral role in a regional war, with this expressed via the acceptance of models that suggest that meaningful changes to civic society must be built from the ground up.

Contribution to theoretical understanding

The first contribution to theoretical understanding and debates made through this study is the distinct significance of the element of agency that was revealed when these teachers discussed the communities that they perceive as important to them. The second is the distinct forms of

knowledge that these teachers attributed most importance to gaining through dialogue with teachers from other countries. These are discussed in this order in the paragraphs below.

Importantly it emerged that the most significant professional community that these teachers saw themselves as belonging to in every instance was a community other than the immediate workplace. This was even though the extent to which each individual teacher enjoyed being part of, felt supported by or even felt comfortable in their workplace varied considerably, with some describing them very positively. Instead of attributing primacy to their workplace, all the participants described professional communities that were significant to them that had two distinct characteristics. The first of these was that they had sought membership of this community and sought to retain membership of this community. The second was that they were more distantly tied and in being so had different qualities and benefits compared to workplace communities. This potentially adds to models of communities of practice, which richly describe the communities people belong to but not the role of seeking membership in such communities (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Tseng & Kuo, 2014).

These communities that these teachers attributed significance to were not consistently international in terms of membership but they were always alternative to the workplace. They also always had 'broad and permeable boundaries' that enabled engagement with fellow professionals who they were not closely tied to via working structures (Slay & Smith, 2011). In most cases specific significance was attached to membership of the International Teacher Leadership initiative. This was to some extent expected as this initiative had defined the sample of participants who had been selected. However, it was noticeable that membership of this community was not defined by these teachers as what Stoll and Louis (2007) define as a peripheral community, positive but with perhaps a relatively marginal role in their professional lives, but rather as being as or more important than the workplace. It was also noticeable that they referred to other international initiatives and to those that they had generated themselves with a similar emphasis on their significance and the positive role these played for them and they played within them. This included for some a willingness to see colleagues who they primarily communicated with online as being as important as colleagues they met every day.

The process of seeking membership of these communities was described by the participants as being important because it affirmed their self-perception as innovative and highly engaged professionals. This was to the extent that the process of finding, joining and negotiating a position within such communities was seen as being as significant in terms of developing self-

efficacy regardless of any other concrete outcomes having been attained. This was the case as well with communities that these teachers had created. Those that had planned and built communities themselves took great pride in this and then connected this to a self-definition as innovative and engaged professionals. This finding potentially contributes an extension of the communities of practice model rather than a challenge. Wenger (1998) provides a full account of the movement from periphery to mastery within a workplace but the process of seeking and finding communities is far less developed (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). However, the interviews with these teachers suggest that this stage of seeking participation within new communities, especially perhaps once a position of mastery within the workplace community has been achieved and embedded, is significant in its own right.

The reasons that the teachers attached this significance to these alternative communities varied according to the individual teacher's experiences and goals as regards community membership. Several commonalities however emerged. The teachers typically found that the recognition gained from expert professionals in the same field, who do not belong to the same workplace, had a particular and important role in reaffirming their sense of moral purpose and self-efficacy. This was strongly asserted by all the participants and it may be expected that in other contexts too, teachers who seek membership of similar communities may find the role of being both expert presenter and expert audience to be deeply rewarding. This is accounted for in research into communities of practice, which stresses the importance of interaction with peers (Eckert & Wenger, 2005). However, these participants gave greater significance to the importance of affirmation rather than learning new strategies. These communities that teachers seek membership of outside their own workplace therefore could perhaps be better defined as communities of affirmation or empowerment rather than communities of practice and as discussed in the next chapter this may be an important type of community, for those in a position to do so, to nurture and support.

These suggestions made above, also relate to a discourse on leadership that emerged through several of the interviews. This was in a considerably more developed way with some of the participants in terms of the way that the boundaries of the arena that they expected to exercise leadership in were drawn. However, certain commonalities emerged in the ways in which these teachers saw their potential for leadership being developed. These commonalities included the importance of non-positionality in a formally defined sense (Frost, 2015), with the perception of their role as leaders instead affirmed by the perceptions that others had of them. This relates

to the interchangeability of the roles of both expert and expert-audience that emerged consistently within all the interviews.

