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## **The freedom to choose**

Autonomy as the guiding principle of veteran women teacher's  
approach to CPD

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# **“Der Weg des Geistes ist der Umweg“**

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

## **Thank you/Danke**

Dr. Ann Rae for opening the door to empirical research.

Allen Lehrerinnen, die dieses Projekt mitgetragen haben.

Karin und Sepp, für den hohen Wert, den Bildung in unserer Familie hat.

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Karin, für die englischen Stimmen meiner Teilnehmerinnen.

Susannah for your devotion to languages and support “auf den letzten Metern”.

Roger, für uns.

## **Abstract**

This thesis presents a study on how highly committed veteran women teachers in Austria approach and experience continuous professional development (CPD) and how these experiences are shaped by professional identity. Autonomy proves to be the guiding principle for all the participants, linking together the three different aspects (identity, CPD, context) of the research interest. Semi-structured interviews show that participants' professional identity consists of a combination of democratic values, professional curiosity and ambition, and a strong sense of agency. Veteran women teachers show a preference for community-oriented and informal forms of professional development. Furthermore, the extensive use of sabbaticals by participants in this study and the implications of this for professional learning, is as an unexpected result that demands further investigation. Finally, highly committed veteran women teachers experience two distinct sets of emotions in regard to teaching and CPD: joy/freedom and frustration/constraint and they express distinct expectations and needs regarding professional development in their career stage. This study discloses the significance of teacher autonomy in Austria and provides tentative recommendations for the future development of CPD in the given context.

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## Keywords

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Title:

The project aims to explore highly committed veteran women teachers' approaches and experiences with CPD in Austria and the way these are shaped by professional identity.

Keywords: teacher professional identity; professionalism; continuous professional development; professional learning; Austria, veteran teacher; women; autonomy; sabbatical; Fortbildung; Weiterbildung

# 1. PROLOGUE

*“I am acting. As a teacher, I am a stand-up comedian, I perform a Shakespeare play and sometimes one by Nestroy. And to me, the classroom is the stage.” (Elisabeth05)*

According to OECDs TALIS report (OECD, 2009; Schmich, 2010) an international average of 30% and an Austrian average of 43% of secondary school teachers have already been teaching for more than twenty years. These teachers are called late career or veteran teachers. In light of Day’s (2008) research, in particular, which found that veteran secondary school teachers are at a greater risk of losing motivation and commitment and are less likely to engage in professional development, this group presents itself as an interesting research subject. This study aims to confront the negative impacts on teachers of routine (Day, 2008), nostalgia (Goodson et al. 2016), stress and constantly changing policy discourse (Thorburn, 2014; Ball, 2003; Sachs, 2001) by contrasting it with the experiences of highly committed veteran teachers and their approaches towards professional identity and professional development. Results hope to inform the future development of CPD activities in the Austrian context as well as adding to a better understanding of the growing group of veteran teachers in schools all over Europe.

Research papers tend to present research processes in a very linear and uncontested way, which stands in contrast to the reality of most social science projects (Mckinley and Rose, 2016) and the obstacles researchers face on their way to gaining final results. The outline of this thesis aims to do justice to this reality and therefore adopts a participant’s metaphor for teaching (see introductory quote) as a guiding principle for structuring the presentation. Teaching is understood as a form of art (Biesta, 2009), a performance, that requires a “sensitivity for the moment” and professional judgements in “always new and unique situations” (ibid. 184). Structuring this paper according to the stages in a theatre production illustrates how research starts with a clear vision (research design), that gets shaped and reshaped along the way in accordance with, or at least in reaction to, the values, motifs and actions of the “artists” involved (research process). Thus, this paper will guide the reader through a metaphorical performance beginning with setting the scene by conceptualising professional identity and describing the Austrian context, moving on to the individual experiences of nine veteran women teachers with continuous professional development (CPD) and ending with an in-depth analysis of how these are shaped by individuals’ professional identity and the context presented.



## 2. THE SETTING – Relevant Literature

The following two chapters aims to set the scene for the conducted study. A theoretical introduction to professionalism, professional identity and professional development is intended to help the reader better understand participants' narratives about themselves and the way they approach CPD. A basic understanding of the Austrian education system and its approach towards professional development is thereby essential.

### 2.1. Professionalism and Professional Identity

Teacher professionalism is a highly contested topic not only in academia, but also in policy (Sachs, 2015) and media (Thomas, 2011) discourses. While traditional notions of professionalism, such as enacted in the fields of medicine or law, are built on a specific code of knowledge, a clear radius of autonomy and very distinct values and responsibilities (Furlong, 2000), debates on what it means to be a teaching professional or how to define professional identity are still open to interpretation (Hargreaves, 2006).

Broadly speaking, professional identity can be understood as a set of self-perceptions, values (Biesta, 2009), expectations, goals and beliefs (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2008) as well as perceptions and ascriptions of others (Sachs, 2001) that differentiates one professional person/group from another. Thus, professional teaching identities are ongoing dialogues by which a person mostly unconsciously integrates his/her various voices, experiences, values and goals into a coherent professional teaching image (ibid., p.154).

Theoretical conceptualisations of teacher professional identity fluctuate between the more traditional understanding of a fixed and stable unity (Mead, 1979) bound by pre-existing<sup>1</sup> values and beliefs, and post-modern approaches of multiplicity, dynamic and social construction (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Sachs, 2001; Day et al., 2006; Mockler, 2011; Kaplan and Garner, 2018). The later seems to rise towards contemporary consensus and scholars describe a variety of dichotomies – ascribed and achieved identities (Linton, 1936), retrospective and prospective identities (Bernstein, 2000), personal and social identities (Tice and Baumeister, 2001) - to illustrate the fact, that there is not *an identity* but at least two or more to be considered within one person.

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<sup>1</sup> values relevant before entering the teaching profession

All of these in some way or other relate to or anticipate Gee's definition of identity that claims:

"One is recognized as 'being' at a given time and place, can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context, and of course can be ambiguous or unstable. (...) all people have multiple identities connected not to their 'internal state' but to their performance in society" (Gee 1990, p.99)

One's self is shaped by a constant dialogue between various domains of identity (e.g. gender, occupation, ethnicity, social position, group membership etc.) in which professional identity is one of the cores, but not the only voice of the self (Ashforth, 2001). Mirza (2013) for example shows how multiple identities are shaped by the "situated ways" in which race and gender is produced and lived through. "Particular identities (e.g. black and female) are tied to particular inequalities in different historical times and geographies" (p.6) and therefore cannot be separated out into discrete identity-strands. In other words, particular situations evoke particular domains or require particular domains to dominate the intersubjective dialogue. For example, playing in the local football team stimulates other layers of a teacher's identity than those stimulated by cooking for loved ones or engaging with students in a classroom.

Furthermore, this study draws on Akkerman and Meijer's (2011) dialogical approach that conceptualizes identity as a variety of "I-positions" within one's narrative that are held together by a unified self, constituted through self-dialogue (p. 315) - the self as "the meaning-maker" or "storyteller" and identities as "the stories being told" (Rodgers and Scott, 2008 p. 739). These narratives of the past, influence the perception, roles, beliefs and values of the present and also include future-oriented ideas on how one would like to be in inevitably changing surroundings (Day et al. 2006). In doing so, they include a diachronic or at least temporal dimension. Moreover, our narratives are not only built up by inner voices of identity, but also by objects, routines and, most important by other people. We anticipate other peoples' selves as well as potentially assigned social roles, responsibilities and expectations (Richardson and Watt, 2018). In short, identity is socially constructed. The social arenas, or in the words of Bourdieu (1979) 'cultural fields', in which professional identity formation processes take place are constituted by specific "institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, appointments and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy and authorise certain discourses and activities" (Webb et al., 2010, p.21-22). Professional teacher identities are never arbitrary or independent of these discourses; what is said or done not only represents a persons' self, but also his/her attitude towards others and the field (ibid. p.30). In this way a teacher's environment becomes part of her/his professional identity, it constitutes part(s) of the multifarious self.

Finally, identity is dynamic. Variations of dominance or conflicting identities, the interaction with others and being situated in not only one but various constantly changing fields requires “identity work” (Schutz et al., 2018), i.e. continuous assessment, refinement and transformation to maintain a unified self-narrative. Accordingly, Mockler (2011) argues that professional identities get shaped throughout an individual’s whole career by personal experiences, the specific professional context and external (political) settings and transformations. Critical intellectual and/or emotional episodes – whether personal, professional or environmental - provide opportunities for inter-subjective dialogue and adjustments in terms of professional identity. These events have the power to question or confirm who I am and what I want to achieve as a teacher based on a potentially revised set of values and beliefs (Schutz et al., 2018).

Having discussed professional identity, the topic of professional development, which is one of the main aspects of a teacher’s work and one which is strongly influenced by his/her individual identity, will now be addressed.

## **2.2. Continuous Professional Development**

In this study I will use the term *CPD* (*continuous professional development*) rather than the term *professional learning*. Despite the different nuances of each of these (Watson and Michael, 2015), women in this study use the very broad German terms *Fortbildung* or *Weiterbildung* that do not carry any of the semantic associations (development, continuous, learning, professional etc.) recently discussed by English-speaking scholars (*ibid.*). Therefore, it was left to me as a researcher to decide for one of the two. In accordance with the literature and frameworks this study draws on (Day, 2008; Day, 2018; Sachs, 2015; Kennedy, 2014; Forde, 2016; Furlong, 2000 etc.) and also due to a slightly more traditional approach in Austria, I choose to still use CPD to describe, analyse and conceptualise highly committed veteran women teachers’ experiences with *Fort- und Weiterbildung*. In this sense I am building on Day’s (2004) widely acknowledged understanding of professional development as all activities in which teachers engage throughout their career to enhance their work.

"Professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which (...) benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice (...) through each phase of their teaching lives." (Day and Sachs, 2004, p. 13)

This definition acknowledges formal as well as informal learning opportunities, with the second offering the most frequent learning opportunities in the workplace (Eraut, 2019). In this sense CPD includes university programmes, in-service-training-days and individual ways of accumulating new skills and knowledge such as reading specialist books, attending conferences or professional discussions with colleagues (Kunter et al., 2007). It also frames CPD as the means to achieve a lasting change in a teacher's perception of his/her class or subject, which is seen to be the first step towards changes in teaching (Opfer et al., 2011).

CPD never takes place in a vacuum. On the contrary, if teaching itself is seen as an act of co-construction of knowledge and collaboration with others (Forde, 2006, p. 110), CPD needs to be analysed within this given context. For example, a school's climate and ethos have a tangible impact on how teachers engage with professional development (Adey, 2004, p. 16). Furthermore, it is the individual teacher's beliefs (Opfer et al., 2011), gender (Richter et al., 2011, p. 119), career stage, prior experiences (Grangeat and Gray, 2007; Mok and Kwon, 1999), motivation and commitment, that define if and when CPD is successful.

By focusing on the output of CPD in regard to teachers' emotions Clement and Vanderberghe (2000) use a different approach. They deem activities successful if they lead to "an increased sense of control (feeling capable of doing the job properly); a degree of flexibility (feeling able to successfully deal with new demands or tasks in the job); and increased capacity for accountability (being more able to provide educational justification for one's actual practice)" (Clement and Vanderberghe, 2000 cited in Kelchtermans, 2004, p. 227). Learning is seen as a truly emotional experience that does not only need to take emotions into account but react and enact upon them.

Moving from theoretical foundations to results of evaluative studies, research shows that teachers are more likely to attend CPD activities that support their existing orientations and beliefs. Even teachers voluntarily engaging with professional development are barely willing to question their ideas, let alone replace them with others (Tillema, 2000). On the contrary, a change of teaching practice is "compelled by personal beliefs, interests, motivations and social/historical contexts" (Opfer et al., 2011, p. 446) and is rarely a result of new knowledge and skills acquired in learning activities. Changes in beliefs during one (external) CPD workshop are very unlikely to happen.

Most studies (Adey, 2004; Jackson and Bruegmann, 2009; Muijs et al., 2004,) agree on training teachers in relation to their specific workplace. This kind of training provides opportunities for

reflection on already successful or problematic situations, facilitates applications of new knowledge, and enables teachers to directly feel improvement, rather than merely hearing about the success of a new approach. CPD is successful if the duration of a certain activity reflects the intensity of change anticipated, methods reflect the pedagogy they try to impart, and participants' individual workplaces are involved (Fullan, 2016).

Linked with the specific workplace, but not unique to it, is the concept of professional communities. Sachs (2010), for example, shows that successful teachers share membership of some sort of professional community. CPD can be one tool which provides this form of community. It can create an environment of professional safety and trust, as well as reduce teachers' professional isolation - isolation, that is likely to reinforce individuals' and school communities' conventional, conservative taken-for-granted beliefs consequently hindering professional development (Sachs, 2010, p. 15). Professional communities that link schools with universities and related different professions can set up research led learning activities and provide ways for teachers to engage in recent discourses on learning and teaching (Opfer et al., 2011, p. 445).

At this point Sachs' (2001, 2010; 2015) in-depth discourse analysis on policy trends over the last ten to fifteen years unites the two main topics of the theoretical foundation of this study: identity and CPD. As summarized in Figure 1, she describes professional development in schools as influenced by competing discourses, such as a democratic, a managerial (Sachs, 2001, p.149) and more recently a transformative discourse (Sachs, 2010, p.16) that lead to either more controlled, compliant, collaborative or activist teacher identities (Sachs, 2015, p.421).



**Figure 1: Types of CPD and Teacher Professionalism (Sachs, 2015, p.421)**

Finally, Kennedy's (2005; 2014) framework of models of continuing professional development incorporates these theoretical conceptualizations, practical necessities and political trends. She defines nine distinct models of formal CPD activities that each transport specific forms of knowledge and can be adopted in varying circumstances: training model, award-bearing model, deficit model, cascade model, standard-based-model, coaching/mentoring model, community of practice model, action research model, transformative model (ibid. p.338-339). The application of these categories at the analytical stage of this study provides the reader with a good overview of the variations and specifics of CPD in a given context.

What finally links this general conceptualization of CPD to the Austrian teaching reality is the significant number of teachers in the US and across Europe, that perceive professional development as a burden with few tangible rewards, rather than an opportunity for learning, empowering and support (Sugrue, 2004, p. 71).

### 3. THE STAGE – Teaching and learning in Austria

#### 3.1. A very fragmented system - Initial teacher training and CPD

The Austrian education system is very fragmented, as is its initial teacher training system (ITE). As Figure 2 shows, it basically follows two distinct types of schooling: the more academic oriented *AHS/BHS*<sup>2</sup> pathway and the more vocational oriented *NMS/Lehre*<sup>3</sup>.

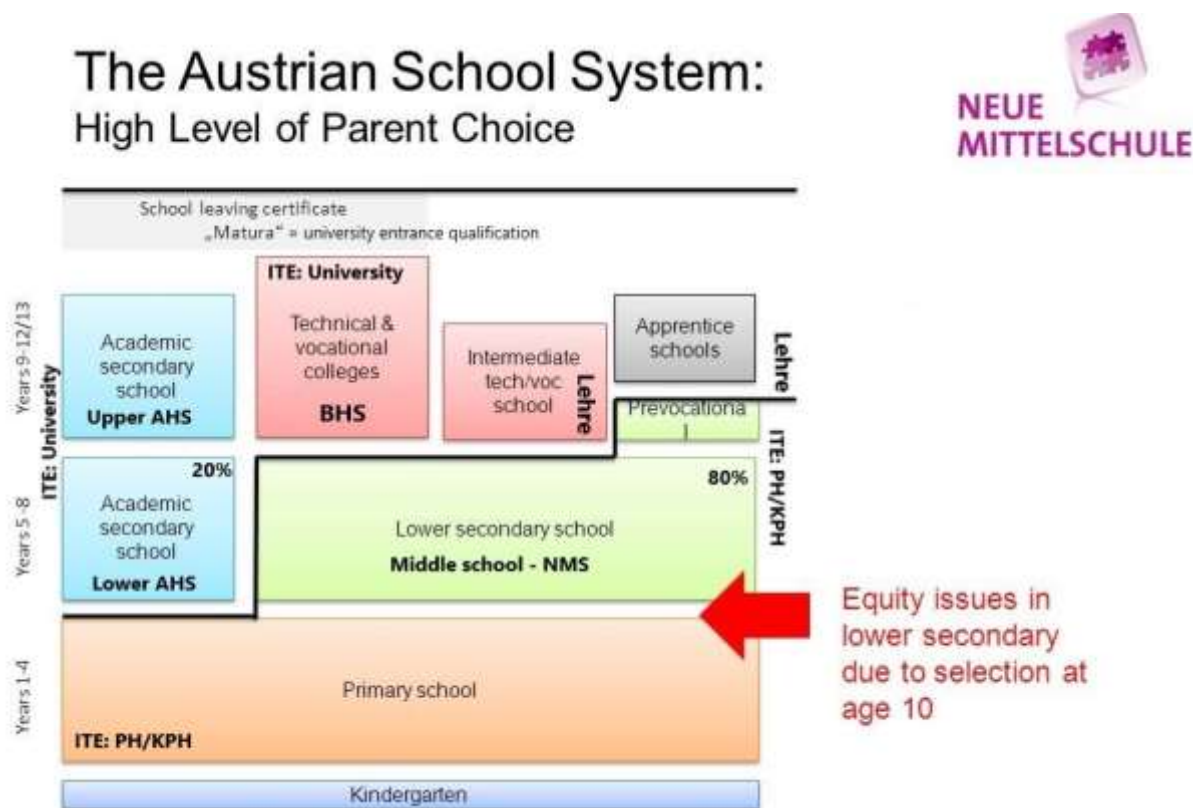


Figure 2: The Austrian School System (BBWF, 2018)

While it is theoretically possible for students to move between these strands, up until 2018 this has not been the case for teachers. Initial teacher training for AHS/BHS and NMS/Lehre as well as contracts and payment have been significantly different. Although this study focuses solely on the experiences of AHS/BHS teachers, both systems needs to be considered as the same CPD is offered to all teachers. Also attending different ITE-programms and working in one of the two strands is very likely to influence teachers' understanding of learning.

<sup>2</sup> AHS Allgemeinebildende Höhere Schule (grammar school): age 10-18; BHS Berufsbildende Höhere Schule (vocational school with higher education entrance qualification): age 15-19

<sup>3</sup> NMS Neue Mittelschule (middle school): 10-14; Lehre (vocational training): age 15-18, ITE Initial Teacher Education

Teachers working in AHSs and BHSs have always been trained at universities engaging in research-oriented forms of pedagogics and a high level of subject knowledge. Teachers at primary schools, NMSs and Lehre were trained at more praxis oriented *Pädagogische Hochschulen* (PH)<sup>4</sup> up until 2015. Since 2015 all secondary school teachers are given initial teacher training in a new programme, which constitutes an amalgamation of the university teacher training course and that of the PHs (BGB 113, 2006). By offering this joint programme, both institutes were forced to somehow align their significantly different approaches and traditions.

Up until today, teaching and learning at Pädagogische Hochschulen comprises notions of teaching as a technical skill, which should be obtained by the cumulation of internships in schools and many hours of practical teaching experience (Messner and Posch, 2010). Being an AHS/BHS teacher, on the other hand, is seen as the more prestigious job and training at university as more reflective, philosophic and difficult (ibid.). Moreover, NMS teachers only study up until Bachelor level - which is already an improvement in comparison to the two years of non-academic NMS-teacher training required up until 2005 - while teaching at an AHS/BHS always required a Master's degree (6 years). These notions still shape how teachers in general and especially the veteran women teachers in this study view learning.

