The influence of attribution style on beginning teachers’ professional learner identities

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Abstract

It is well documented that entry into the teaching profession tests beginning teachers’ ability to cope and build capacity as they encounter the realities of teaching. Professional learning – particularly through mentoring and induction – has been identified as important for beginning teachers to effectively manage early professional practice, and to go on to thrive as teachers. For this reason, the development of professional learner identities is of significant interest in beginning teacher research. The aim of this research is to generate deeper understandings of the ways beginning teachers develop their identities as professional learners in their first year of teaching.

Discussion about beginning teachers’ engagement with professional learning is often focused on externally driven accountabilities such as the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and Teacher Registration Authority requirements. Significant responsibility has also been placed on schools to provide professional learning environments that meet the needs of teachers entering the profession. This approach to professional learning for beginning teachers, however, has a number of problems. First, access to quality professional learning environments has been shown to be highly inconsistent for those starting their teaching careers. Second, intentional engagement with professional learning, rather than an externally driven obligation to participate, is significant to the success of teachers from the outset of their careers. Third, professional learning provision generated in response to teacher standards and associated accountability measurers often fails to acknowledge the importance of internal motivation and attitude to beginning teachers’ sense of a professional learner identity.

Framed within the theory of attribution, this study was motivated by the following research question: How do first-year teachers’ responses to their experiences influence the
development of their professional learner identities? Attribution theory provides an explanation for how individuals make meaning of their experiences by determining causality for the outcomes of these experiences, thereby influencing their subsequent actions. Using a mixed methodology, whereby attribution theory informed data collection and analysis, this study investigated first-year teachers’ attributions of causality following a range of experiences to understand the influence of these attributions on the development of their professional learner identities. Participants in this study were drawn from independent schools across Queensland, Australia in 2015 and 2016. First, I administered an adaptation of the Causal Dimension Scale II (CDSII) as an online survey tool with 57 first-year teachers reporting their experiences and attributions of causality for perceived outcomes. Following this, I conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 16 first-year teachers who provided rich insights into the ways in which their attributional responses to experiences influenced the development of their professional learner identities.

Through the use of descriptive statistical and thematic analysis for the survey and interview data respectively, the findings illustrated that attributions of causality were significant for first-year teachers in the development of their identities as professional learners across varied school contexts. Participants responding to their experiences using a balance of attributional behaviours were best able to maintain positive attitudes as professional learners despite the challenges and demands of entry into the profession. In contrast, predominantly unvaried and habitual attributional responses across many experiences negatively impacted the extent to which participants perceived thinking and acting as a professional learner to be purposeful, necessary and manageable. These findings also demonstrated that first-year teachers’ perceptions of their school contexts impacted the ways they made meaning of their experiences and thus their ability to enact their envisaged professional learner identities as they progressed through the first year of teaching.
In an era of standardisation and accountability, this study draws attention to the need to expand current approaches to supporting first-year teachers beyond the provision of professional learning, with current models of professional learning proposed by external accountabilities and standardised regimes insufficient for the development of positive professional learner identities and building capacity within the workforce. This study highlights the importance to a number of stakeholders of taking into account first-year teachers’ attributional behaviours and attitudes to professional learning; they include policy makers, teacher educators, school leaders and those responsible for beginning teachers’ induction into the profession. This study makes an important contribution to research about effective support for teachers as they commence teaching, their professional and personal growth, and their identity work as professional learners.
Statement of originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.
# Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. iii

Statement of originality ........................................................................................................................ vi

List of figures and tables ....................................................................................................................... xiii

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................... xv

Chapter 1 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

  Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 1
  Background .......................................................................................................................................... 2
    
    *Entering the teaching profession* .................................................................................................... 2
    *Professional learning in policy* .......................................................................................................... 4
  
  The research problem ....................................................................................................................... 9
  The research aim and question .......................................................................................................... 13
  The context ........................................................................................................................................... 15
  The significance of the research .................................................................................................... 16
  Limitations of the study .................................................................................................................. 17
  The structure of this thesis ............................................................................................................... 18

Chapter 2 Literature review ............................................................................................................... 21

  Introduction .......................................................................................................................................... 21

  The experiences of beginning teachers ............................................................................................... 22
    *Practice-related experiences* ............................................................................................................ 24
    *Context-related experiences* .......................................................................................................... 25
    *Professional learning* ..................................................................................................................... 27
  
  Professional learning: An evolving conceptualisation .................................................................... 28
  Professional learning for the beginning teacher ............................................................................... 35
Beginning teacher participation in professional learning ........................................38

Quality professional learning .............................................................................. 38

The beginning teacher as professional learner .................................................. 43

Teacher identity and the professional learner ..................................................... 48

Teacher identity construction ............................................................................. 50

Summary and conclusions .................................................................................. 54

Chapter 3 Theoretical framework .................................................................... 58

Introduction .......................................................................................................... 58

Weiner’s theory of attribution .............................................................................. 58

Dimensions of causality ...................................................................................... 60

Dimension of locus ............................................................................................. 61

Dimension of stability .......................................................................................... 62

Dimension of controllability ............................................................................... 62

Responses to attributions .................................................................................... 63

Responses to the dimension of locus .................................................................. 64

Responses to the dimension of stability .............................................................. 65

Responses to the dimension of controllability .................................................... 66

Attribution styles: Positive and negative ............................................................. 68

The process of attributing causality ................................................................... 70

Synthesis and discussion .................................................................................... 75

Chapter 4 Methodology ..................................................................................... 78

Introduction .......................................................................................................... 78

A mixed methodology .......................................................................................... 78

My role as researcher ........................................................................................... 80

My professional background .............................................................................. 80
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My role in this study</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1 research methods</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................... Data instrument: An online survey (CDSII) ..........</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................... Participant recruitment in Phase 1 ...............</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2 research methods</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................... Data instrument: A semi-structured interview ....</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................... Participant recruitment in Phase 2 ...............</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................... Fereday and Muir-Cochrane’s (2006) approach to qualitative analysis</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................... Application of the hybrid approach ...............</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................... Reporting of findings from interview data .......</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency and trustworthiness in mixed methodology</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................... Phase 1: Trustworthiness (validity) and reliability (consistency)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................... Phase 2: Consistency and trustworthiness .........</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................... Ethical considerations ................................</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 Survey findings</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The first two findings</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................... The complexities of teachers’ work ..............</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................... Shared responsibility ...........................</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further findings</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6 Interview findings ................................................................. 134

Introduction ......................................................................................... 134

Five narratives .................................................................................. 135

Damien .............................................................................................. 136

Mark .................................................................................................. 139

Liz ....................................................................................................... 142

Nadia ............................................................................................... 145

Heather ........................................................................................... 148

Findings ............................................................................................. 152

Finding 1: Individualised versus collective responsibility and accountability . 153

Finding 2: The envisaged versus lived experiences of the professional learner 155

Finding 3: Perpetuating the status quo: Individual, social and critical reflection 157

Finding 4: Disruption and reinforcement of professional learner identities .... 159

Summary and discussion ................................................................... 161
Appendix I: QUALTRICS statistical analysis .................................................. 260
Appendix J: Semi-structured interview schedule ........................................... 264
Appendix K: Interview email to principals .................................................. 266
Appendix L: Plain Language Statement for interviews ................................. 267
Appendix M: Interview consent form ....................................................... 270
Appendix N: Sample coding frame ............................................................ 271
Appendix O: Sample connecting codes matrix ......................................... 274
Appendix P: Ethics approval ..................................................................... 276
Appendix Q: Ethical considerations summary .......................................... 277
List of figures and tables