For some teachers the leadership they saw themselves as exercising was limited to the classroom. To others and to all the teachers from Macedonia it involved an aspect of civic leadership. For a few it involved a perception of themselves as leaders of change in a broader global context. It could be that similar viewpoints may emerge with other teachers in other contexts too. If this were to be the case then it would suggest that if institutions aim to develop the leadership potential of teachers, the significance of membership of alternative and specifically international communities needs to be acknowledged. It was noticeable that the teachers who defined themselves most confidently as global leaders of change were also those who had the deepest involvement within the international communities that they had worked within. Even though from this study it is not possible to assert such a strong causal relationship, this is an important contribution with potential impact on how schools can support staff to become leaders.

Specific significance was also attached to the process of working together with teachers from other countries. To the teachers from England the international aspect was directly related to the experience of meeting teachers from other countries. To the Macedonian teachers being part of an international initiative was important but in a more nuanced form. They did not for the most part expect to work with teachers from other countries. Rather they expected to work with teachers from Macedonia, who had an international perspective, which in turn was associated with various positive traits such as: innovativeness and confidence in exercising leadership. Therefore, to these Macedonian teachers the community that they discovered when they sought these alternative internationally linked communities was international minded rather than internationally constituted (Joshevska & Kirandziska, 2017). The potential relevance of these findings is that it may be that enabling international engagement builds teachers' self-efficacy and commitment to the profession and that international engagement can also be a vehicle for building professional communities of teachers in a local context too. Over a long term these locally constituted communities of internationally engaged teachers may even be more significant than the international initiatives that created them.

An alternative way that this theme of agency emerged from the interviews with these teachers was the emphasis that several placed upon retaining contact with communities that they had belonged to in a closely tied way in their professional past. This was to the extent that they

emphasised the significance of these communities even more than that of the currently closely tied, often workplace, communities that they are part of on an everyday basis. The significance of communities that have importance as being memorable and therefore that ensure resilience when immediate circumstances challenge a teacher's self-efficacy exists within communities of practice models (Wenger, 1998; Cin & Walker, 2013). However, in these instances they are commonly portrayed as also involving a return to a peripheral role, albeit one that is subtly different to the peripheral role one holds to at an early stage in gaining membership of a community.

The teachers however, who attributed significance to these communities showed more agency in retaining their membership than these models suggest. At critical junctures: such as in times of crisis or when in need of inspiration they turned directly to members of these past communities. Therefore, it seems they still defined themselves as having a central role, albeit one that they utilised strategically. These teachers also took a great deal of pride in the ways that membership defined how they saw themselves as teachers. They stressed the influence these communities and individual colleagues within them had on concrete aspects of their professional life, such as their current classroom strategies and practice. If this emphasis on the importance of retaining membership of communities that form part of a teacher's past is frequently part of the professional identity of teachers, beyond those participants who took part in this study, then there are potential implications for the types of support that need to be given to teachers by schools. These are discussed further below.

The second theoretical contribution relates to the sharing of knowledge: it emerged from these studies that none of the teachers placed any particular significance on the sharing of specific teaching strategies. Instead they stressed the importance of hearing about strategies for designing lessons and for exercising leadership. However, the most significant emphasis was placed on the sharing of values and pedagogical perspectives as well as the co-construction of moral purpose, reflecting language used by Frost (2015). This know-why knowledge was seen to exist in the same discourse as knowledge about practice but was given far greater primacy. Indeed stories of know-how for these teachers were largely seen as a vehicle for these other deeper forms of knowledge. As regards this discourse, teachers from both countries saw themselves as being engaged in a conversation between equals. However, both groups of participants identified that this was particularly possible because they identified with the commonality of being teachers or experts in education of another kind. If this approach to

knowledge and to the respect attributed to fellow professionals were to be common in other contexts where teachers work together across borders, it questions the relevancy of goals that stress the sharing of strategies, whilst also acknowledging the possibility of teacher engagement across borders being a dialogue among equals.