### **3.2. CPD in Austria**

Considering all the differences of AHS/BHS and NMS/Lehre, it is interesting that CPD for all teachers (elementary, primary, NMS, AHS, BHS) has always been the sole responsibility of the 14 different regional PHs. Each independently designs professional learning activities in accordance with loose guidelines from the regional educative authorities (*Landesschulrat*) and the board of education. Since research only became a part of the PHs DNA in 2005, research-led teaching in the context of professional learning in Austria has also only been on the agenda since about 2005 or even 2015. It is a fairly new field.

Apart from the provision of CPD, professional development is seen to be a duty of the individual teacher with expectations varying according to the different contracts for primary/NMS and AHS/BHS teachers. For example, the contracts of all the participants in this study (all AHS or BHS) only refer to CPD in an indirect way. Teachers are asked to teach “in a state-of-the-art-manner” and are required to stay up-to-date with recent scientific research in

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<sup>4</sup> University Colleges of Teacher Education

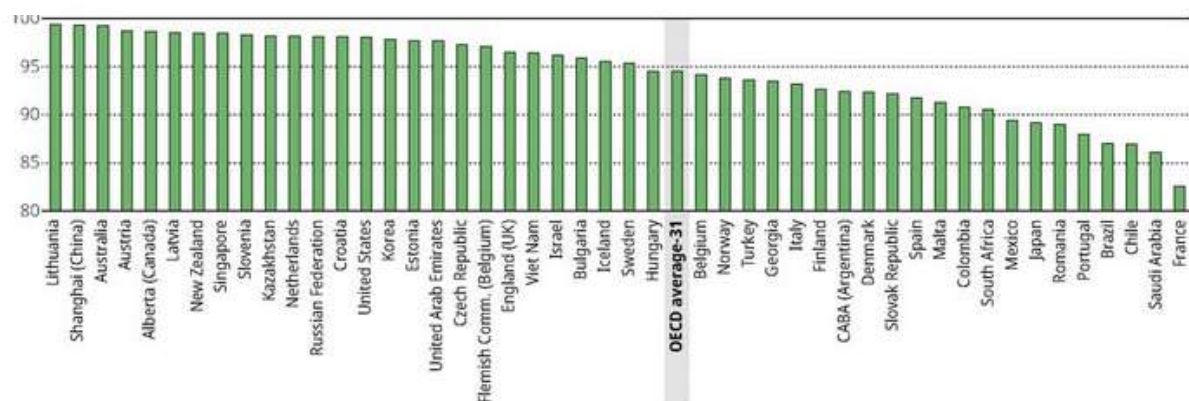


their respective fields (BBWF, 1985 § 17(1)). Contracts do not dictate a specific amount of CPD hours, topics or frameworks for development. As a result, in practice, CPD is de facto seen as somehow optional for teachers in AHS/BHS schools (Rechnungshof Österreich, 2017, p. 13).

These hazy contractual regulations might be the reason for a variety of misleading scientific results, e.g. OECD's 2018 TALIS report shows more than 90% of all teachers in Austria taking part in formal or informal learning opportunities (see figure 3) while the Austrian Court of Editors only found two thirds of AHS/BHS teachers engaging in CPD (Rechnungshof Österreich, 2017).

Figure I.5.1 **Participation in professional development activities**

Percentage of lower secondary teachers who participated in professional development activities<sup>1</sup>



1. Refers to professional development activities in which teachers participated in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of the percentage of teachers who participated in professional development activities in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Source: OECD, TALIS 2018 Database, Table I.5.1.


StatLink  <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933932741>

Figure 3: Percentage of teachers who undertook some professional development in the previous 12 months (OECD, 2019, p. 153)

Furthermore, teachers in Austria spend a comparably low amount of time on CPD (OECD, 2009, p. 43) and they predominantly take part in short-term-interventions (see figure 4) even though they themselves describe long-term programmes (teacher-networks, action/practitioner research, university programmes etc.) as more effective (Schmich, 2010, p. 11; OECD, 2019).

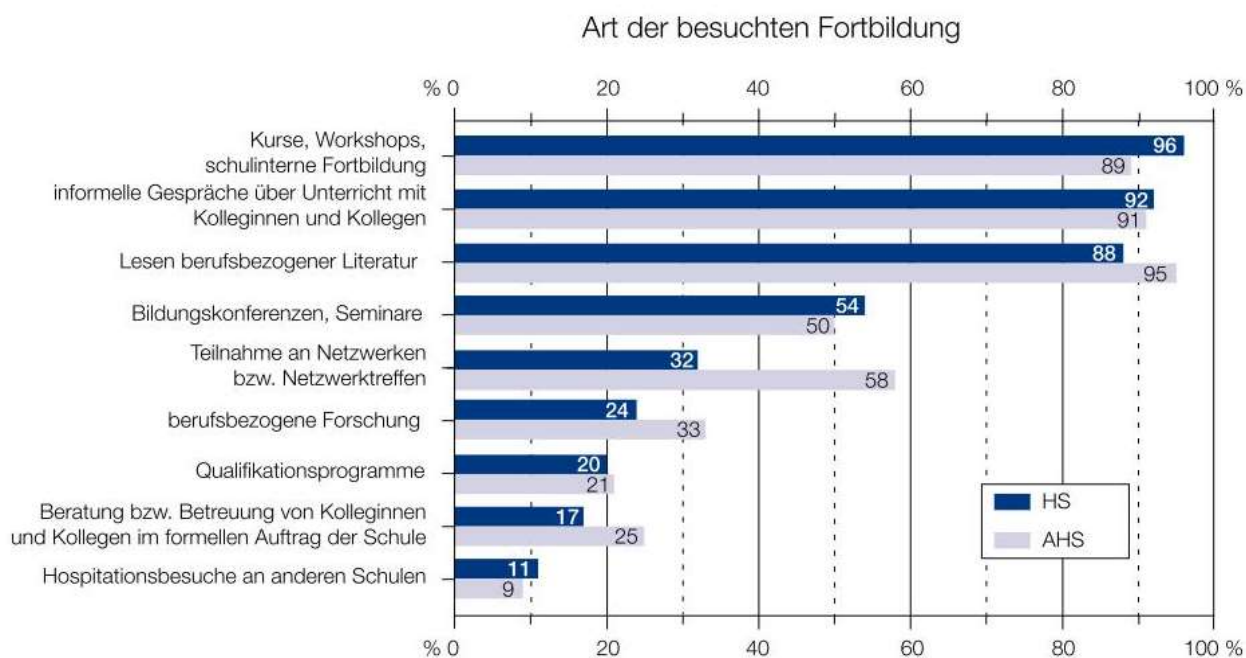


Figure 4: Type of CPD activities (Schmich, 2010, p. 18)<sup>5</sup>

In terms of administration and organisation of CPD the individual teacher guides his/her own professional development process. Head teachers only have limited influence over the content and formats their staff engages with. What is beneficial in terms of teachers' motivation and sense of ownership, bares the risk of CPD not resulting in broader school or classroom development (Muijs et al., 2004, p. 297). When considering again the strong influence of pre-existing beliefs on the choices and effects of professional learning (Richardson, 1996; Tillema, 2000), teachers in Austria might be more likely to develop their individual strengths and interests further, than to work on the necessities of a school-wide-strategy.

### 3.3. Recent policy changes - *Standardisierte Reifeprüfung*

The third aspect that is relevant in understanding the results of this study is the implementation of nation-wide standardized testing in 2015. *Standardisierte Reifeprüfung (SRDP)* also called *Zentralmatura* provides a centralised school leaving certificate based on national standards for all higher secondary schools in Austria. It is the result of a predominantly negative connotated discourse on student attainment and teacher accountability (Bozuk et al., 2007) after the so-

<sup>5</sup> Type of CPD activity: 1) workshop, in-service-training; 2) informal conversation about teaching and learning; 3) reading specialized literature; 4) attending conferences; 5) teacher-networks; 6) programs that provide additional qualification; 7) peer-mentoring; 8) visits to other schools

called *Pisa-Schock* in 2008, when Austria failed to improve on its already quite low PISA results in literacy and maths in 2000 (OECD, 2010). Therefore, the introduction of *Zentralmatura* sits in wider international discourses on managerialism (Sachs, 2001) and performativity (Ball, 2003) that has already been dominating educational policy development for quite some time in other European countries.

## 4. THE SCRIPT – Methodology

The individual teacher and his/her personal and professional identity lie at the heart of this study. The lens with which to approach him/her is the lens of continuous professional development (CPD). Hence, this study aims to explore how highly committed veteran women teachers approach and experience CPD and how these experiences are influenced by their professional identities.

Focusing on veteran teachers provides a unique perspective on practitioners. Although they are large in number, veteran teachers are surprisingly underrepresented in CPD research (Thornburn, 2014; Meister and Ahrens, 2011; Mockler, 2011)<sup>6</sup>. Against the background of the ageing body of teachers in many European countries (OECD, 2019) as well as Day's (2008) claim that teachers in their later years are more likely to lose commitment and efficiency<sup>7</sup>, this study will focus on highly committed veteran teachers. By doing so it offers positive examples of teachers resisting plateauing (Meister and Ahrens, 2011). Furthermore, through its focus on women teachers, it does justice to the large number of women working in the field of education and provides additional insights on women's experiences in the workplace. More specifically, the objective of this study is to answer the following research questions:

- What does professionalism and professional identity mean for the highly committed Austrian veteran women teachers in this study?
- How do highly committed veteran women teachers approach and experience CPD?
- In what way are these experiences shaped by professional identity and the Austrian context?

### 4.1. Ontological and epistemological assumptions

This study starts with the axiom that all research is guided by abstract ontological and epistemological principles and assumptions. How we as researchers see the world, and how we can know about it, deeply shapes what we consider worth investigating, the questions we ask, the methods we use and our interpretations of various forms of data. Regardless of possible ultimate truth or fallacy, we are invariably bound by these philosophical beliefs (Guba and

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<sup>6</sup> Also, simply compare results of the key words "initial" or "novice" teachers with "senior" or "veteran" teachers in university library catalogues or international research databases (e.g. JSTORE, etc.)