Figures

3.1 Weiner’s (1985, 1986) dimensions of causality .................................................. 61
3.2 Adapted from Weiner’s (1985, 1986) conceptualisations of attributional responses ................................................................. 64
3.3 Attribution styles ........................................................................................................ 68
3.4 The process of attributing causality ........................................................................ 71
3.5 Theoretical framework based on Weiner’s theory of attribution (1985, 1986) ........75
5.1 Teachers’ work........................................................................................................... 117
5.2 Key causes identified to explain outcomes of teaching experiences ..................... 121
5.3 Perceptions of control for successful outcomes ..................................................... 125
5.4 Attributions of control over causes of unsuccessful outcomes ............................... 127
5.5 Likelihood that causes for unsuccessful experiences would change .................... 128
5.6 Likelihood that causes of successful experiences would stay the same ............... 129
5.7 Distribution of Likert scale scores following successful outcomes ..................... 131
5.8 Distribution of Likert scale scores following unsuccessful outcomes ................... 131

Tables

4.1 Geographic location and size of Queensland independent schools (June 2015) ......85
4.2 Number of first-year teachers by geographic location ........................................... 86
4.3 Survey participants by geographic location of the workplace ................................. 88
4.4 Size of participating schools .................................................................................... 89
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Chapter 1 Introduction

Introduction

The broad issue addressed in this thesis is the professional learning of beginning teachers. Professional learning has long been understood as part of the work of teachers. Participation in professional learning has been demonstrated to assist teachers to respond to the changing needs of students as well as serve as a means of support in a profession that is inherently demanding and complex. Furthermore, advocacy for professional learning for beginning teachers has been particularly prominent throughout both education research and policy. Standardisation in the teaching profession, as documented both globally and in Australia, has led to a focus on professional learning as a matter of compliance in many quarters (Hardy, 2018a). In order to be effective, however, professional learning needs to be undertaken in proactive and intentional ways in the diverse contexts in which teaching occurs. I join with others to contend that teachers need to develop their orientations as professional learners, whereby they consider engagement with professional learning as more than a requirement of the job, but instead as an appropriate and empowering response to their teaching experiences.

More precisely, then, this thesis focuses on the ways in which beginning teachers engage in professional learning and develop their orientations as professional learners. I investigate the ways in which a sample of Australian first-year teachers responded to their experiences, and how their responses influenced their attitudes to professional learning. In doing so, I contribute to current national and international empirical research on effective professional learning support for beginning teachers.

It is important at the outset to define the term ‘professional learning’, as it has been conceptualised for the purpose of this thesis. The definition I draw on in this work is that articulated by Mockler (2013, p. 45), who argues that ‘authentic and generative teacher professional learning
grows out of an understanding that good professional learning supports the formation of robust teacher identities, supporting teachers to develop their skills and capacities in relation to their contexts’. This definition acknowledges that professional learning that is transformative consists of more than the consumption of knowledge though participation in workshops, seminars and the like; rather, it requires an investment on the part of the teacher, and engagement with professional learning that is both relevant and meaningful. I return to a discussion of the varied conceptualisations and definitions about teacher professional learning in Chapter 2.

**Background**

In the following sections, I address the contextual background of this study.

**Entering the teaching profession**

The term ‘beginning teachers’ commonly refers to teachers with up to three to five years of experience (AITSL, 2016). They are also referred to as ‘early career teachers’. In their early years, most teachers work to develop and consolidate the skills and knowledge they learned during their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs. Research shows that these beginning years represent a period of important achievements as well as significant challenges. In relation to the latter, beginning teachers are often called on to deal with, among other factors, intense workloads, out-of-field teaching and the challenges of an increased performative and evaluative teaching culture (Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Roosenboom, & Volman, 2017; Gu & Day, 2013; Larsen & Allen, 2016; Lew & Nelson, 2016). Ball (2003) defines performativity as a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and … measures of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality’ … As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization.

Beginning teachers can feel that their practice is heavily scrutinised as they work to demonstrate their capacity against the teacher standards as well as meet school and systemic expectations.
Many beginning teachers find the first year of teaching in particular to be difficult, as they encounter new and challenging experiences in contexts that may be unfamiliar to them. Required to ‘hit the ground running’ (Veasey, 2012, p. 4), beginning teachers are commonly expected to deliver quality instruction to their students from their first day on the job. In many ways, as Zembytska (2015, p. 105) points out, ‘beginning teachers are expected to perform on the level of veteran teachers, which often poses severe challenges to inexperienced novices’. In Australia, the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group’s (TEMAG) Report, Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers (2014), draws attention to the need for new teachers to be ready to take on the numerous responsibilities of teaching on their initial entry into the profession. This initiation into the profession has been referred to as a ‘baptism of fire’ (Breusch, 2004; Weasmer & Woods, 2000). While this metaphor and others applied to the experiences of beginning teachers can appear to be rather extreme, there is much research that demonstrates that entry into the profession can be both difficult and demanding.

Professional learning is recognised as particularly beneficial for beginning teachers for a range of reasons. Kennedy (2014) and others (e.g. Colbert, Brown, Choi, & Thomas, 2008; Fenwick & Weir, 2010; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Kang, 2011; Yuen, 2012) state that professional learning specifically supports beginning teachers to bridge the theory-to-practice gap as they enter the profession, providing opportunities for them to continue developing their pedagogical capabilities and, in turn, support their students’ learning (Ferguson-Patrick, 2010; Timperley, 2011b). Other research has demonstrated that professional learning – particularly in the form of induction programs inclusive of mentoring, can assist beginning teachers to maintain their sense of self-efficacy, resilience and motivation (Helms-Lorenz, Slof, & van der Grift, 2013; Johnson et al., 2014; Mayer & Lloyd, 2011), increase professional capacity in areas such as planning and classroom management (Glazerman et al., 2010), and assist with beginning teachers’ sense of belonging, reducing the stress and anxiety often associated with entry into teaching (Anthony,
As a consequence, beginning teacher professional learning has also been credited with helping to ameliorate issues of early career teacher attrition (Anthony et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2010; Kapadia, Coca, & Easton, 2007; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Queensland College of Teachers (QCT), 2013; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014; Yost, 2006).

**Professional learning in policy**

Intense performative pressure is currently being placed on schools internationally. The globalisation of education means that nations are under pressure to remain competitive in a global education market (Hursh, 2001), measured to a large extent by international standardised assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). These assessments, along with other global sources of comparative data, such as the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2012), create a connection between student outcomes, teacher quality and economic competitiveness that acts to frame what good teachers know and do (Robertson & Sorenson, 2017). Global comparisons such as these have resulted in a ‘transnational policy’ shift in education (Goldhaber, 2015; Hardy, 2018b; Ozga, 2013) as international governments seek an upward shift in their international rankings.

In countries such as the United States, Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland and Australia, education policy is focused on reforms intended to achieve the improvement of teaching. According to Kennedy (2015, p. 6), these policies position teachers as instrumental in improving student outcomes and thus driving economic advancement. As a consequence, teachers’ work has become increasingly standardised, regulated and measured for impact in what is referred to by many as an ‘era of accountability’ (Buchanan, 2015; Chouinard, 2013). Kennedy (2015) argues that
professional learning has become the global ‘hyper-narrative’ in policy for education reform and, as a consequence, has become externally driven by policy that places emphasis on externally driven accountabilities placed on teachers to participate in professional learning through the standardisation and regulation of their work. Mockler (2017, p. 275) concurs, stating:

Teacher professional learning and development has become increasingly tied to the agendas of standards and accountability, counted and quantified in hours and linked increasingly to improving student performance on standardised tests and other limited measures.

The expectation that teachers will provide ‘calculated’ evidence of their educational practice (Hardy, 2018a, p. 3) is shaping their work as professional learners.

England is one country where professional learning has been a focus of policy-making in education. The Teachers’ Standards (Department of Education (United Kingdom), 2013, p. 13), implemented since 2012, specifically state that teachers must ‘take responsibility for improving teaching through appropriate professional development, responding to advice and feedback from colleagues’. A Continuing Professional Development Framework for Teachers was developed by the British Council in 2015 to support teachers to develop professional learning plans across 12 listed professional practices. In 2016, the Standard for Teachers’ Professional Development was released in England as a set of requirements for the implementation of quality professional development.