One challenge posed in the popular media (Curtis, 2010) that provoked the early stages of researching towards this study and that is referred to in the introduction, was the frequently presented challenge of: why when teachers engage with other teachers in international discourse they do not seem to then import knowledge that leads to apparently better schooling. However, from this study it seems that perhaps they do but that this knowledge is simply to be found in a place other than the mechanistic processes of teaching strategy. It may be found instead in a deeper understanding of the practice of lesson design, which may then inform the design of strategies suitable for a specific classroom, existing in a specific cultural context. It may also be found in the affirmation of moral purpose. Acknowledging these as valid forms of knowledge that shape definitions of success for such initiatives, could be an important development in their design.

One aspect of the way teachers perceived these communities that links both these aspects of agency and knowledge sharing together was the way teachers positioned themselves as community members. The movement from the periphery to a central role was far more rapid for these teachers when they joined these alternative communities than is commonly described (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). In some cases such as the online communities that some of the participants created, it was even effectively instantaneous, as the community was set up by them, with them at the heart of it. These communities therefore involved rapid recognition of expertise and a preparedness to share this at an early stage in membership, rather than a gradual movement to the centre from the periphery. These teachers both expected this for themselves and facilitated this for others by being an expert audience. The implications of this are that the process of managing and structuring such a community may be distinct and not fully informed by models that are based on communities that sit within workplace structures.

These contributions to the broader understanding of the professional communities that teachers belong to, are linked in that together they form a coherent addition to accounts of: community membership, facilitated by knowledge sharing and enabling leadership. This leadership is framed within these communities and enabled by the discourse that takes place within them. This leadership is non-positional (Frost, 2014) and exists outside the workplace, although it

informs actions within it. However, it can still be defined as leadership for the following reasons. Firstly, the agency involved in seeking out such communities is an act of leadership (Harris, 2013; Roberts, 2017). Beyond this too, the co-construction of moral purpose then enables teachers to exercise leadership in a school and civic context. The implications for policy and practice of both these strong threads that emerged through this study are discussed further in the next and final chapter.



Conclusion and implications of the study

This final short chapter, which concludes this thesis has three sections. In the first I return to and directly respond to the four research questions presented at the start of this thesis. In the second I discuss the implications of the findings from this study for policy and practice. In the final section I reflect upon the methodology and discuss subsequent potential research that may develop from this dissertation. The sections are called:

- the research questions: a response
- implications for policy and practice
- reflections on the methodological approach

The research questions: a response

In this first section to this chapter, I present a short, summative response to each research question.

Research question one: in what ways do teachers perceive themselves as belonging to an international professional community of teachers?

Some teachers clearly do perceive themselves as belonging to an international community of fellow professionals, indeed all the teachers interviewed did, although in individual and subtly nuanced ways. The nature of this community as described by the participants was rich and varied and had different meanings for different people. However, there are also some clear commonalities that emerged among the participants. The international communities that these teachers defined themselves as belonging too could be defined as, communities of affirmation or empowerment, as it was shared, mutual acknowledgment of expertise and the collective construction of moral purpose, which seemed to be the primary gain for these teachers. Affirmation features within the communities of practice model (Wenger, 1998). However, it is the strong emphasis on this that emerged from the interviews, which suggests that this model needs to be developed if it is to fully account for communities of teachers working together outside workplace boundaries, including internationally.

Another appropriate term, with which to describe international communities of teachers, may be, a community of recognition. This is because one of the most rewarding aspects of being a member of such a community that was expressed by the participants, was mutual recognition of shared expertise by fellow experts. Interestingly the high degree of professional confidence that this implies was present with teachers from both England and Macedonia, even though Macedonia is a country where it could be expected that, due to contextualising factors, levels of professional confidence may be considerably lower. Finally, another significant aspect of perceiving themselves as belonging to these communities came from pride in the agency that they had demonstrated in terms of how they had built or found these communities. These teachers attached a high degree of significance to their stories of finding a way to engage with teachers from other countries. Therefore, these communities could also be described as, sought communities as that was one of their primary features.