<sup>7</sup> at least efficiency that is exemplified by student results in national tests

Lincoln, 2011). Borgatti (2012) argues, and I strongly agree, that we might never be able to get around this problem. We can only reduce it by making our implicit framework explicit.

This provides challenges not only for the design of a study, but certainly also for the presentation of it. If we aim to uncover our personal paradigmatic position, we need to find a way to represent multiple dimensions of voice (Hertz, 1999), the voice of various participants as well as the voice of the author's self. This study acknowledges these multiple voices by using personal pronouns ("I", "we", "us", "they") whenever they are necessary in order to understand a specific individual position. This break with traditional ways of scientific writing, that demands abstract semantic and passive grammatical choices, aims to open up a more honest and humble dialogue about the results presented here. It can help researchers and readers (who are most likely to be researchers themselves) to overcome the distance between them and their participants, as well as raise awareness of the responsibilities social scientists carry, both for their results (BERA, 2018) and the individuals they engage with during their inquiries. Moreover, it should help us to acknowledge the complexity of the world (Guba and Lincoln, 2011) and prevent us from presenting this complexity in a seemingly unchallengeable, pseudo-objectified way. By contrast, a more open and subjective style of writing tries to break up discourse hegemonies that are inherent in the various fields of science (ibid., p. 210).

#### **4.2. The researcher**

I conducted the study from the perspective of a white, central European, female researcher, who has worked in the field of CPD for long enough to be well informed, but not long enough to have been caught up in its inherent contextual logic and demands. The research design is strongly informed by a constructivist paradigmatic understanding that itself is the result of a long process of socialisation within the academic world.

Studying Literature, my first encounters with philosophical questions about the world and how we know about it, took place in a structuralist and post-structuralist setting. Engaging with de Saussure's work on signifier and signified, and his claim that words and language do not obtain meaning from an objective reference in the world, but are, on the contrary, arbitrary 'sound images' which hold meaning only in relation to the other words in a language (de Saussure cited in: Jarvie and Zamora-Bonilla, 2011, p. 436), strongly shaped a tentative ontological understanding. The strong influence of texts in Western culture, the various interpretations of

them, and the strong systematic hierarchical power they hold (Baert et al., 2011, pp. 476–477), challenged notions of objectivity and the sense of an absolute truth. The acceptance of the (post-) structural assumption, that there is no single, but only partial “truth” and that any agreement of what is “valid” arises from negotiations regarding what will be accepted as “truth” in a certain community (Guba and Lincoln, 2011) almost inevitably led to a relativistic ontological view.

I also engaged with post-modern theories (Bourdieu, 1979) and their implication for research methods (Foucault and Seitter, 1996). This shaped my epistemological understanding of knowledge as something socially situated. In terms of knowledge production, I follow Bourdieu’s (1979) idea of “cultural fields”, contexts that produce and transform practices, and “habitus”, durable yet unconscious principles that guide perceptions and actions. What one can know and how one gets to know what one knows vastly depends on how well one fits into cultural trajectories and “has a feel for the game” of everyday life (Webb, 2010, p.38). Methodologies and methods such as Foucault’s genealogy and critical discourse analysis use similar ideas (Baert et. al, 2011). Foucault (Foucault and Seitter, 1996) asks us to move away from grand narratives that artificially present history as a fixed continuity and instead look closer at discontinuities and constructions of what we think we know. Genealogy acknowledges history, historical knowledge and *à la longue* knowledge in general as something constructed by actors in a present discourse<sup>8</sup> (ibid.). As well as in Bourdieu’s sense of habitus, knowledge is seen as socially constructed rather than a priori waiting to be discovered.

Working in the field of social sciences now, I bring with me a relativist ontological understanding of local and specific constructed and co-constructed “realities” and a constructionist epistemology that sees knowledge as co-created by interactions with the surrounding world (Lincoln and Guba, 2011). This means, I cannot separate myself from the process of knowledge production and it asks me to invite my participants to play a more active role in the whole research process.

Finally, conducting this study from a social constructivist stance, I neither believe in nor aim for criteria of absolute reality or validity. As a result, I see these criteria only deriving from communities and a consensus on what is “real” and “valid”, rather than providing some sort of

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<sup>8</sup> for an in-depth conceptualization of discourse see Anderson and Holloway (2018); Lester, White, and Lochmiller (2017); Bacchi, (2000); Bell (1993); Foucault (1977) etc.

a standard for evaluation. It is the action of consensus and meaning-making in discourses and possible implications for other situations (transferability), this study is interested in.

### **4.3. Research ethics**

The ontological and epistemological assumptions presented in 4.1. and 4.2. hold implications for research ethics, especially regarding the interaction with participants. Thus, ethical considerations guided this study at all stages. I strictly follow BERA's (2018) guidelines for Educational Research, especially in terms of confidentiality, consent and anonymisation. Furthermore, participants' risks and costs were considered at all times, with some participants even articulating benefits (helping to change CPD formats for the better, having an opportunity to reflect on one's professional learning over the years, being interested in scientific trends) unprompted during interviews. Although I am aware, that the main benefit is reaped by the researcher and his/her respective field (Makar and O'Brian, 2013), participants were also appreciative of personal gains, and were happy to take part in this study. Although participants were invited to strongly guide the interviews and to reread, alter or add something to the transcripts according to their perspective, I would have wished for a generally more participant-oriented approach. Unfortunately, significant time constraint on both sides impeded this.

### **4.4. Participants**

The sampling process was based on the combination of two theories: Day's (2008) career stage model and Crosswell's (2006) dimensions of commitment. A population of highly committed veteran women teachers was defined, including teachers with more than 20 years of teaching experience (Day, 2006 p. 249) who still undertook regular<sup>9</sup> CPD activities and saw themselves as passionate and engaged with the school community (Crosswell, 2006, p.109). Table 1 provides an overview of all participants and context related attributive data.

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<sup>9</sup> 10 days over the course of 18 months (OECD, 2009) including *Pädagogische Konferenzen*, panel meetings etc.

<i>Participants (own pseudonyms used)</i>	<i>Years of teaching experience</i>	<i>Type of school</i>	<i>Subjects</i>
<i>Blanca</i>	23	AHS	Spanish/French
<i>Elisabeth05</i>	36	AHS	English/History
<i>Karla</i>	20	AHS	English/History
<i>Louise</i>	26	AHS	German/English
<i>Maria</i>	29	AHS	Italian/History
<i>Minerva</i>	37	AHS	Latin/German
<i>Silvioser</i>	29	AHS	German/History
<i>Subaltern</i>	23	AHS	German/Psychology and Philosophy
<i>Susanne</i>	32	BHS	French/History

**Table 1: Participants - attributive data**

The study specifically focuses on women's experiences because teaching is still predominantly in women's hands and the small sample size would not permit representation of gender distribution in schools without overemphasising the voices of male teachers in the results of this study. Moreover, I see it as another step in exploring women's specific experiences in the world of work. The sampling population was also limited to Modern Foreign Languages and German<sup>10</sup> teachers, for the purpose of ensuring comparability in terms of workload, initial teacher training and CPD experience. Finally, sampling only includes teachers from AHS/BHS schools, since they share the same contractual regulations in terms of professional development.

Implementing Richie and Lewi's (2014) strategy of snowball sampling, I approached teachers, whom I already knew, to recommend possible participants that fulfilled all sampling criteria (teaching experience, gender, subjects, commitment, regular CPD attendance). Out of twelve recommended women, nine agreed to take part in the study, a number that proved to be sufficient for saturation (Baker and Edwards, 2012) regarding the aim and time frame of the study. Thus, no further snowballing was necessary.

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<sup>10</sup> Teachers in Austria study and teach two subjects. Sampling asked for teachers teaching at least one of the two



## **4.6. Method**

In accordance with the aim of this study, I applied Brinkmann's (2018) argument, that interviews often represent the most adequate means of knowledge production, when the research interest is human experience. Therefore, I decided to use semi-structured interviews and a thematic analysis of data to approach the research questions. This concurs with the paradigmatic assumption of multiple realities and allows both the researcher and the participants to engage in the construction of knowledge.

Maccoby and Maccoby already defined interviews in 1954 as "face-to-face verbal exchange[s], in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinions and beliefs from another person or persons" (cited in Brinkmann, 2018, p.578) An interview is never just conversation, it is a specific form of communication characterized by a combination of structure and flexibility, interactivity, reflexivity and the use of tools such as language, images etc. to generate knowledge. It is an active negotiation between a researcher and one or more interviewee(s) (Ritchie and Lewis, 2014; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015) that hold all sorts of interests, motifs and fears. Interviews are conducted for a purpose, need to be organized and administered and follow specific (communicative and academic) conventions - all of which raises specific questions about power and ethics. So, interviews are never just research instruments, they are social practices embedded in everyday social life (Silverman, 2011).

## **4.7. Data collection**

Semi-structured or topical (Rubin and Rubin, 2012) interviews aim to cover a set of predefined issues with all participants within a study, while allowing the individual interviewees to guide the process more spontaneously and engage in unanticipated aspects of the given topic (ibid.). They also provide a better setting for the researcher to become visible as an actor in the process of knowledge production than, for example, structured surveys (Brinkmann, 2018). In order to examine highly committed veteran women teachers' experiences with CPD, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted over the process of two separate interview circles, allowing for slight alterations to the interview schedule after the first four interviews. I initially followed a set of seven questions, three referring to identity and four to CPD (see table 2). The two topics of gender and politics were added after the first round of interviews, since they were regularly brought up unprompted by the first group of participants.