Policy in the United States shows a similar shift, first demonstrated in 2001 with the ‘No Child Left Behind’ initiative and then in 2009 with the ‘Race to the Top’ agenda. Both the National Board of Professional Teacher Standards (NBPTS) (2018) and teacher standards enacted at the state level include expectations for engagement in professional learning. Professional development plans are required by all teachers in many states and are used as part of performance processes in teacher evaluation and for licence renewal. Mandatory Continuous Professional Development (CPD), whereby teachers are required to undertake a predetermined minimum number of professional
learning hours, is required in some states, such as Colorado, where teachers are required to complete 90 hours of professional development every five years to be eligible for licence renewal. Many other nations, including Scotland, England and Australia, have adopted the mandatory CPD model for professional learning.

In Australia, policy initiatives reflect a similar trend. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (hereafter referred to as ‘the Standards’ (AITSL, 2014) were introduced in 2011 and later revised in 2014. These Standards provide a nationally consistent set of expectations of what teachers need to know and do at all career stages from Graduate Teacher through to Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher levels. The Standards are categorised into three domains: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement. Across these domains, seven standards are detailed, with Standard 6: Engaging professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community, being the most relevant to this study. This Standard, aligned to the third domain of Professional Engagement, specifies that teachers, including those at the beginning of their careers, are required to participate in professional learning for the purpose of improving practice.

Pre-service teachers must provide evidence of their practice at the Graduate level against these seven Standards throughout their ITE programs and, from 2019, successfully undertake a Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) in their final year of study prior to graduation to demonstrate competence against the majority of these Standards. All teachers are required to reach a minimum career stage recognised as Proficient across a period of two years from their entry into professional practice. To progress from provisional to full teacher registration, beginning teachers are required to gather and present evidence of their practice against each of the Standards.

In 2012, the Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders (hereafter referred to as ‘the Charter’) (AITSL, 2012) was introduced to specify
expectations for teachers and schools with regard to their professional learning obligations. The Charter (AITSL, 2012, p. 6) outlines:

- the importance of professional learning
- the qualities of a professional learning culture
- the characteristics of effective professional learning, and
- the shared commitment and responsibility of teachers, school leaders and those who support them to engage in professional learning to improve educational outcomes for all young Australians.

Schools are charged with the responsibility of developing a culture of professional learning and ensuring access to quality professional learning experiences for all teachers. The Charter (AITSL, 2012, p. 6) also clearly articulates the expectation that teachers will ‘take responsibility for, and actively engage in, professional learning in order to build their capacity and that of others’.

The externally driven expectation that Australian teachers participate in professional learning is further evidenced by professional learning requirements for ongoing teacher registration. All teachers, including beginning teachers, are required to participate in a defined number of hours of CPD in order to maintain teacher registration. A 20 hour per annum CPD requirement for teacher registration in Queensland was legislated through QCT in 2006 and came into effect in 2010. The Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) has equivalent mandatory requirements. The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) mandates that teachers participate in 100 hours of CPD over a five-year period. CPD is required to demonstrate consideration of the Standards.

The expectation that access to quality professional learning will be provided to beginning teachers through induction and mentoring is also included in Australian professional learning policy (AITSL, 2012; Lovett & Cameron, 2011; Phillips, 2008). TEMAG (2014), tasked with investigating the quality of ITE in Australia, proposed that the provision of improved mentoring and induction
processes was essential for beginning teachers. The TEMAG report (2014, p. 40) recommended that ‘school systems and employers provide an effective induction for all beginning teachers’ and that ‘schools and the profession have a fundamental responsibility to develop beginning teachers to full professional proficiency’ (TEMAG, 2014, p. 39). The report also stated that the provision of ‘improved induction depends on a strong and supportive school culture that directs resources to ongoing professional learning’ (TEMAG, 2014, p. 39). Reduced teaching loads, professional learning opportunities and teacher release for beginning teachers were recommended as practices to enable beginning teachers to engage in induction and mentoring activities.

Following TEMAG, a further review of Australia’s education system was conducted in 2017 and reported on in *Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Academic Excellence in Australian Schools* in March 2018. This review undertook to:

recommend ways that Australia could improve student outcomes, return to being one of the top education systems in the world, and ensure that school systems and schools truly prepare Australia’s young people for an ever-changing world (Department of Education and Training, 2018, p. vii).

Among the recommendations and findings, this report calls for schools to:

Create a continuously improving profession through the provision of high-quality professional learning for teachers; appropriate to their career stage, development needs and the changes rapidly occurring in society.

Specifically, the report draws attention to the needs of beginning teachers as follows:

Implementation of effective induction practices and appropriate conditions are critical to support the transition from initial teacher education into the profession for early career teachers, and play an important role in promoting retention and professional growth (Department of Education and Training, 2018, p. xvi).
In many countries, the enactment of professional learning policy has been problematic. First, there is inherent variation in policy enactment across contexts (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012; Maguire, Braun, & Ball, 2015). Second, policy requirements may result in teachers’ externally motivated compliance with activities as opposed to internally motivated engagement.

**The research problem**

Enacting professional learning policy has been problematic due to translations of policy, and the various human and capital resources available in schools for quality implementation. As a consequence, the form and quality of professional learning has been found to differ widely from school to school (Choy, Wong, Lim, & Chong, 2013; Crosswell & Beutel, 2013; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Donnelly et al., 2005; Hsieh, 2015; Yuen, 2012). According to Pedder and MacBeath (2008) and Tang and Choi (2009), schools experience significant challenges in developing processes to support the implementation of comprehensive professional learning approaches due partly to the work intensification experienced at the school and system levels. Providing the required time, expertise and financial investment to develop quality professional learning has proved to be difficult, and is beyond the capacity of some schools.

The problem of access to high-quality professional learning is exacerbated by the casualisation of beginning teacher work in Australia. Temporary or relief work arrangements often lead to reduced professional support for beginning teachers, either as a consequence of short-term or inconsistent placement across school contexts, or funding decisions undertaken by the school to prioritise professional learning for continuing or permanent staff (Patrick, Elliot, Hulme, & McPhee, 2010). Despite the fact that many beginning teachers work on a casual basis in their first year, accessing induction programs even when they do secure full-time work can be difficult (AITSL, 2016; Latifoglue, 2016; Mayer et al., 2015; QCT, 2013). Induction and mentoring programs are often unavailable for these beginning teachers. Those working in regional or remote
areas of Australia also have difficulties accessing high-quality professional learning. Distance from collegial networks, strained resources such as funding and time release, and a lack of available or appropriate staff to conduct programs can limit access (Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015; Sullivan & Johnson, 2012). For beginning teachers in such contexts, professional learning is not readily available (Ratliffe, 2012).

Research internationally demonstrates this inconsistent access to professional learning opportunities. According to results compiled on the experiences of new teachers from the 2012 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (Jensen, Sandoval-Hernández, Knoll, & Gonzalez, 2012), 91% of principals reported that teachers have access to induction programs. Only half of the teachers in this same survey, however, reported having access. In addition, only 19% of principals reported providing mentoring programs for beginning teachers in their schools. The international report, Education at a Glance 2012, released by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2012), identified little difference between the amount of support provided to beginning teachers through induction processes and that provided to their more experienced counterparts. It would seem while school leaders may believe their schools to provide appropriate and effective levels of induction, beginning teachers may find the initiatives in place to be less than satisfactory in terms of meeting their own individual professional learning needs.