Having outlined these commonalities between the two groups of participants there were also differences. The teachers from Macedonia perceived themselves as belonging to a community that was international in outlook and put emphasis on being part of a wider community of teachers with ideas coming into this community from other countries. However, with one notable exception, they mainly expected and valued the opportunity to work with like-minded teachers from Macedonia. The teachers from England on the other hand actively sought professional relationships with teachers from other countries. The teachers from Macedonia also demonstrated greater preparedness to create such communities of their own volition. This was particularly the case with one teacher who had used online means to create a large and varied network of like-minded colleagues. This though was a small sample of teachers each telling their own idiographic story and it is highly probable that this teacher is an exceptional case of a teacher demonstrating a degree of agency beyond that which could be expected to be seen in others.

Research question two: how is the way teachers perceive their professional identity shaped by the experience of working with teachers from other countries?

The experience of working with teachers from other countries was seen as positive by all the participants, those from England and those from Macedonia. In all cases these teachers started to see themselves as part of a community that they hadn't fully considered beforehand. They described in positive ways the experience of realising, through discussion with teachers, commonalities that crossed national boundaries. In all cases this increased perception of

belonging to this alternative more distantly connected community was personally significant. In the case of some participants from both countries they saw it as being especially significant in building resilience in a professional context in which they did not find their current school a conducive workplace to belong to.

To all the participants the role of expert presenter and expert audience were interchangeable and the possibility to be both was equally valued by them. The teachers found the experience of exchanging their expertise within a community of fellow professionals from other countries to be deeply affirming. To use the language that they used in interview; the participants consistently described themselves as innovative, forward thinking, internationally engaged and globally aware and also clearly explained that these were specifically attributable characteristics not ones that they felt would define all teachers. As has been mentioned, all had also taken pride in the story of how they had become involved in such initiatives. Therefore, the affirmation they described was also a realisation and public acknowledgment of professional characteristics they felt that they had possessed before.

The participants from Macedonia all agreed that they had found that involvement in International Teacher Leadership initiatives had led them to perceive themselves as part of a community of internationally minded teachers that was based locally in Macedonia. Therefore, engagement in an international initiative had had the effect of building a local community of like-minded teachers, which they valued highly. For these teachers, international mindedness was linked directly to other positives such as innovation in lesson design and also to a depth of interest in the pastoral care of their students. In this sense an international outlook was seen to be related to a positive perspective on teaching practice more broadly. The possibility to fulfil and to be recognised by others within a leadership role was also identified as important to the participants. For the Macedonians this was consistently linked to their role as actors in the building of civic society. For the teachers from England perceptions of this varied more. For three of them leadership was specifically related to their school context, for the other two it was defined more broadly as civic leadership.

Research question three: are there any significant obstacles or affordances to perceiving the existence of an international professional community of teachers?

Within the academic community of writers about international engagement in education there is a live and vibrant debate about the risks of neo-colonialism and the teachers from Macedonia

reflected and engaged in this when they spoke about their concerns regarding ideas being imposed on them from outside when these were not introduced by fellow teachers. However, the teachers did not perceive this as a risk or something that they had to deal with when dealing with fellow professionals doing the same job. In the case of the Macedonian teachers, they had the self-confidence to challenge this and to impose an alternative discourse when change was placed upon them by outside experts. And in the case of the teachers from England they showed respect for the expertise of colleagues from outside England including the Balkan nations such as Macedonia, acknowledging them as fellow experts.

Therefore, boundaries created by different perceptions of the levels of expertise held by teachers in either country did not strongly emerge. However, several obstacles were still identified. One of these was a perception that, although these teachers were able to discuss as equals, in the current Macedonian context there is still an excessive idealisation of what are perceived to be Western approaches towards education and that this could impinge on the nature and quality of this dialogue. This was attributed by the participants as being a far greater problem in terms of the attitudes and beliefs of people working in policy making bodies and government rather than teachers themselves. However, this was still seen as potentially problematic as this could interfere in the potential for meaningful dialogue between teachers. In connection to this the teachers from Macedonia raised concerns regarding the very rapid importing of a system of education wholesale from England. Although several positives were associated with the teaching and assessment strategies that had been imported, there were also concerns that this had not been done in a way that had fully engaged the expertise already present in Macedonia. However, this did not present an obstacle, according to the participants, as regards teachers working positively together.