Research Questions	Semi-structured interviews	Research Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What does professionalism and professional identity mean for highly committed senior career women teachers in this study?</i></li> <li>• <i>How do highly committed senior career women teachers approach and experience CPD?</i></li> </ul>	<p><u>Identity</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work as a teacher/ role in classroom/ role in school community</li> <li>• Reasons and motivation to enter and stay in profession</li> <li>• Critical episodes and career stages</li> <li>• gender</li> <li>• politics</li> </ul> <p><u>CPD</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staying committed – How? Role of CPD</li> <li>• Forms of CPD</li> <li>• Expectations/needs/experiences</li> <li>• What do you want to add?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>In what way are these experiences shaped by professional identity and the Austrian context?</i></li> </ul>

Table 2: Interview schedule

#### 4.8. Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim<sup>11</sup> and analysed according to Braun and Clark’s (2006) 6-step framework of thematic analysis. As illustrated in table 3, coding was done consecutively in three different circles using structural, descriptive and emotional codes. Codes were developed deductively, based, for example on Kennedy’s (2014) modes of continuing professional development, as well as inductively. Especially emotions and experiences of CPD were approached in an inductive way, giving distinct priority to the verbatim accounts of participants. No strict linear process was forced upon the data set, instead I moved back and forth between Braun and Clarke’s (2006) phases, especially during initial coding (step 2) and defining final themes (step 4).

<sup>11</sup> verbatim transcripts were done in German, coding was done in German and English

Approach to Data Analysis						
Type of Coding	Codes derived from	Example Codes	Example Quotes			
<b>Deductive</b>	Descriptive Coding	Theoretical Frameworks	Dry, 2008: Career Stage Model	Career Stages Initial Teacher Training Sabbatical Senior Career Teacher	"I think an older age does help and for me, I don't feel more and more tired the older I get. On the contrary, I am more and more energetic." (María)	
			Kennedy, 2014: Models of CPD	Types of CPD Literature Professional Community Conferences, University Informal	"I go to conferences; I go to symposia of subject didactics. So, these events are affiliated with university in terms of organization. (...) For instance, experts in subject didactics from Germany are great." (Amanda)	
<b>Inductive</b>	Structural Coding	Interview schedule	Roles	Identity Epistemological understanding Roles in school community Initial motivation	"I enjoy directing in class, but it is also fine, if others participate. So, in principle, I would describe it as a collegial style." (Subaltery)	
			Motivation	Committed	Long-term commitment	"Well, today, although I still think subject and content are important, they are not priority anymore. I want to emphasize humanity and social awareness." (Karla)
			CPD	CPD expectations CPD experiences	"I think I would be bored. I am the type of person, that does not sit around for long. I need to do and try out different things and that is something you can do as a teacher." (Susanne)	
			...	...	"If you have a certain amount of teaching experience and are also actively involved in educative programs outside the school, then most of the obligatory CPD activities seem to be very trivial. (Elisabeth05)"	
			Identity	Part of the job Boundaries Interests/Hobbies Agency	"I love reading. I think that a teacher's main task is to read, especially if you are a teacher of History or Italian. And I can't stand it when I encounter colleagues who never read. I'm wondering what their teaching looks like." (María)	
Verbatim	Verbatim and latent	Emotions	valued fun tired frustrated challenged	"The older I get the more meaningful I consider this job, the less crisis of purpose I have." (Blanca)		
Verbatim	Verbatim	Experiences	Reasons for CPD CPD abroad Sabbatical place	"But most CPD activities are not offered to me by school or school-related institutes (PH/KPH), but they are much more expensive indeed, but if you further develop yourself, it is much more useful for school than the [traditional] offers." (Louise)		

Table 3: Approach to data analysis

## 5. THE PERFORMANCE – Findings

Drawing on data gathered in an Austrian context, the first part of this chapter offers an analysis on the roles, values and characteristics of veteran women teachers and their understandings of professionalism (research question 1). Secondly, I will focus more closely on the participants' perspective on CPD. Based on various modes of professional development (Kennedy, 2014), a variety of CPD formats and its implications for the veteran women teachers will be discussed. This sets the stage for linking identity, CPD and the Austrian context (research questions 2 and 3) by drawing attention to the emotions and experiences veteran women teachers describe, when talking about professional development in part three.

### 5.1. Who you are – Teacher professional identity

In this study, highly committed veteran women teachers' understanding of professionalism consists of clear democratic values, professional curiosity and ambition, and a strong sense of agency. It is based on, and at the same time aims for, autonomy, something that can be seen in the way teachers in this study implement educational choices and take on responsibilities beyond teaching.

The presentation of results in this section loosely follows Furlong's (2000) conceptualisation of identity that draws on distinct values, a defined range of autonomy and certain responsibilities. All three dimensions came up at various points during the interviews, but certainly in a more comprehensive and interrelated way, than depicted in Furlong's work. These dimensions will therefore act as a background to the following results.

#### 5.1.1. Being a teacher is more than just teaching: Values and teacher professionalism

Biesta (2009, p.191) describes the ability to make normative educational judgments as the core of a teacher's professional identity – "it is not a rule-based skill, (...) [but] a way of seeing and being". The systematic exploration of values that Biesta conceptualizes as the foregrounds of all educational choices, can strengthen this ability and, consequently, teacher professionalism.

The veteran teachers in this study refer to two main themes when it comes to values: society/democracy and personal responsibility/critical thinking. Teaching is seen as something meaningful and important for a democratic society and the participants in this study deem teaching their students democratic values very important. In relation to a personal understanding of autonomy, these women also want their students to develop a strong sense of personal responsibility, critical thinking and independence.

*“I think it’s important that they think independently with regard to politics, that they are critical, that they reflect on things, that they are rebellious, and develop moral courage. As a teacher, I can put these things into practice very well.” (Maria)*

*“I consider high personal responsibility on the part of students to be very important and I provide them with a good framework for that.” (Subaltern)*

Values are neither described as curriculum nor standard driven. Instead, the women in this study clearly follow a democratic or even social justice approach (Keddie, 2012) and autonomy seems to permeate most of their educational choices. It is a precondition as well as the overall aim. Autonomy provides the context in which teachers are able to transform personal values into teaching practices. These practices then develop and reinforce their students’ autonomy and that of the broader teaching profession (see 5.1.2. for specific examples).

Another interesting aspect of teacher identity in this context compares well with Akkerman and Meijer’s (2011) concept of identity as a variety of “I-positions”. None of the participants would see herself as “just” a teacher or reducing professionalism to what takes place in individual classrooms. Being a teacher is seen in a more comprehensive way, which, for some of these women, even extends beyond the school community. Concurrently, teaching is perceived as somehow influenced by other aspects of life and identity, such as gender, social status, belonging to a local/religious community etc. This relates to current trends in educational research that see teacher professional identity as multifarious, dynamic and socially constructed (Mockler 2011; Schutz et al., 2018).

*“And what also strikes me is (...) that, especially at our school, there are so many children with a way of living which we don’t know anything about. (...) Because I think we have got such privileges in society and there are so many children at our school who do not have these very privileges. And we always take our reality as a point of reference. I am also prone to that.” (Silvioser)*

One of the dimensions that seemed to play a particularly notable role for this sample is that of gender. Although not primarily intended by the interview schedule, participants explicitly and implicitly talked about how being a woman affected their experiences and emotions

related to teaching. I am fully aware that the constructionist designs of the study and the sample that solely consisted of women inevitably shapes the results regarding the influence of gender. Nevertheless, the intensity and number of references to gender during the interviews was unexpected. Further investigation and an individual research design would probably be necessary to fully do justice to the variety of answers in this context.

*“Apart from that, it is also a political issue as a woman. I have come to realise that, being a middle-aged woman, I am actually a proper feminist and I didn’t even know that I was one. But, it is quite simple: I want to earn my own money, I want to work, and I would never give that up, regardless of my husband’s wage. This is about me.” (Maria)*

*“What’s important to me at school, in literature, are feminist topics, or let’s say emancipatory topics. But feminist ones as well, actually. (...)” (Louise)*

Finally, participants in this sample of highly committed veteran women teachers seem to be sharing certain characteristics that link professional identity with teaching practices and their approach towards CPD (see 3.2., Kennedy, 2014). Most participants described themselves as curious and ambitious building on a concept of professional curiosity and a very specific understanding of ambition.

*“What helps me? Well, I think that I am a very curious person by nature.” (Blanca)*

*“I mean, I can’t just not inform myself about the new “Matura” (. . .) I need to know how it works, because I want to be able to implement it really well.” (Karla)*

Kashdan et al. (2013, p.142) describes natural curiosity as the “predisposition to recognize and search for new knowledge”, something that is necessarily linked to professional development. Also, curious and ambitious people possess several higher-order skills such as flexibility, abstract thinking, strong intellectual capacity etc. (ibid.). Ambition, although often associated with career progression or predefined outcomes for students (Donaldson Report, 2010; Curriculum for Excellence, 2011; Ball, 2003; Sachs, 2015), is understood in a slightly different way by participants in this study. The notion of autonomy emerges again as veteran teachers describe ambition in relation to a changing teaching context and their desire to respond appropriately to it - in accordance with their personal values, not according to set frameworks.

Both, professional curiosity and ambition are considered as the main driving forces for CPD in most of the interviews. They are perceived as necessities to stay innovative throughout the full span of teachers’ careers.

*We wouldn't stay up-to-date without CPD. And CPD training is part of the variety of the profession. (Susanne)*

Given the lack of frameworks and accountability for teachers in Austria, it is certainly interesting that participants voluntarily bind themselves to comparably high internal standards. In this sense the presented results confirm **and** expand on Day's (2008) findings on variations in teachers' work, lives and effectiveness.

### 5.1.2. Autonomy

Individual autonomy in the teaching profession can be described as “the freedom to make prescriptive professional choices concerning the services rendered to students.” (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005, p.42). All participants have a strong sense of autonomy, most often described as the “*freedom*” to choose what to teach (autonomy in terms of content) and how to teach it (autonomy in terms of teaching methods). Despite the existence of a national curriculum, veteran women teachers in this study feel free to pursue what they deem important within the boundaries of their subject, using methods they perceive to best suit the individual needs of their students.