The findings are similar at a national level. A large-scale stakeholder survey conducted by AITSL in 2016 of 1287 school leaders and 2268 teachers found a significant discrepancy between access to induction as reported by principals and beginning teachers’ reports pertaining to this access. Of those leaders surveyed, 89% indicated that formal induction programs were available to the beginning teachers in their schools. In contrast, only 49% of the teachers in these contexts reported having access to induction programs. Findings from beginning teachers’ responses in the SETE Report (Mayer et al., 2015) indicated that formal mentor arrangements were inconsistently available.
Findings in the 2013 QCT report, *Attrition of Recent Queensland Graduate Teachers*, were slightly more positive. However, 29% of beginning teachers surveyed who had left the profession reported receiving no professional learning related to their needs, and 21% reported that they did not participate in an induction program. Significantly, of the 70% of the survey participants who had been employed on a relief/casual or contract basis, 65% reported that they had not participated in an induction program during their employment as beginning teachers. Even where beginning teachers were working in schools involved in government-supported induction initiatives, access was variable. One such government-supported induction initiative, the *Beginning Teacher Time Release* program (BeTTR), was implemented in schools in Tasmania (Kidd, Brown, & Fitzallen, 2015). Findings from this much smaller-scale quantitative study indicated that contributing factors to variable access included: (1) the geographic location of the school; (2) differing levels of school support and available resources for implementation; (3) inconsistent skills of participating mentors; (4) available time for implementation; and (5) the employment status of beginning teachers, with casual staff experiencing diminished access. Of the 91 beginning teachers in the sample, 21% reported that they had received no or very little access to induction in their first year of teaching. Beutel, Crosswell, Willis, Spooner-Lane, Curtis and Churchward (2017) found similar issues in their mentoring work with schools in rural and remote locations in Queensland, where appropriate staff to implement these programs were difficult to find and retain. Another Australian study by Schuck, Aubusson, Buchannan, Varadharajan and Burke (2018) reported comparable findings, with the professional learning provided as part of a government-funded initiative in New South Wales inconsistently operationalised in schools. The authors determined that ‘implementation occurs within the context of competing local priorities. As a result, the intention of the system mandates may be diluted by the realities of the individual school contexts and demands.’

It would, therefore, seem problematic for beginning teachers to rely on the provision of quality professional learning to develop as professional learners. Beginning teachers could find
themselves in the precarious position of being ‘helplessly tossed about by the prevailing situational winds’ (Funder, 2010, p. 569), dependent upon their contexts as their source of professional learning and without the capacity to overcome a ‘restrictive’ professional learning environment (Fox, Wilson, & Deaney, 2011; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004). Moreover, beginning teachers may be faced with professional learning that may not meet their specific needs due to a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach (Roehrig & Luft, 2006).

Furthermore, a number of international and Australian researchers argue that the current focus on externally driven requirements for teachers to participate in professional learning is insufficient to develop beginning teachers who are internally motivated and committed as professionals (Ball, 2016; Beauchamp, Clarke, Hulme, & Murray, 2015; Biesta, 2013; Mockler, 2013). Eren (2014, p. 74) refers to this accountability-driven approach as ‘assigned responsibility’, and states that such assignation does not create the same level of commitment and priority for participation that self-assigned responsibility does. Leonard and Roberts (2016) warn that external accountabilities reduce professional learning to a performance task. Vaughan and McLaughlin (2011) add that, even if beginning teachers engage in compliant participation, the impact on their practice may be compromised through a lack of commitment to the process. Supporting this view, Beck and Young (2005, p. 184) found that in England, ‘cherished identities and commitments have been undermined’ through processes of external measurement. The teaching profession as a collective is feeling a loss of autonomy in many areas of its work, including teacher learning, with these decisions now increasingly regulated and determined by governments.

Importantly, in his seminal work on teacher identity, Gee (2000) states that individuals have the choice of whether or not to engage in defined activities that identify them as a certain kind of person. While registration authorities and those responsible for performance assessments in schools may create the situation in which beginning teachers feel obliged to engage in specific activities, Gee (2000, p. 14) explains that we cannot ‘coerce anyone into seeing particular experiences … as
constitutive (in part) of the kind of person they are.’ Beginning teachers may elect to reject or withdraw from professional learning or may participate in professional learning with limited intent where they do not see professional learning as constitutive of the teacher they are or aspire to be. Thus understanding how to support beginning teachers to take ‘up the identity of ongoing professional learners’ (Crosswell & Beutel, 2013, p. 153) is essential.

In this thesis, I argue that developing an identity as a professional learner, where beginning teachers perceive professional learning to be a productive response to their early experiences as a teacher, is an important part of their professional growth. Understanding how beginning teachers develop and sustain intentional and proactive professional learner identities is essential in order to support them in managing the challenges they encounter at the outset of their careers. I argue that the current models of external accountability and performativity are unlikely to promote meaningful engagement in professional learning, and that first-year teachers need to be assisted to develop and sustain the kind of commitment to professional learning required to positively impact their teaching practice.

**The research aim and question**

The aim of this study is to generate deeper understandings of the ways beginning teachers develop their identities as professional learners in their first year of teaching. The research question for this study is:

*How do first-year teachers’ responses to their experiences influence the development of their professional learner identities?*

Attribution theory, as developed by Bernard Weiner in 1985 and 1986, is used to frame this research. Attribution theory provides insight into the ways in which individuals determine causality (that is, why things turned out the way they did) for the outcomes of their experiences. Attribution
theorists categorise these experiences as successful and unsuccessful. Further, the theory elucidates how perceptions of causality then influence individuals’ subsequent actions and responses. I use attribution theory in this research as a way of thinking about how first-year teachers as a group perceive and then respond to their professional experiences, in order to investigate the impact of these responses on the development of their professional learner identities. Attribution theory provides a frame for investigating how first-year teachers navigate through the contemporary policy environment that threatens to hold teachers as the ‘sole proprietors of their success and failure’ (Stern, 2012, p. 391) in ways that instead enable them to maintain their positivity about professional learning and its purposeful place in their work.

For this research, I collected data from first-year teachers working in independent schools across Queensland, Australia, in 2015 and 2016, using a two-phase mixed methods approach. The focus on first-year teachers as a cohort of beginning teachers is pertinent due to the significant challenges and unfamiliar experiences they encounter as they enter the teaching profession, as discussed previously. In Phase 1 of the study, online survey data were collected from 57 first-year teachers using an adaptation of a pre-developed tool, the Causal Dimension Scale II (McAuley, Duncan, & Russell, 1992). These data provided insight into the ways in which first-year teachers sought to make meaning of their teaching experiences and to understand why these experiences turned out the way they did (henceforth referred to as ‘the outcomes of the experiences’ or ‘outcomes’). Phase 2 consisted of 16 individual, face-to-face semi-structured interviews undertaken with another sample of first-year teachers working in the same context.

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1 In accordance with attribution theorists, I have also used the terms ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ in this thesis, with the understanding that individuals perceive the outcomes of their experiences along a continuum from successful to unsuccessful. In the study, the outcomes of experiences are self-perceived.

2 Queensland is one of eight Australian states and territories. It is the second largest of all the states and territories in area, and the third largest in population.
The context

This study was conducted in the independent school sector, which comprises one of three school sectors in Australia, the others being the state (government) and Catholic education sectors. According to the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA, 2018) website:

Independent schools are diverse, in terms of the communities they serve, their student population, their size and nature. This diversity has long been considered a major strength of the Australian schooling system, serving the needs of geographically dispersed, socially mixed, multicultural and multi-faith populations.

The independent sector employs first-year teachers across a rich array of contexts, which proved highly informative to the work undertaken in this study. Independent schools include faith-affiliated and non-denominational schools, Montessori and Steiner schools, schools based upon total education and neo-humanistic principles, grammar schools, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community schools, schools catering for specific disabilities, special assistance schools for disengaged youth, and trade schools. While first-year teachers in independent schools are required to meet the same standards and accountabilities as teachers in all other sectors, schools independently determine the kinds of support and professional learning programs that will be made available at the school site.

While conceptualising and collecting data for this research, I worked as Manager (Teaching and Learning) for Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ). This organisation, while not an authoritative body, provides support and guidance to independent schools. My role involved working with schools throughout the state to provide professional learning to teachers at all career stages and to support school improvement processes. In this role, I had the opportunity to experience at first hand the richness and diversity of school settings that would become the context for this research.
The significance of the research

The significance of this research is fourfold. First, this research adds to knowledge through a focus on the professional learner identity development of first-year teachers. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 2, the weight of the research in this area has been on the challenges facing beginning teachers, the importance of professional learning and the most effective professional learning for their needs. Issues around access and quality of professional learning for the beginning teacher have also been well researched. This study is also one of few undertaken across multiple independent school sites in Queensland.