There were also affordances identified by the teachers from both sample groups in terms of engaging with teachers from other countries. The teachers found working with teachers from other countries to be stimulating and affirming. They enjoyed the rich dialogue and the discovery of commonalities. Membership of these communities, for all, had built their confidence and self-efficacy. The Macedonian teachers who demonstrated the highest levels of agency sought involvement with teachers from other countries, not primarily to learn but rather to engage in a co-constructed dialogue that enabled them as leaders of change. The teachers from England with the greatest experience in engaging with other countries acknowledged the excellent teaching in these countries and also the variety of teaching practice.

Research question four: in what ways do teachers define success when working with colleagues from other countries?

Definitions of success varied. Firstly, there was an expectation from some of the participants that teaching strategies could be directly imported into their own practice by engaging in dialogue with teachers from other countries, although for none of the teachers was this described as their primary goal. Secondly, there was a strong expectation that views and perspectives on teaching would be shared and teachers looked forward to this, including the subsequent opportunity to reflect on their own practice. Third, there was an expectation that in some ways participation would enable them to play a role within a broader agenda of building civic or democratic society and that this would include the potential to become part of a community with a sense of purpose that extended beyond the classroom. Finally, there were personal definitions of success, some of which had not been predicted by the teachers beforehand such as the building of personal friendships.

In terms of the significance of learning teaching strategies from other countries this was expressed in subtle and nuanced ways by teachers from both countries interviewed as part of this study. Even with those who were most enthusiastic about transferring classroom strategies there was an expectation that these could only be directly transferred on occasion, that it should be reciprocated and that it was not the primary goal of these processes. Also, even in these cases it was acknowledged that strategies would at least need to be subtly modified to fit with the practical and cultural conditions of the country they were being transferred into. Interestingly this nuanced interpretation and downplaying of significance was shown by the participants from both countries to an equal extent. However, despite the goal of learning strategies being largely downplayed, the importance of sharing stories about teaching was emphasised very strongly by all these teachers.

Transferring practice to these teachers generally referred to the transfer of an approach or philosophy towards teaching rather than specific teaching acts. This wide ranging, flexible and pedagogical approach crosses over into reflection as a definition of success in its own right. The participants clearly all enjoyed conversations about teaching and furthermore expected to enjoy conversations of this type. It was in this context and with this emphasis that several of the participants referred directly to a crafts person or artist analogy when building a definition of teachers' professionalism in their interviews. However, reflection alone was not perceived by any as fully encompassing their reasons for involvement. This is because it lacked the

element of agency and leadership that they all also perceived as being central to successful engagement in such processes. In further relation to this, all the teachers perceived themselves as skilled lesson designers and none saw themselves as dependent on the designs of others. However, this to them did not negate the role of sharing practice and more significantly still the co-construction of a shared moral purpose.

These teachers also described how one thing they gained from engagement in working with teachers from other countries was a sense of shared purpose and an opportunity to exercise leadership within a community.

Implications for policy and practice

Implications for policy and practice can only be tentatively suggested from a study such as this. The limitations of this study, the methodological contribution and suggestions for further research are discussed in the section that follows. However, if these additions to the theoretical understanding of professional communities that are outlined here, were reaffirmed by further research then they are pertinent to refining practice when supporting and enabling teachers.

Emphasis in terms of policy ranging from school to national level in several countries, including both England and Macedonia but also others, has emphasised two dominant perspectives which are challenged by the research presented in this dissertation. These are firstly; that to ensure such positives as: retention of staff, school improvement and a positive working experience, emphasis needs to be placed on building collegiality and professional communities within the workplace. Secondly; that the primary purpose of teachers working as part of initiatives that connect them in dialogue with teachers from other countries is or should be to exchange teaching strategies directly. The corollary of this is that frequently funding for such processes from various bodies has been granted based on this goal being achieved in evidenceable ways.

It is clearly the case that the workplace community is significant for teachers. Those participants who described working in positive and conducive workplaces were pleased to do so. Therefore, I am not suggesting that striving to improve the quality of collegiality and professional community within a workplace has no value. However, those teachers who did not work in workplace contexts that they saw positively still retained self-efficacy and an

identity as, expert professionals, as long as this was affirmed by membership of alternative professional communities not bounded by the workplace. This research therefore suggests that to emphasise the quality of the workplace community above all others would be oversimplistic.