*“First of all, I have no superior. Well, I do have one, but that has never been an issue for me, not with any of my seven head teachers. I have never felt monitored, or even when I felt that way, I did what I deemed best anyway. (...) And the Landesschulrat<sup>12</sup>, well, what are they supposed to tell me? When the parents have got my back, everything's alright” (Elisabeth05)*

*“And this freedom that we have here as teachers. This is a really great thing. This is particularly important to me. If I had to deal with a head teacher who constantly told me what to do or what I'm not allowed to do, I probably would have gone into “inner emigration”<sup>13</sup> eventually.” (Minerva)*

Newly introduced frameworks and standards due to the “Zentralmatura”, on the other hand, are perceived as limiting professional autonomy and are therefore strongly criticised by all participants. Nevertheless, veteran women teachers do not necessarily feel hindered by the introduction of these policies. Instead, they draw once more on their professional autonomy to resist some aspects of this form of standardization, whilst simultaneously finding ways to incorporate others into their teaching routines.

*“But I have already got so upset about the “Zentralmatura”, and I have decided to stop. If somebody approaches me some day, telling me: ‘You can't do it that way’, I will reply: ‘Alright, then I'll leave’.*

<sup>12</sup> local education authority

<sup>13</sup> derogatory German metaphor; literally: The choice of some German writers to remain in Nazi Germany despite being opposed to Nazism.

*This won't be the case, since they do know that those who are really passionate about children and education work in a different way anyway.*” (Louise)

*“Because of the new Matura you have hardly any opportunity to teach students about culture and geography anymore. I do it anyway.”* (Maria)

The distinct role of autonomy in forming a professional identity for these teachers and the specific values they hold, are linked to a larger, albeit unconscious, concept of teacher agency (Pantič, 2015 p.764). Based on Pantič's (2015) theorization, teachers in this study see their profession as an opportunity to make a difference (sense of purpose) and they value the freedom they have as a powerful tool to do so on their own terms (autonomy, competence). This enables them to successfully take initiative and action at the micro-level of the classroom and the school. Autonomy and agency in this sense are core features of a collaborative or active teaching professionalism (Sachs, 2015, see 3.2.), that supports veteran women teachers in developing a sense of efficacy. The data in this study à la longue suggests that autonomy, agency and a sense of efficacy act as driving forces for motivation and job satisfaction over the length of a full teaching career.

Arising from the sense of agency and autonomy, and in accordance with their personal democratic values highly committed veteran women teachers in this study were also able and willing to take on a distinct set of responsibilities extending beyond their actual teaching, such as “Personalvertretung” (staff council), “SGA” (statutory elected council of teachers, parents, students), “SQA” (school development team) etc.. All these roles aim to improve autonomy and the conditions of teaching and learning for all involved stakeholders. In addition, many also take on volunteer work beyond the immediate school community and engage in community work, local school politics or provide initial teacher training at universities. The importance participants ascribe to these responsibilities is highlighted by the fact that they are carried out despite nearly all the participants describing teaching itself as exhausting and challenging, with a third even explicitly mentioning periods of burn out.

Thus, the relationship between teacher identity, autonomy and responsibilities is interconnected, with autonomy constituting the foreground as well as the result of teacher professionalism in this context.



## 5.2. What you do – Veteran women teachers and CPD

The following section links concepts of identity with professional development. An analysis of participants' accounts of CPD will show a clear preference for community oriented and informal modes of learning. Both links back to the strong sense of autonomy and professional confidence discussed in 5.1.

With regard to Kennedy's (2014) framework of modes of continuing professional development (see section 3.2.) veteran women teachers engage in a variety of CPD formats. Being part of a professional community and self-directed (formal and informal) learning apart from traditional CPD providers (PHs) was mentioned most frequently when talking about recent CPD activities. Being a mentor-teacher, attending supervision groups and engaging in school development processes for example all refer to a preference for a community of practice (ibid. p. 346) in this career stage that strongly emphasises relations between teaching professional and at the same time learning individual.

*“And this exchange is what makes it interesting. On the one hand, within school when we talk about school development. And also, an exchange that ultimately goes beyond Vienna. I know colleagues from Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Carinthia, Vorarlberg and then it is always really interesting to exchange experiences.” (Minerva)*

*“Certainly, because you can exchange experiences with other colleagues, and I think that is highly important. The face-to-face conversation as well. Lately, we have somehow tried observing each other's lessons at my school. That helps as well, I think.” (Blanca)*

Patterns of informal learning correspond with Richter et al.'s (2011) results on professional development across a teacher's career. It often takes place by reading relevant literature or visiting exhibitions and attending talks or theatre productions, activities veteran women teachers seem to engage in considerably more often than their early or mid-career colleagues.

*“I think that a teacher's main task is to read. And I can't stand it when I encounter colleagues who never read. I'm wondering what their teaching looks like.” (Maria)*

When it comes to more formal forms of CPD, veteran women teachers turned away from traditional providers of CPD activities. They are critical about activities provided by PHs and strongly draw on their own experience and expertise when attesting traditional CPD activities to *“only repeat what [they had] already heard earlier in [their] career[s]” (Minerva).*

Instead, women in this study attend activities organised by universities or independent academies that offer very specialised or intensive programmes.

*“I go to conferences; I go to symposia of subject didactics. these events are affiliated with a university in terms of organisation. (...) For instance, experts in subject didactics from Germany are great.” (Minerva)*

Probably the most significant result in this sample is the high number of participants that took either a “Sabbatical”<sup>14</sup> or “Bildungskarenz”<sup>15</sup> or both. In comparison with most international literature on teacher identity and CPD, especially Kennedy (2014), taking a sabbatical/Bildungskarenz seems to be a feature unique to the Austrian context. It is fairly easy to apply and get funding for, as it relies on an agreement between unions, schools and local authorities and is funded by the Austrian welfare state. A sabbatical or Bildungskarenz allows teachers (and other professionals) to fully direct professional learning for a period of up to twelve months without the extra burden of a fulltime job, major financial losses or fear of losing one’s position in the school.

During sabbaticals all the women engaged in long, intensive and expensive CPD programmes. Often, they attended university courses or programmes provided by other tertiary education institutes. Programmes had clear links to teaching but are not officially recognised as CPD or provided by PHs (e.g. mediation, gestalt pedagogy etc.). All participants saw these external year(s) as highly beneficial, not only in terms of experience and professionalism but also in terms of enhancing further motivation and commitment as teachers.

*“And last year I took a sabbatical. That has been very important, because now I have the feeling that I walk into the classroom more freely. The children have now reached an age when they are very independent, and now I have this feeling that I can immerse myself again [in school] and act out this side [of me] again to a greater extent.” (Silvioser)*

One can see a fundamental difference to many international, especially Anglo-American contexts here. While CPD in the UK, US and Australia is deemed efficient, if it is

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<sup>14</sup> Sabbatical: Contractual agreement where teachers receive 80% of their salary for 5 years while only working for 4 years and taking one year of paid holiday. There is no obligation to engage in CPD during a sabbatical.

<sup>15</sup> Educational leave. State-provided means of professional learning for a large variety of professions. Participants stay formally employed but instead of receiving a regular salary, educational and living costs are covered to a certain extent by the state. Unlike a sabbatical, Bildungskarenz requires the completion of previously agreed CPD activities constituting at least 20 ECTS points or an equivalent amount of presence hours.

immediately applicable to classroom situations or changes classroom procedures (Su, 2017), CPD activities for most participants of this study are not utility oriented, which means most participants do not need to see an immediate way of transferring a certain activity into classroom practices. This is specifically true for sabbaticals/Bildungskarenz.

Instead of short-term subject-related applications most veteran women teachers are interested in topics that inherently and comprehensively benefits teaching in general. For example, they take courses in rhetoric's, mediation, relaxation techniques, highly specialized topics in linguistics, literature etc. Thus, perceptions of what is worthwhile highly depend on the context, discourses and the professional identity of the individual teacher.

*“And I would never do something I am not interested in, only to be able to spend three lessons on it. I'm not interested in that. And when I'm not interested in something, I don't do it. Unless I am forced into doing it, but I'm not.” (Maria)*

In the few cases where veteran women teachers engage in traditional CPD formats provided by PHs, it is almost exclusively to follow up on policy or curricular changes. Although participants do not specifically seem to enjoy these training and standard-based activities (Kennedy, 2014 p.338 & 342) they consider them a necessary duty of the profession and therefore essential to live up to their high personal teaching standards.

*“Over the last few years I have participated in a lot of CPD activities because of the new Matura. These (CPD activities] were not close to my heart, but I engaged with them. I have to do that if I have no idea about the new Matura, otherwise I wouldn't be able to prepare my students for it in a successful way.” (Maria)*

In general, highly committed veteran women teachers in this study engage in CPD because they consider it a core element of the teaching profession and they enjoy learning. Decisions about what to engage in are nearly always interest-driven or generated by the implementation of new teaching policies (e.g. new testing formats). CPD in the context of this study usually supports personal strengths, rather than eliminates deficits (compare Kennedy, 2014 p. 340). Finally, some see CPD as an opportunity for personal benefit – to develop as a human being - and some choose to engage in CPD because they simply enjoy working with other teachers and take pleasure in satisfying their professional curiosity.

### 5.3. How you do it – Emotions and Experiences

Acknowledging the importance of emotions for learning in general (Clement and Vanderberghe, 2000) and professional development in particular (Schwarzer-Petruck, 2014), this last section focuses on the two distinct sets of emotions participants recall during interviews: joy and frustration. Both are closely linked to the two poles of the guiding concept of autonomy encountered previously in these findings. This leads to the conceptual pairs of joy/freedom and frustration/constraint when analysing the emotions highly committed veteran women teachers attach to teaching and CPD.

#### 5.3.1. Joy/freedom

When talking about their professional lives all the women predominantly verbalize emotions of joy. They speak about pleasant encounters with students, refer to a core interest in their subject without falling for subject “tribalism” and recall various positive feelings (having fun, feeling confident etc.) associated with teaching and CPD. What is significant in all these accounts is the role participants ascribe to their colleagues and superiors when it comes to positive emotions related to their experiences as professionals.