Second, this thesis has the potential to contribute to current international and Australian education policy. Policies intended to reform the quality of teaching as nations compete within a global economy to achieve high educational outcomes have at their foundation a focus on teachers’ professional learning and seek to do so through external professional learning expectations and accountabilities. This thesis contributes to current research on professional learning by underscoring the importance of internal motivation and commitment to professional learning that can drive first-year teachers’ authentic and purposeful engagement as teacher-learners.

The third significant contribution made by this research is to theory. I used Weiner’s (1985, 1986) theory of attribution to provide understanding into participants’ experiences, responses and subsequent identity development as professional learners in the complex work environment of the first-year teacher. I have integrated Weiner’s theory of attribution with the work of attribution-style theorists and principles of reflective practice to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework that acknowledges both the individual and context during the attributional process. To my knowledge, attribution theory has not been used to frame previous research on this topic. In addition, while attribution theory has been used in some education research, it has been used mainly in quantitative research (see Chapter 3). This research is significant in its use of attribution theory in a mixed methods study.
The findings from this research also have the potential to support first-year teachers to reflect on and develop their self-awareness about the impact of their interpretations of their teaching experiences on the development of their professional learner identities. The study’s findings could also be of interest to teacher educators, supervising teachers during professional experience placements for pre-service teachers, and mentors working in schools as part of induction programs. Furthermore, this study is significant to stakeholders responsible for the development and implementation of policy-driven and systemic support initiatives for beginning teachers.

Limitations of the study

Notwithstanding the significance of the research, I acknowledge some limitations. First, the research was limited in scope, in that I recruited participants working only in independent schools in Queensland. These school contexts may not be completely representative of working conditions in schools from other Queensland school sectors, or those schools located in other states and territories across Australia. Similar research in other school sectors remains to be undertaken. Nevertheless, the inclusion of participants from multiple and diverse school sites in the empirical work of this thesis may provide transferable insights to other cohorts of beginning teachers, both in Australia and internationally.

A related limitation is that the research involved only first-year teachers. While appropriate to this research study, the generalisability of the findings from this research to other beginning teachers in their second and third years of teaching cannot be assured. It was not my intention that the findings from this study would be representative of all teachers considered to be beginning teachers. Such generalisability of findings across beginning teacher cohorts would require further targeted studies or the implementation of longitudinal research.

A possible third limitation of the research is that I did not include other school staff working alongside the participants as a source of data. Mentors, colleagues or school leaders may have
provided additional insight into participants’ responses to their teaching experiences and their engagement as professional learners; however, for the purposes of this study, my interest was in the perceptions of the first-year teachers themselves, and the impact of their perceptions on their professional learner identity development. According to Smith, Mackie, and Claypool (2015, p. 4), ‘the content of our thoughts, the goals towards which we strive, and the feelings we have about people and activities—all the ways we act and react in the social world—are based on what we believe the world is like’. A case study approach collecting data from multiple viewpoints is a matter for further research.

The structure of this thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. This current chapter provides the background to the research through locating it within the current international and national policy scene and introducing key themes of beginning teachers, professional learning and teacher identity. A general overview of the research is provided, establishing the scope and significance of the research. The research aim, research question and limitations of the study are included.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to the research problem. I first examine the literature pertaining to the work and experiences of beginning teachers. Second, I review the literature surrounding professional learning opportunities for beginning teachers and their participation in professional learning. Third, I examine the literature pertaining to teacher identity, specifically professional learner identity.

In Chapter 3, I explain Weiner’s (1985, 1986) theory of attribution, which underpins this research. I construct the theoretical framework for the research, connecting Weiner’s theory to key concepts from the research problem: beginning teachers, professional learning and identity. I then justify the use of attribution theory as the theoretical framework for this research through a
consideration of both the context and the aim of the study. Understandings from this chapter provide the foundation for the data-collection and data-analysis methods discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 describes and justifies the sequential explanatory mixed methods design used in this research. I detail and justify the data instruments and data-collection methods used in Phase 1 (quantitative online survey) and Phase 2 (semi-structured interviews) of the research. I explain my role as researcher, and I also provide details of the participant recruitment process and a demographic profile of the participants. I explain the methods of analysis used in both phases of the research and provide a detailed account of how I applied this analytic method. I also explain the method used for the reporting of findings in this thesis. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the consistency and trustworthiness of the research and ethical considerations.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I present and analyse the key findings from this study. Chapter 5 details findings from survey data from which preliminary insights were gained into participants’ experiences, and the ways in which they sought to explain the outcomes of these experiences. Key areas for investigation that informed the subsequent interview phase of the research are summarised. In Chapter 6, I first share five composite narratives drawn from interviews to elucidate the experiences of the participants and then provide a detailed analysis of the findings.

In Chapter 7, I discuss the findings presented and analysed in the previous chapters. I address the major concepts emerging from the findings that address the aim of this research: envisaged and enacted professional learner identity tensions, the ways in which first-year teachers’ attributional behaviours influenced their attitudes to professional learning, and factors impacting how they attributed causality. In doing so, I make connections to both the conceptual basis and the theoretical framework for this study. Through my discussion, I propose answers to the research question posed.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I demonstrate how this thesis contributes to research, theory and the teaching profession. I discuss the utility of the attribution theory as an alternative frame for thinking
about first-year teachers as professional learners in contemporary education contexts. I consider the possible impact of the findings on future policy and the ways in which professional learning is currently represented in the Standards and externally managed through teacher accountabilities. I discuss the potential impact of findings on future practice and the ways in which first-year teachers may be supported as professional learners. Finally, I also consider possible future research that could extend or add to the findings from the research presented in this thesis.
Chapter 2 Literature review

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the aim of this research is to generate deeper understandings of the ways beginning teachers develop their identities as professional learners in their first year of teaching. Specifically, I investigate how the responses of first-year teachers to their experiences influence the development of their professional learner identities. In Chapter 1, I located this research within current education policy and demonstrated the significance of professional learning in such policy. In this chapter, I present and analyse the literature pertaining to key concepts relevant to the research problem: the experiences of beginning teachers, professional learning and teacher identity. Through a review of both international and Australian literature relevant to these key themes, I provide the conceptual basis for this research.

First, this review will consider the work of beginning teachers and their reported teaching experiences. As outlined in the previous chapter, beginning teachers encounter a range of experiences that can be challenging in their first year of teaching (Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Hudson, 2012a; Lew & Nelson, 2016). These experiences can have a significant impact on how teachers manage their entry into professional practice and continue to develop in the profession. Through a review of the literature concerning the work of the beginning teacher, I provide a deepened understanding of the circumstances and experiences of first-year teachers at work.

Second, I review the literature on teacher professional learning. As discussed previously, professional learning has been demonstrated to be a key support measure for teachers in their first year of teaching (Crosswell & Beutel, 2013; Patrick et al., 2010; Yuen, 2012). Through engagement as professional learners, beginning teachers have the opportunity to develop and consolidate their teaching capabilities and build their understandings of the context and community in which they
teach. In this section of the review, I elucidate the varied ways in which professional learning is represented in the literature with a specific focus on beginning teachers and their engagement with professional learning.

Finally, I review the literature regarding teacher identity. This section of the review is divided into three key categories: teacher identity as it is defined and conceived by various identity researchers; the construction of teacher identity; and the role of identity construction in the work of teachers as professional learners. This section is important to this research, which specifically investigates the construction of professional learner identities as critical to beginning teachers’ commitment to their work. I now turn to a review of the work of beginning teachers.

The experiences of beginning teachers

Beginning teachers enter the profession via a number of pathways. According to Crosswell and Beutel (2017), the contemporary teaching workforce is made up of school-leavers who have completed their Initial Teacher Education (ITE), alongside a significant number of career changers – those individuals who have commenced teaching after a previous period of alternate employment, either in education or elsewhere. Regardless of their pathway, beginning teachers are often required to fulfil ‘the same roles and responsibilities as veteran teachers … from the day they enter the classroom’ (Shoffner, 2011, p. 417).