None of the participants described their workplace as being the most important professional community that they belonged to and therefore this suggests that neither should this be the only community that positional leaders and policy makers in education should focus on. It may be that in order to develop approaches that would lead to such universally acknowledged positive outcomes as; staff retention and school improvement, strategies need to be devised that enable teachers to engage in communities other than the workplace in positive and affirming ways. These could potentially include ways that enable them to exercise leadership and to co-construct purpose as well as share strategies.

Such processes do already exist but they tend to be small scale, impacting upon only a few schools or teachers within a school, and often requiring a significant commitment from teachers in terms of time or resources. There would be practical implications to this, if this were to be enabled for more than a few. This would be a distinct process to manage compared to improving the community within a workplace. It would involve a high level of professional trust and also acknowledgment of this in the opening up of space to develop such communities. This is because if there is an emphasis placed upon teachers to be part of structures that facilitate dialogue within a school then the effect may be that it limits the space and time for teachers to find and create the alternative community that this research suggests they will find most affirming.

As regards the second challenge that these findings present, it seems that those teachers who become involved in initiatives, with teachers from other countries, do not expect to simply learn classroom strategies through these processes. The knowledge they expect to gain is of a far more complex kind. The forms of knowledge that are particularly valued are primarily a co-constructed knowledge of purpose and to some extent of approaches towards leadership in the classroom and on a wider scale. Therefore, for processes of teacher networking to be of value to teachers they should perhaps not primarily emphasise as their aims mechanistically transferring strategies nor should they be merely reflective experiences. They should enable a discourse of leadership to emerge, whereby the knowledge built via the discourse between teachers is varied, flexible and responsive to local conditions.

The high regard these teachers put upon the experience of being able to network with fellow professionals suggests that there is value in government, local and national, supporting such processes. Teachers clearly described how being involved in internationally situated communities had improved their classroom practice and professional confidence, all aspects of teachers' professionalism that any school or country would want to develop. However, if these are to be supported a nuanced understanding of the ways that knowledge built by such processes is realised needs to be present among those funding and supporting such initiatives.

Reflections on the methodological approach

The research for this study was conducted primarily using a focused interview approach framed within an interpretivist paradigm. It has successfully led to proposals for the refining of theoretical accounts of the professional communities that teachers belong to and has revealed significant ways in which our understanding of such communities potentially needs to be nuanced. This was enabled by the way that this approach enabled the building of a set of successive frameworks that meant that the data could be analysed in depth. This started with the building of a conceptual framework, which provided the foundations for the process. I was then able to analyse a relatively small amount of interview data using two concurrent approaches to coding, supported by documentary evidence. By using such an approach a close textual analysis was possible meaning that nuanced and subtle distinctions in experience and perspective could be identified.

The data collection process was successful in that a rich range of data was collected via a focused interview process. This data was rich in depth and comparable between different participants and between sample groups. This approach to interviewing challenges the simple boundaries drawn between structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews because these focused interviews were carefully designed and crafted and therefore certainly have structure. However, the design is built around the identification of themes that guide the interview rather than specific questions. It is therefore responsive to the participant's views and priorities and enables the participant to interact as an equal expert engaging in a professional dialogue. The open way in which the interview was conducted with participants fully aware of the role of the interviewer, the research goals and the context, also affirms the potential for good ethical practices to improve the quality of data collection and demonstrates how ethical

research designs, depth and validity can potentially iteratively interact. This design for the interview process is not an innovation of this study, although there were distinct elements such as the opening prompt. However, this study contributes to methodological discussions in this area by providing an example of the potential of studies that use focused interviews to produce rich data and contribute to theoretical debates.

The method of analysis, which was informed but not bounded by grounded theory, leads to a potential contribution to debates regarding the applicability of methods influenced by grounded theory within the context of a more closely bounded and pre-structured research design. This contribution is that it reaffirms the potential for such a process to reach interesting and useful suggestions that can contribute to theory and understanding, albeit whilst acknowledging that further research would always be needed in order to reinforce the confidence that can be had in these contributions. The view that qualitative studies based on small numbers of participants are inevitably limited to being narrative and exploratory has been challenged before (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Yin, 2014). This study adds to that debate by embracing the positive aspects of such an approach. These are that the depth of analysis enabled by designing a study in this way is in fact why the refining and development of theoretical models can be achieved. However, this is also not an end point. To build confidence in the claims made, further research would be needed.