*„And what’s definitely a big plus at my school, is the teacher community. I don’t think there are many teacher communities in Vienna that cooperate so successfully, support each other, where everything just runs smoothly and where a really, really good work atmosphere prevails.” (Susanne)*

With respect to motivational frameworks (Richardson, 2018) positive emotions due to embeddedness in rich personal relationships are not surprising. The data gathered shows once more how school cultures and workplace environment undoubtedly shape teachers’ motivation and goals. Interestingly, these teachers attribute even more importance to their head teachers, than the existing literature (e.g. Adey, 2004, Day, 2008) suggests. Highly committed veteran women teachers generally feel strongly supported and valued by their head teachers. They deliberately express how important this is for their motivation and sense of agency, not only when it comes to teaching, but also regarding CPD.

*“I have always had head teachers who highly appreciate and fully support me in what I do. (...) That might be something really important to me.” (Maria)*

Head teachers who support initiative, trust their staff, and protect teacher’s autonomy in the face of external factors (local authorities, parents, etc.) play an important role in veteran teachers’ professional lives. This result seems less surprising when taking the specific Austrian context into account in which official hierarchies and career ladders in schools are

none-existent and head teachers constitute the sole structural superior. Furthermore, the role of head teachers is also fairly autonomous, at least within the constraints set by a very old, centralized and bureaucratic education system. Autonomy in this sense seems to be a systemic expectation (Soh, 2014), which is said to be among the most influential aspects of school management and leadership (ibid.). In this sense it is astonishing that head teachers often choose not to interfere with the CPD of their teachers even though they have the power to do so. Based on the data gathered in this study head teachers seem to expect teachers to take care of their own professional development and teachers, on the other hand, expect head teachers not to interfere with their interests. This strongly contrasts Ball's (2008) position that sees teacher autonomy eroding due to external pressures in many Anglo-American contexts. What is a little bit surprising though is how little importance teachers in this sample ascribed to parents and broader societal discourses. Contradicting many arguments in predominantly English-speaking literature (e.g. Ball, 2003; Sachs, 2015 etc.) highly committed veteran women teachers in Austria feel less affected and hindered by discourses of de-professionalisation and accountability.

*"This [public discourse] doesn't hinder me at all, neither at school nor in my work. It really doesn't. I don't let that happen. (...) Sure, you sometimes have to listen to silly jokes about having so much time off. But I don't care about that." (Minerva)*

### 5.3.2. Frustration/Constraint

In accordance with the significant role of head teachers, veteran women teachers refer to conflicts with the very same when reporting negative emotions. Due to the length of their careers all the teachers worked with quite a significant number of head teachers. If participants referred to negative emotions during the interviews, they did so when talking about head teachers they did not like or could not work with. Two even mentioned changing school because of their disapproval of the management style. While Day (2008) discovered a lack of leadership as a hindering factor for teachers' commitment and motivation, veteran women teachers in this study struggled with over-monitoring and too much intervention by some of the head teachers they worked with. They express very strong opinions on colleagues and head teachers who are unable to create an amicable atmosphere and limit their autonomy regarding teaching and professional development.

*"I am actually very reliant on a very appreciative leadership. I think that this is really important for a teacher. And yes, that was difficult at my previous school. And then I came to this school where it was absolutely fantastic again." (Minerva)*

Specific to the Austrian context and probably even more so for this sample<sup>16</sup> are experiences of political leverage on individual careers. Teachers recall not being welcomed in certain schools, not being allowed to participate in certain CPD activities or not being hired for certain positions if they were not affiliated with political parties supporting the leadership team of the respective institution. Although the teachers in this study generally feel less external pressure, some also still recall frustrating encounters with parents over students' grades. As much as both seems to have been troublesome, participants mostly ascribe these issues to earlier stages in their careers, when they had "less experience" (Blanca) and were "less aplomb" (Elisabeth05).

*"Which CPD activities you engage in is also a political mindset. Well, our KPH is totally affiliated with the ÖVP<sup>17</sup>, so what am I supposed to do there?" (Elisabeth05)*

*"The Landesschulrat issued a directive back then: At Gymnasiums the position of head teacher had always been filled by an SPÖ<sup>18</sup> member. Then there was a political change and then a directive was issued, saying that Gymnasium shall be purged of any SPÖ elements." (Silvioser)*

In their current stage the main sources of frustration seem to be the implementation of "Zentralmatura" (see 3.3.) in 2014/15 (Bozuk et al., 2007). Participants' accounts strongly criticise this policy for its constraint on autonomy and its prescription of what and how to teach. Their criticism adds to the generally negative discourse of the media and regional stakeholders (union, artists, etc.), who perceive standardization as a hindrance to individual learning (ibid). For highly committed veteran women teachers in this study, the "Zentralmatura" acts as a substantially stronger incentive than the national curriculum and is also perceived as significantly intensifying teachers' workloads. What remains is the impression that more and more time in class is taken away from teachers for them to do administrative tasks they think should not be part of their profession.

*"What also totally annoys me is the "Zentralmatura" and all the administrative tasks that come with it. Not because I think that it makes no sense to compare, but its modality." (Louise)*

*"I have started to think that it is almost an imposition that I have to do such tasks, because I don't think that this is part of my job." (Maria)*

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<sup>16</sup> I would assume this is due to the age group in the sample. Political leverage in schools is still an issue in Austria, but probably less so today than it was back in the days when these women started teaching. Further research would have to be undertaken to prove this hypothesis.

<sup>17</sup> ÖVP: Austrian People's Party = Conservatives;

<sup>18</sup> SPÖ: Social Democratic Party of Austria

### 5.3.3. CPD Experiences

As stated before, traditional CPD formats are seen in a surprisingly bad light. Participants experience these as “*trivial, too easy and redundant*” in regard to their current career stage.

*“Once you have gained a certain kind of experience and when you are also engaged in activities beyond teaching in schools, or when you give lectures and are in charge of CPD activities, everything that is offered to you in obligatory CPD activities seems very, very trivial.” (Elisabeth05)*

Although all the participants recall how intensively they participated in PH workshops, seminars and credential programmes earlier on in their career, only about one third of the teachers in this study still regularly take part in traditional CPD formats provided by these institutions. Positive accounts only occurred when participants were personally involved in the planning and organisation of these workshops (e.g. SCHILF<sup>19</sup> or being a lecturer themselves), or they felt the need for specific training due to school development processes (e.g. “Freiarbeit”, “Qualitätszirkel”, implementation of new subjects).

Also, most senior career women teachers in this study do not want to participate in credential or long-term-programmes anymore, showing explicit refusals in writing longer essays as part of CPD. Nevertheless, all preferred activities that did not follow the regular afternoon-timeframe of 4 hours that is set out by the local authorities.<sup>20</sup> Providing high standard teaching in the morning and then an expectation of having to engage in professional development in the later afternoon was considered too much to do in one single day. Most participants would rather devote evenings, weekends and holidays to take part in activities that would run over two to three days in order to fully delve into a new or even familiar topic of CPD.

*“Well, I would like activities with colleagues from all over Austria which last longer than half a day, so I mean, I would prefer two-day activities with different, really excellent lecturers.” (Susanne)*

It is significant how often the veteran teachers in this study are prepared to engage in formal CPD activities that are not provided by PHs and/or officially accredited as professional development for teachers. This comes at the cost of not being able to claim reimbursement and having to invest personal free time. In general, financial constraints were no reason for these

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<sup>19</sup> SCHILF: Schulinterne Fortbildung. In-school service training. Often schools have designated SCHILF-teams that organise in-school workshops for the whole teaching staff or for designated subjects. Topics are usually defined by teachers or the head teacher, funding is provided by the PH.

<sup>20</sup> CPD is not allowed to take place during core teaching-hours so most courses are designed for teachers to attend in the afternoon after a full morning of teaching. Consequently, most courses follow a four-hour timeframe on Mo-Th.

women not to attend CPD activities they were interested in. On the contrary, participants were regularly prepared to invest quite a substantial amount of money in professional development they personally deem worthwhile.

*“(But) most CPD activities are not offered to me by school or school-related institutes [PH/KPH], although CPD is then much more expensive, it is often much more useful for school than the [traditional] offers.” (Louise)*

Furthermore, these preferred formats tend to be periodic events, veteran women teachers have already attended some time before, or they are recommendations of colleagues and friends. In contrast with traditional CPD activities at a PH, teachers in this study specifically value the broader range of participants at these events; Participants from a variety of professions, who all share a high interest and degree of expertise in the given subject. This allows for a more comprehensive perspective and the opportunity to think “outside the box”.

*Every three years a conference on giftedness [by the Austrian Research and Support Centre for the Gifted and Talented (ÖZBF)] takes place in Salzburg. I have already been to it a few times and I’m going there again in the autumn.” (Minerva)*

*“(And) (...) we are a very diverse group there, two people who are mentor teachers, too, one person from the economic sector, (...) [And it’s good that] you don’t always stew in your own juice.” (Silvioser)*

Another important driving factor is the professional set-up, the quality of the lecturers and the venue - often a nice seminar-hotel, or an interesting location in Vienna, etc. This also reveals an indirect perception of PHs and other traditional CPD activities (e.g. SCHILF) as not providing high-quality CPD in a pleasant atmosphere and thus providing for the needs of adult learners.

*“[There, the] location was really fascinating, because you learn a lot. The weather was absolutely wonderful, the city itself [was paved with] cobblestones, there was really a bit like a patina. So much was included and we were professionally supported from beginning to end. It was a really great experience. I learnt a lot there; it was really motivating for me as well.” (Subaltern)*

Interestingly, the place where CPD takes place or should not take place is vital to these teachers. Although they all participate in regular optional in-school activities (SCHILF), they agree that the most effective and enjoyable CPD took and takes place outside school, in pleasant surroundings that stimulate in-depth engagement with a certain topic. More than half even suggested or recalled activities they had taken abroad or wished for more opportunities to work



with teachers from different countries. What all accounts on CPD had in common was a strong claim for high quality lecturers.