These roles and responsibilities include the implementation of quality teaching and learning practices; collaboration with colleagues, including specialist teachers, teacher aides and parents (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Dalgren & Chiriac, 2009); following the administrative, operational and procedural processes of their particular context; and building their understanding of the school culture and community (Shoffner, Brown, Platt, Long, & Salyer, 2010). Beginning teachers are required to become familiar with the norms of practice in their teaching context and to understand the hierarchical structure of the school (Zembytska, 2015). At the same time, they are
learning who they are, and who they want to be as teachers (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006; Flores & Day, 2006; Pillen, Beijaard, & Den Brok, 2013a) in a context that is complex and demanding.

These responsibilities of teaching have been demonstrated to be challenging and overwhelming for many beginning teachers, a phenomenon that has been documented across several decades in the literature (Buchanan et al., 2013; Gaikhorst et al., 2017). This literature is characterised by narratives and case studies that report on the lived experiences of beginning teachers. Other researchers, such as Veenman (1984) and Devos, Dupriez, and Paquay (2012, p. 206), using questionnaires in larger-scale studies, have similarly found that ‘beginning teachers enter a new world, experience an accelerated pace of life, and encounter unexpected situations and challenges’ (Devos et al., 2012, p. 206). The Studying the Effectiveness of Teacher Education (SETE) Report (Mayer et al., 2015), which provided findings from a three-year longitudinal study following teachers from the Australian states of Queensland and Victoria in 2010 and 2011, found that beginning teachers were given roles and responsibilities, such as teaching in unfamiliar content areas and in some cases taking on leadership roles for which they were sometimes ill-equipped and insufficiently experienced.

Advancing a different view, Schmidt, Klusmann, Lüdtke, Möller, and Kunter (2017) argue that it would be inaccurate to state that all beginning teachers feel negatively about their first year of teaching or that they share the same sort of experiences. Similarly, not all beginning teachers in the same context will necessarily perceive problems and pressures in the same way. In a recent narrative study in New Zealand, Trevethan (2018) shared the stories of three first-year teachers who maintained a positive and enthusiastic attitude to teaching throughout the year, drawing on both contextual sources of support such as colleagues and professional learning, and inner resources including a commitment and determination to meet the challenges of commencing in the profession. While research has demonstrated that the socio-cultural characteristics of the context play a
significant part in the issues encountered by beginning teachers (Day & Kington, 2008; Flores & Day, 2006), it must be understood that these contexts are perceptually created through each individual’s interpretation of their experiences (Erlandson, 2014). Thus collective experiences may be understood by the individual in subjective and personal ways.

Across multiple studies into the lived experiences of the beginning teachers, however, some common findings have been reported; these can be placed into two interrelated categories, which I have labelled ‘practice-related’ and ‘context-related’ experiences. I now turn to a discussion of these categories, with a focus on the latter because of its relevance to this thesis.

**Practice-related experiences**

Many of the studies investigating the experiences of beginning teachers focus on issues of practice. Practice-related experiences include behaviour management, planning of curriculum and engaging students in their learning (Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). These practice-related experiences are associated with teacher knowledge and skills, with beginning teachers reporting issues with motivating students, curriculum planning, differentiating curriculum and pedagogy to meet diverse learner needs (Roehrig, Bohn, Turner, & Pressley, 2008), developing content knowledge and implementing assessment and reporting practices (Buchanan et al., 2013; Roehrig et al., 2008; Schmidt et al., 2017). The recent work of Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Roosenboom, and Volman (2017) adds to the list of challenges, reporting contemporary issues of cultural diversity and poverty facing today’s beginning teachers as they work to differentiate their teaching to meet the needs of all students. In a recent Australian study by Schuck et al. (2018, p. 209) involving an online survey of 336 early career teachers, the ‘old problems’ of building relationships with parents, finding the time to fulfil extra-curricular and administrative responsibilities and managing student behaviour were still found to persist for beginning teachers.
One of the most significant challenges to teachers, reported in the literature across time, is behaviour management (e.g. Hudson, 2012a; Kiggins, 2007; Veenman, 1984; Woodcock & Reupert, 2012). Beginning teachers report a lack of preparedness to manage the behaviour of students effectively – an issue that has an early and negative impact on their work satisfaction and sense of self-efficacy (Kiggins, 2007). This impact is exacerbated in particular contexts, where beginning teachers’ capacity in this area is used as a measure of their calibre as a teacher, both by the beginning teachers themselves and by other stakeholders, such as the principal, other teachers and parents.

**Context-related experiences**

Other literature reviewed revealed a large number of studies focused on the kind of contexts in which beginning teachers work (e.g. du Plessis & Sunde, 2017; Gu & Day, 2013; Johnson et al., 2010; Kidd et al., 2015). Teachers’ context-related experiences pertain to how they perceive characteristics of their working environment, such as the levels of supportiveness and collegiality they receive, as well as the contextual expectations they believe are placed on them. Each workplace entails its own socio-cultural climate and associated norms of practice (Fox et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2010), and ‘new teachers have to learn to be micro-politically literate as they negotiate their way through school organisation and staffroom culture’ (Schuck et al., 2018, p. 210).

According to Pogodzinski, Youngs, and Frank (2013, p. 27), ‘in each school, the reality of the given context may or may not provide a supportive context for novice teachers’.

Beginning teachers commonly report that their expectations of teaching do not align with what they encounter at the outset of their careers (Mayer et al., 2015; Pillen et al., 2013a; Pillen, Beijaard, & den Brok, 2013b). Issues of workload are foregrounded in the literature (du Plessis & Sunde, 2017; Kidd et al., 2015), which shows that beginning teachers commonly struggle to keep up with the demands of their roles, such as planning and delivering quality curriculum, building
relationships with parents, collaborating with colleagues and ensuring that assessment and reporting requirements are fulfilled (Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Kidd et al., 2015; Roehrig et al., 2008). In many contexts, beginning teachers are expected to take on an extra-curricular role in the school, such as a sporting coach or club facilitator, on top of already heavy workloads (Gu & Day, 2013). In addition, there is often an expectation that beginning teachers will take on the same or similar duties to their more experienced colleagues, yet without having acquired comparable repertoires of skills (Farrell, 2016). The workload burden can also be intensified further by teacher accreditation processes that require beginning teachers to spend considerable time collecting and documenting evidence of an array of facets of their teaching practice (Schuck et al., 2018).

For some beginning teachers, the disjunction between their goals, aspirations and beliefs about being a teacher and the expectations and norms of practice within the school context creates a tension that is often stressful and sometimes disempowering (Pillen et al., 2013b). In Pillen et al.’s (2013) study, for example, interviews with 24 beginning teachers about their work lives generated three categories of perceived tension: the shift from pre-service to practising teacher; pedagogical conflicts; and conflicting conceptions of learning to teach. Other studies support these findings, reporting that beginning teachers feel a sense of disillusionment as their early experiences of teaching fail to live up to their preconceived ideas and expectations of what it means to be a teacher (Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Pogodzinski et al., 2013). Teaching practices learned and valued at university may be at cross-purposes with the pedagogical expectations that exist within the school context (Cherubini, 2009). Pedagogical dissonance can be exacerbated further by the common requirement for beginning teachers to teach in an area of unfamiliar content – that is, out of field.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, out-of-field teaching has been widely reported by teachers as problematic. Defined as the ‘teaching [of] a subject for which they [the teachers] have not studied above first-year level at university, and for which they have not studied teaching methodology’ (Weldon, 2016, p. 1), this phenomenon is of particular concern for beginning teachers. Weldon
(2016) reported that, in Australia, 37% of beginning teachers teaching Year 7–10 students are required to teach out of field. This statistic compares with 25% of experienced teachers who are required to teach out of field. According to the work of McConney and Price (2009) and later du Plessis and Sunde (2017), teaching out of field intensifies the challenges that beginning teachers face by placing additional demands on them to develop additional content and pedagogical content knowledge.