This dissertation although a substantial piece of work in its own right, is therefore also a starting point for further research by me and potentially by others exploring the theoretical contributions made within and the implications of them. Although this was a sound methodological approach for the generation of ideas due to the thick data that was generated and analysed, there are also limitations in terms of generalisability with this research design. To be assured of their validity the contributions to theoretical understanding discussed in this conclusion need to be explored further. Two clear avenues could facilitate this. Firstly, this could be via an alternative methodological approach perhaps using a quantitative approach to enable the management of data from a larger sample of teachers and others engaged in education. This may even involve isolating key findings from this research and by refining them and presenting them to a larger sample exploring their universality. However, this could also be via the accumulation of the findings from further qualitative studies.

The latter of these two approaches could expand both the theoretical and methodological contribution made. In Chapter Five I suggested that within an interpretivist paradigm the

accumulation of layers of individual stories qualitatively analysed and presented could provide rigour to conclusions reached via research studies designed in this way. The findings presented here could therefore be refined and expanded upon by conducting similar studies to this one, within relatable but different contexts, including other international initiatives. This second approach is the one that is likely to be taken forward by me in the first instance. The gathering of teachers' stories in other contexts, to further develop and refine these conclusions, is likely to be ongoing throughout the next stages of my career as I use the findings generated by this research to further refine my practice working with teachers in a range of contexts. In short: this study has generated interesting insights and the method for doing so has been enlightening and secure. However, it is still only a starting point from which further research in this area could be developed.

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Appendix A

Interview Schedule

Explain the purpose

- To explore the ways in which teachers perceive themselves as belonging to an international community of teachers.
- To explore the ways that working with teachers from other nations has shaped this perception.

Explain the nature of the interviews

The interviews will be semi-structured. They will last between 40 minutes and one hour. The interviews will be recorded. **The themes below will provide prompts for the interview, this is instead of a schedule of questions.**

Further preliminaries as follows

Prior to the interview I will explain some points relevant to the interview process.

Explain the purpose of the research.

To understand more about the communities teachers perceive themselves as belonging to and the reasons why - via the experiences of individual teachers involved in an international initiative.

Explain relevant ethical practice related to the interview

- that the interview data will be anonymised but that brief biographies will be included
- that they will have the opportunity to comment on a summary of my thesis before submission
- that they can withdraw from being a participant at any stage

Visual presentation

Prior to the interview they will be asked to sketch in any form they want the professional groups and communities that they perceive themselves as belonging to and how these inter-relate. I will refer to this during the interview.

Themes

Their personal story: including their experiences of working with teachers from other nations:

- their reasons for involvement in international programmes
- their experiences working with teachers from other nations
- the nature and requirements of programmes that they have been part of
- whether they built long-term professional relationships through such programmes
- their definitions of success or otherwise for such experiences
- the types of knowledge that they exchanged
- the ways in which this knowledge was exchanged

Definitions of professionalism:

- Whether the working environment in their school is collegial, can they define this?

- Whether the way of working is different to that they have with colleagues from their own nation? In what ways?
- Whether it was easier or harder to build relationships with colleagues from other countries, in anyway?
- What it means to be an education professional a 'teacher'.
- Whether they feel that reflecting on or researching about their teaching is part of being 'a teacher'

Learning new strategies:

- whether through working with teachers from other nations they learnt new teaching strategies
- whether through working with teachers from other nations they shared teaching ideas without learning strategies
- whether working with teachers from other nations enabled them to reflect on their own practice
- what other forms of knowledge they learnt/shared/constructed

Goals other than those related to teaching:

Whether they had other goals for working with teachers from other nations:

- personal
- political/civic
- professional

Appendix B (i)

This table illustrates the process used when analysing documents produced within the context of the International Teacher Leadership Initiative.