To sum up, veteran women teachers see professional development as a professional and personal investment and are prepared to take full responsibility for it. The strong preferences for certain formats and places mirror the expectation of being treated as an autonomous adult learner beyond the nimbus of schools.

## **6. THE REVIEW - Discussion**

Life-long learning and professional development are prominent features of recent policy discourses (e.g. in Scotland: Donaldson Report, Curriculum for Excellence). Up until today, research strongly focuses on the experiences and needs of early career teachers (Kaplan and Garner, 2018; Mockler, 2011) and possible generalizations on how to successfully provide CPD (Adey, 2004). By concentrating on highly committed veteran women teachers, this study follows a different route. Data on how they approach and experience CPD is interrelated with participants' understanding of professional identity and the specifics of the Austrian context. Ensuing from these results, I follow with recommendations for the provision and organisation of professional development in different career stages, especially for more experienced teachers in Austria.

### **6.1. The significance of teacher autonomy**

The most significant result from all the interviews and regarding all three research questions is the theme of autonomy. The way in which veteran women teachers decide what forms of CPD they want to engage in, the role of and expectation towards head teachers, taking sabbatical years, etc. - all of these are pervaded by a sense of autonomy. By influencing identity, autonomy also indirectly influences how women in this study experience CPD. The values and beliefs highly committed veteran women teachers share, form the foundation upon which they make educative choices. The Austrian context of systemic autonomy provides them with opportunities to implement them. The result is a high sense of agency and efficacy that leads to sustained commitment and motivation. Teachers who are reinforced in their autonomy, valued by head teachers and their peer group and are provided with opportunities to connect with others are more likely to teach in a motivated and committed way over a long period of time.

#### **6.1.1. Inside and outside discourses**

Teacher autonomy in the Austrian context follows current neo-liberal trends of individualization and globalization and, simultaneously, old humanistic traditions. Due to its "highly portable nature" Carnoy (1998, p.22) sees knowledge as a fundamental mean of

globalization and its transmission through the notion of autonomy (ibid. p.22) as an expression of fairly new neo-liberal policy discourses. The introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2011) and the Donaldson report (Donaldson, 2010) are good examples of the recent popularity autonomy has attained in international education policies. In the Austrian context, high teacher autonomy is an old characteristic. It dates back to the scholarly tradition of the 18th century, which is still visible in today's education system (Zichy, 2010). Its distinct master-student relationships confers a high degree of responsibility, but also significant power and autonomy on the individual teacher. Although teaching is nowadays widely seen as a construction of knowledge between various individuals (Riel et al. 2002), teacher autonomy as part of an older understanding of power of one significant expert over one learning subject has survived. Thus, teacher autonomy is strong in Austria in a way that causes it to simultaneously building on old traditions of professionalism as well as new international policy trends.

Other strong discourses, such as standardization for example, seem not to affect these women, at least not in the way Akkerman and Meijer's (2011) work on teacher identity would suggest. There might be a political appetite for more policy driven approaches in Austria, e.g. the introduction of the *Zentralmatura*, but systemic expectations of autonomy help veteran women teachers to maintain their independence and freedom. On the contrary, participants in this study seem to mount active resistance against tendencies or normalization and standardization or at least bend new policies and rules in order to fit their teaching styles. This builds resilience against the pressure and deformation of the professional identity of many teachers as, for example, can be seen in Ball's (2003) work on performativity in the Anglo-American context. Veteran women teachers in this study, however, have a strong sense of professional confidence based on the autonomy and sense of agency they use to find fulfilment in teaching. This helps them to stay active, committed and – based on self-disclosure – effective in teaching for often well over twenty years.

#### 6.1.2. Autonomy, identity and CPD

A strong sense of autonomy and agency also links once more with Sachs' (2001) conception of a democratic or active teaching profession. Sachs defines collaborative and cooperative action between teachers as a key feature of democratic identities, something that can clearly be seen in veteran women teachers CPD preferences. They are likely to choose activities that supports exchange and collaboration in a way that allows them to be active adult learners, while still being valued as experienced practitioners. Lecturers who are leading experts in their field

and CPD formats that support the formation of professional communities are given as examples for these preferences.

In this way the CPD experiences of highly committed veteran women teachers contradict discourses of anti-intellectualism and problematic antagonisms of “university/academic” and “schools/professional” (Kennedy, 2015, p.340). The comparatively long initial teacher training in Austria (6+ years, including a compulsory Masters degree for all secondary school teachers) and the specific notions of being university trained (see 3.1.) shape the participants view of learning. Both add to this distinct feature of professional identity in the sample group and the positive image it ascribes to academic traditions.

Furthermore, highly committed veteran women teachers see themselves as having wider responsibilities than just the classroom and have clear emancipatory aims to reduce inequalities in a wider societal context (Sachs, 2001, p. 156). To be able to meet these intrinsically high standards, highly committed veteran women teachers are prepared to invest significant resources (time and money) in their professional development on a day-to-day basis but also, even more strikingly, in sabbaticals or *Bildungskarenz*.

## **6.2. Sabbaticals – A unique Austrian approach**

The highly committed veteran women teachers’ discussion of sabbaticals was an interesting and unexpected finding. Devoting up to twelve months to professional learning in a self-determined way, as described by participants, is probably the most visible consequence of teacher autonomy in relation to CPD. Thus, sabbaticals/*Bildungskarenz* would have to be seen as a new category in CPD frameworks such as those developed by Kennedy (2014). They combine characteristics of various modes - award-bearing, active/practitioner research, training, transformative and community of practise (Kennedy, 2014, p.338-348) - and interrelate different forms of knowledge. But they also exceed all existing categories in the unique way that they allow teachers to play a more active role in guiding their own professional development. Sabbaticals/*Bildungskarenz* position teachers as autonomous professionals and also reinforce autonomy through building up external expertise and confidence. Finally, stepping out of the school context for a significant amount of time is said by participants to allow for a more comprehensive view of learning and society. All the women recalled how important the sabbatical was for them and how strongly it boosted commitment and motivation

in a time in their career, when expertise and routines were no longer perceived as beneficial but as boring or even tiring (Day, 2008).

### **6.3. Structural Limitations**

The strong sense of autonomy and agency of veteran women teachers in Austria seems to support resilience against negative leverage from outside school and allows teachers to focus on students and teaching as the centre of their professional identity. It also has its downsides. Strong teacher autonomy without standardized means of accountability does allow for less committed teachers to work significantly below common standards and places their students at greater risk of not fully developing their potential. It is exactly this issue that limits the full transferability of the results presented here. Autonomy in the way it is enacted by highly committed veteran women teachers in this study also allows for a certain percentage of teachers not engaging in professional development at all (Rechnungshof Österreich, 2017). The focus on autonomy leaves little room or incentive for collaboration between teachers and hinders school-wide or even district-wide professional development strategies. Veteran women teachers' reluctance or even resistance to fully implement national policies, at least when it comes to standardization, puts the education system at risk of remaining resistant to change and poses challenges for nation-wide approaches and improvements. This slow pace contrasts with the 21st century's fast-changing society and workplace. In the same way as autonomy and a sense of agency supports initiatives for change on the micro-level it can also form a barrier for it on the macro-level.

### **6.4. What to do next? - Recommendations**

The fragmented nature of the Austrian education system makes it difficult to generalize, an phenomenon that is even more true for professional development that strongly depends on the individual, the individual's workplace and the distinct activities he/she engages in. The scale of this study (time, sample size, institutionalized support) allows for an insight into a very small population with very distinct characteristics that can only be the starting point of further investigation. Nevertheless, it allows for tentative suggestions on where to probe further.

In the given Austrian context (relatively high value attributed to academic programmes, strong autonomy etc.) and with regard to Kennedy's (2014) framework of professional development,

it is surprising that the category of Action Research/Practitioners Research<sup>21</sup> was not mentioned more often by the participants. I would strongly advise investing more time and financial resources in teachers and their research interests to support them with potential internal school research projects. Incentives and information on how to tackle challenges in school with a practitioner research approach would link with teachers' sense of autonomy and professional confidence. It further removes antagonisms of "academic" and "professionals" and can be highly beneficial for the research portfolio of a small country like Austria. Practitioner research would also concur with the recent fusion of Austria's initial teacher training programme (see 3.1.) that also provides an amalgamation of strong traditions on academic and practical work.

In light of the results of this study concerning identity and CPD, a combination of Practitioner Research and sabbatical/Bildungskarenz could further strengthen Austria's specific approach towards comprehensive professional development and would support even more teachers in maintaining commitment and motivation over the length of a full career.

CPD providers as well as schools could benefit from tailored formats for teachers at different stages of their careers. Veteran women teachers in this study clearly articulated different expectations and needs regarding CPD than they expect from and see their early career colleagues having. Periodical events, for example, can play an important role in motivating especially older teachers to take part in professional development over a longer period of time. These formats seem to remain relevant even when participants have already turned away from the traditional activities provided by PHs.

The limitations of this study provide starting points for future research. Comparative studies on teacher autonomy in similar or significantly different national and international contexts would further strengthen an in-depth understanding of the concept. In particular the question of autonomy in other stages of a teacher's career and how it links with efficiency in general would be interesting. The missing theoretical focus on literature on sabbaticals/Bildungskarenz with this study necessitates a closer look at them in future projects. Their implications for personal and staff development in schools should not be underestimated. Furthermore, veteran women teachers' resilience and confidence could be a starting point for further investigation of job satisfaction and health. Despite or maybe due to the focus on highly committed teachers, one third of the participants in this project mention experiences of burn-out. Finally, it is the gender aspect that this study shows to be worth exploring. As this was not a predominant part

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<sup>21</sup> Kennedy uses Action Research for a more recent conceptualisation of the differences between action research and practitioner research see Menter et al. (2011).

of the original research design, it led to missed opportunities to understand women teachers' experiences in schools and with CPD even better. Further studies could fill this gap by exploring the way teachers' careers, their experiences, emotions and approaches towards CPD are shaped by gender and gender implications - not only in Austria but also in comparison with other countries around the world.

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