Another issue is the casualisation of the teaching workforce, which has intensified in recent times. This trend has resulted in many first-year teachers only being able to secure casual work in their first year of teaching (AITSL, 2016; du Plessis & Sunde, 2017; Mayer et al., 2015; QCT, 2013). According to Australian researchers Jenkins, Smith, and Maxwell (2009), this can be highly problematic – a concern shared by McCormack and Thomas (2005), who state that working in a casual role can result in feelings of isolation. Several studies (e.g. du Plessis & Sunde, 2017; Farrell, 2016; Kidd et al., 2015) have identified that casualisation impacts beginning teachers’ access to support and professional learning. Pietsch and Williamson (2009) add that first-year teachers who take on casual teaching positions can experience a loss of pedagogical confidence and encounter difficulties with developing a professional identity. I now turn to a review of the literature on professional learning as a means of supporting beginning teachers through these and other challenges, as well as to continue to grow professionally.

*Professional learning*

The provision of professional learning as a support measure for teachers entering the profession has been widely advocated both internationally and in Australia (Crosswell & Beutel, 2013; King, 2016; Lovett & Cameron, 2011; Yost, 2006). There is less consensus among commentators about how professional learning should be defined, what it should entail and what outcomes should be envisaged.
Professional learning: An evolving conceptualisation

The terminology used in relation to teacher professional learning is inconsistent throughout the literature. Most notable is the interchangeable use of the terms ‘professional learning’ and ‘professional development’. Evans (2002, 2015) argues that early researchers neglected to come to a consensus regarding a definition of professional development, resulting in a lack of semantic consistency within the literature. In the early literature, the term ‘professional development’ dominates. While professional development sometimes refers to the process of teacher growth and learning (Keiny, 1994), this term has a history of being strongly associated with the provision of external workshops and conference activities, often employing experts external to the school site, with the understanding that teachers can return to the school and implement newly learned practices (Kelly, 2006). The top-down approach is sometimes explained as professional development done to teachers, rather than with them (Timperley, 2013).

One-off professional development activities have been criticised heavily, particularly for failing to result in a discernible impact on teaching and learning outcomes (King, 2016; Klein, 2007; Lovett & Cameron, 2011; Timperley, 2011b; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007; Yuen, 2012). In a review of research on the impact of professional development activities in the United States, Kennedy (2016) warns that professional development activities may involve mandatory participation of teachers, and therefore findings of limited impact on teaching and learning may be indicative of teachers’ lack of motivation to participate and learn in this way. According to Kelly (2006, p. 509), professional development fails to acknowledge a constructivist view of learning as situated in a social context. In a large-scale study of professional learning in over 300 New Zealand primary schools, Easton (2008) found that, in most cases, generic knowledge shared without a direct connection to teachers’ contexts was either forgotten or dismissed by teachers. In his recent critical analysis of traditional and contemporary approaches to professional development, Korthagen (2017, p. 389) pursues a similar argument, stating that ‘it
seems an attractive idea that once teachers would have the right insights and beliefs about teaching and learning, they could change their behaviour in the right direction. However … this is a rather primitive view of teacher learning.’ In Korthagen’s view, this expectation fails to consider teachers as learners rather than passive recipients of information. Teachers have also reported professional development activities as being isolated, disconnected and often irrelevant to the work they do in schools (Avalos, 2011; Easton, 2008). According to Fullan (2007, p. 35), ‘professional development as a term and as a strategy has run its course’. Timperley (2011a, p. 4) agrees, stating:

Fundamental shifts in professional learning involve moving from professional development to professional learning, focusing on students, attending to requisite knowledge and skills, engaging in systematic inquiry into the effectiveness of practice, being explicit about the underpinning theories of professionalism and engaging everyone in the system of learning.

In more recent times, the term ‘professional learning’ has become widely used. According to Easton (2008, p. 4), while both professional development and professional learning can be ‘intentional, ongoing and systematic processes’, professional development is associated with the delivery of learning whereas professional learning is synonymous with an internal process of making new meaning. Mayer and Lloyd (2011) explain that this change has been due partly to the effort of researchers to redefine professional development with a focus on teacher learning that occurs through job-embedded and contextual opportunities. While Timperley (2011a) and Fullan (2007) are critical of ‘professional development’ as an appropriate term when discussing the learning of teachers, Mayer and Lloyd (2011) avoid presenting ‘professional learning’ and ‘professional development’ as oppositional terms, explaining that the two terms together encompass the wide range of opportunities available for teacher learning to occur both in and beyond the teaching context. They argue (2011, p. 4) that both professional development and professional learning ‘have legitimacy in the context of aiming to improve professional practice that positively influences student learning’. Recently, the term ‘learning opportunities’ has also been used in the
literature, in the place of ‘professional development’, to describe the wide range of activities in which teachers may participate (e.g. Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Horn & Kane, 2015; Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017). The shift in thinking about what comprises professional learning has led to an understanding of professional learning opportunities as including both ‘knowledge of practice’ opportunities such as workshops and conferences, and ‘knowing in practice’ (Kelly, 2006) opportunities such as job-embedded collaboration with colleagues and reflective practice. The terminology debate thus signals a much deeper change to the conceptualisation of how teachers can and should learn.

Reflective practice in particular has gained significant attention as a way of ‘knowing in practice’ (Kelly, 2006). Using primarily case studies, interviews and narrative research methods, numerous researchers have reported reflection to be important to professional learning as a means of making meaning of teacher experience (Clara, 2015; Larivee, 2000; Leroux & Theoret, 2014; Urzua & Vasquez, 2008). Much of the literature defines reflection as a cognitively demanding task that requires the individual to make sense of experiences to gain new understandings about practice (Paterson & Chapman, 2013). The seminal work of Dewey (1933) supported an approach to reflection through a sequenced and logical practice known as reflection-on-action. While the reflective practice of the type proposed by Dewey (1933) is important to understanding past events, Eruat (1995) argues that teachers need to reflect in ways that lead to future action, such as through professional learning. This type of reflection-for-action enables teachers to interpret experiences with a view to improving practice in the future (Urzua & Vasquez, 2008; Wareing, 2017).

Conversely, Korthagen (2017, p. 394) argues that action-oriented reflection alone reduces the reflective process to a determination of ‘what to do or do better’ (italics in original), which limits the opportunity to develop a ‘deeper understanding of the meaning of the situation under reflection’. Planned actions intended to improve practice are therefore rarely successful (Hoekstra, 2007). Korthagen and other researchers (Brookfield, 2009; Clara, 2015; Paterson & Chapman,
advocate for deep critical reflection that interrogates the teaching situation from multiple perspectives to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of teaching experiences. Under these conditions, reflective practice is deliberate and intentional, with teachers’ planned actions informed by a thorough understanding of what has occurred in their teaching and why. From this perspective, reflection is a process of deep learning about both teacher practice and the self (Clara, 2015; Kelchtermans, 1993; Larivee, 2000; Leroux & Theoret, 2014; Urzua & Vasquez, 2008). Korthagen (2017, p. 391) also proposes that such reflection should be collaborative, with ‘guided reflection’ overcoming the issue that teachers may be unaware of the full complexity of their teaching experiences and thus benefit from the collaborative input.