Extracts from documents produced within the context of the International Teacher Leadership initiative	Commentary and analysis
<p>collaborative learning processes were adopted by the faculty as whole (Jones, 2014). – <i>teacher’s story</i>.</p> <p>they adapted them [her approach] for their own teaching purposes. (Jones, 2014) <i>teacher’s story</i>.</p> <p>Arguably, there is a need for teachers to reclaim and re-define the teaching profession, first by nurturing a profile of teachers which not only implies good classroom teaching, but also commitment toward improving education for all through collaboration with colleagues (Joshevska and Kirandziska, 2015). – <i>academic text, conference paper, explaining vision of ITL in MK</i>.</p> <p>led us in a structured workshop, which was informed by papers circulated in advance. The purpose of this activity was to establish a shared understanding of teacher leadership. (<i>the ITL project</i>) – <i>a record of a networking event</i>.</p>	<p>Processes are adopted but not wholesale. This keeps coming up.</p> <p>The other teachers then in turn develop other ideas (see table dated 7th November 2015).</p> <p>Is this a form of leadership. Emerging themes: -sharing approaches. -sharing stories.</p> <p>Linking this to an academic quote: Improving teaching of others. (possibly too prescriptive to describe the teachers’ stories). -enabling others. -facilitating others.</p> <p>Coherency between the process in schools at networking events. -discursive -sharing expertise.</p> <p>Returns this to – audience, affirmation.</p>

Appendix B(ii)

This table illustrates the second stage in the analytical process used for the interviews. In this stage each sentence is separated. The codes used are used consistently across all the interviews and where a concept presented is unique, it is identified in an italicised phrase separate to the code. The chunking is based on changes of theme, rather than a precise grammatical unit.

And now that I think about it, everything that my childhood was about, was getting me ready to enter the teaching profession without actually being told that I would possibly enter the teaching profession	Personal history (family of teachers)
But I always knew that I like working with people and that I like working with younger people rather than older people.	Personal characteristics Personal preferences
Hmm, and even as a student myself in school, in primary school and in high school, I was able to break down concepts through people in a more meaningful and relatable way.	Personal characteristics Distinct skills
And I did not mind if people copied homework from me and I did not see it as intellectual property or whatever.	Left uncoded for now
But I went to high school in the US and I went to high school during the 1990s, which were quite a troubled time for for this particular region and I wanted to be something positive.	International experience prior to teaching Civic commitment to MK
I wanted to be a diplomat.	Personal ambition (implicitly: links teaching to other high status professions)
I spoke a few languages and I thought it would be an interesting career.	Links personal skills to teaching
I can travel because that is the other thing that I liked to do.	Implicitly: pro-active when building globalised identity.
But when I came back after my first year, because I spent my first year of university of undergrad as a student in the US .	International experience prior to teaching

Appendix B (iii)

In this third stage, illustrated by this extract below, the ordering of the table is reversed. The first column has the titles of codes that emerged in successive interviews. The second column contains short quoted extracts pulled from the range of interviews. Although there were successive stages in the analytical process, of which this was the third stage, they were also used concurrently for different purposes (Charmaz, 2014). The full quotes that are contained in the transcript in the earliest stages (appendix B), were returned to throughout including at the stage of writing the chapters in which the interviews were discussed. This was because although these further stages were needed in order to ensure validity and to enable theory generation, quotes containing multiple over-lapping codes tell the narrative of the teachers' experiences with greater clarity and authenticity (Charmaz, 2014).

Code	Extracts
sharing specific strategies,	<p>I think that I am taking ideas away from innovative and creative teachers that I am meeting all around: in my school or at some different event where I am meeting them (Ivana)</p> <p>I think that I and other teachers from England do have a model to put forward, something very distinct in the way that we have used teacher leadership to improve schools but this is the HertsCam model, the ITL model. It isn't an English thing it is a very specific thing (Sarah).</p>
modifying strategies	<p>I think that they, we the teachers, we like to have a freedom to use and to remake strategies to be personal (Martina).</p> <p>The activities, the lessons have your stamp on them. My lessons have the stamp of other individuals who inspire me (Claire)</p> <p>Solutions are found more quickly if you can undertake reflection with other colleagues but the final design of a lesson needs to be something personal (Sarah)</p>