The early ethnographic work of Little (1982), focused on schools as a place for teacher learning, positioned productive collaboration as imperative for professional learning, stating that collaboration enables teachers to engage in deep and ongoing professional dialogue, receive feedback on practice, plan and research together, and share their teaching practices. The benefits of collaboration are based on the premise that teachers working together can share their collective expertise, challenge entrenched practices and support one another to adopt, adapt and sustain new practices. Later research furthered this work by showing that professional learning through coaching, mentoring and the development of professional learning communities could generate professional growth (Bartell, 2005; Hudson, 2012b; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Moss, 2010; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Strong, 2009; Thompson, Hagenah, & Lohwasser, 2015; Zembytska, 2015). Numerous research studies have espoused the benefits of teachers’ participation in action research and teacher inquiry (e.g. Robson & Mtika, 2017; Timperley, 2011b; Timperley et al., 2007) as a means of learning collaboratively. Through inquiring into practice, teacher teams can ‘critically ponder, make sense of and rethink their practice, simultaneously developing their knowledge for and about practice’ (Mockler, 2015, p. 123). Professional learning, thus described, is a socially interactive experience with collective expertise and productive challenge at its core.
Timperley (2011a, p. 5) calls for professional learning that is ‘inclusive of both formal and informal opportunities for teachers to deepen professional knowledge and refine professional skills’. The contexts in which professional learning occurs are therefore broadened from planned events to teacher learning that occurs as a consequence of the interactive nature of the teaching environment. On the one hand, informal professional learning refers to the unplanned opportunities that occur for professional learning for the teacher on a day-to-day basis, such as impromptu conversations with colleagues and learning from experience (Shanks, Robson, & Gray, 2012). Soloman, Boud and Rooney (2006, p. 3) describe informal professional learning as opportunities that occur at the ‘intersection between work and social spaces’. According to Kyndt, Govaerts, Verbeek, and Dochy (2014, pp. 2393–2394):

Informal learning is characterised by a low degree of planning and organising in terms of the learning context, learning support, learning time, and learning objectives. Informal learning opportunities are not restricted to certain environments. The learning results from engagement in daily work-related activities in which learning is not the primary goal. Informal learning is undertaken autonomously, either individually or collectively, but without an instructor. It often happens spontaneously and unconsciously. From the learner’s perspective, it is unintentional. Finally, informal learning outcomes are unpredictable.

A study conducted by Lom and Sullinger (2011) involving 13 teachers across nine schools in the United States found that informal learning provided a chance for teachers to be active agents in their learning; in their view, this led to greater learning and transformation of their practice. Similarly, in a case study by Thacker (2017) of 12 secondary teachers, informal learning was reported to be timely, contextualised and transferrable to the classroom.

Formal professional learning, on the other hand, refers to planned professional learning experiences such as induction programs, formal mentoring meetings and workshops. As defined by Kyndt, Gijbels, Grosemans, and Donche (2016, p. 1113), these activities are ‘structured in terms of
time, space, goals and support’. According to these researchers and others (e.g. Korthagen, 2017; Mayer & Lloyd, 2011), formal professional learning opportunities add to the overall opportunities available to the teacher as a mechanism for learning. Korthagen (2017) stresses that formal professional learning, such as through guided reflection, provides individualised and sustained opportunities for teachers to participate actively in making comprehensive meaning of both their practice and their aspirations as teachers.

This shift in the conceptualisation of teachers’ learning places emphasis on the active role of teachers in purposefully considering the impact of their teaching and transforming their practice in the classroom. Timperley (2011a, p. 4), for example, advocates for professional learning opportunities that ‘may challenge existing beliefs, attitudes and understandings, and [that are] designed to result in changed professional practice for the benefit of students’. In essence, professional learning ‘constitutes the processes that teachers engage in when they expand, refine and change their practice’ (Mockler, 2013, p. 36). This transformative expectation is reflected in the earlier work of Doecke, Parr, and North (2008) and later McDonald (2014), who explains that professional learning is demonstrated through changes in practice associated with professional learning, not solely through participation in a professional learning activity.

Some researchers articulate their concerns that the transformative outcomes of professional learning are still not sufficiently prioritised in professional learning policy (Allard & Doecke, 2014; Leonard, 2015; Mockler, 2013; Ryan & Bourke, 2013). According to Leonard (2015, p. 12), accountability measures applied to teachers’ professional learning have had the perverse effect of limiting the accepted meaning of teacher professional learning.

Within this performative scheme, the only activities that count as professional learning are ones where a clear goal can be set ahead of time and then measured.

It has been argued that the expectation that teachers will participate in a minimum number of hours of professional development through Continuous Professional Development initiatives
(CPD) (e.g. QCT, 2017) is counter-intuitive to the intended outcomes of professional learning (Watson & Michael, 2016). Professional learning can thus be regarded as an exercise in compliance by teachers rather than as a process of engagement in learning (Calvert, 2016; Hardy, 2018a). According to Watson and Michael (2016, p. 271), CPD ‘engenders surveillance and ensures compliance’ by teachers with professional learning requirements. In the case of early career teachers, Allard and Doecke (2014) state that the Standards also neglect to consider each beginning teacher as an individual with their own distinct professional learning needs. Watson and Michael (2016, p. 271) further argue that the standardised view of teacher learning locks teachers into a ‘hierarchy of progress’, which is counter-intuitive to the purpose of professional learning. These researchers argue that the stage-based nature of the Standards delimits participation in professional learning that may deviate from the Standards’ career stages and content. Other researchers, such as Opfer and Pedder (2011, p. 386), argue that reliance on ‘causal knowledge from obligated time spent participating in professional learning will do little to change the capacity of teachers’.

Conversely, other researchers advocate for the use of the Standards to frame initiatives for professional learning to guide professional learning priorities. Holmes (2016) investigated the use of the Standards by middle leaders in an Australian independent school setting to guide professional learning goals and activities for staff. Henderson and Jarvis (2016) argue that the representation of specific professional learning areas within the Standards in Australia ensures that teachers can develop the necessary skills to support all students in the classroom, such as those with disabilities. In effect, the Standards are seen by these researchers as a guide for essential professional learning with which teachers should be required to engage.

For some researchers, however, the issue of professional learning is about ownership and responsibility – which, it has been argued, rests with the teachers. Calvert (2016, p. 4) suggests that what is needed is for professional learning to be seen as a process in which ‘teachers act purposefully and constructively to direct their own professional growth’. Using discourse analysis,
Watson and Michael (2016, p. 272) conclude from interviews conducted across four schools in Scotland that a ‘discursive shift [that] … sees the teacher take on an endless journey of becoming, taking on responsibility for their own self-development’ (italics in original) is necessary. In this way, professional learning opportunities can lead to improved practice for teachers through job-embedded and relevant learning. As Lieberman and Miller (1990, p. 112) explain, teachers ‘are problem solvers; they are researchers; and they are intellectuals engaged in unravelling the learning process both for themselves and for the young people in their charge. Learning is not consumption; it is knowledge production.’ There is an implication in these assertions by Calvert (2016), Watson and Michael (2016) and Lieberman and Miller (1990) that teacher responsibility and ownership over their own professional learning constitute a critical part of becoming and being a teacher.

**Professional learning for the beginning teacher**

A large portion of the literature on professional learning for beginning teachers focuses on induction and mentoring. Studies have predominantly been small-scale and qualitative in design. However, there have been a small number of large-scale studies, such as a randomised control study involving 418 schools and 1009 beginning teachers participating in induction programs conducted by Glazerman et al. in 2010 in the United States. In this study and others, induction is most often defined as a formal and comprehensive system of teacher initiation facilitating the transition between pre-service and classroom teacher responsibilities (Cherubini, 2008). Other researchers refer to induction as the intentional support provided to beginning teachers and advocate for a period of three years or longer to ensure sufficient time for professional growth and scaffolded entry into the profession (Schuck, Aubusson, Buchanan, & Russell, 2012). Kearney (2011, 2014) adds that induction should be well organised and involve the provision of time and resources to support beginning teachers’ access to and participation in these professional learning opportunities.
A number of studies investigating professional beginning teachers include a suite of formal and informal professional learning opportunities. A mixed-methods study by Bickmore and Bickmore (2010) in the United States represents this expanded understanding of professional learning opportunities, providing beginning teachers with a suite of opportunities including workshops, collaborative mentoring, and reflective practice. Similarly, another mixed-methods study by Shanks, Robson, and Gray (2012) of beginning teachers participating in a Scottish induction initiative included both formal and informal professional learning opportunities that enabled them to observe the practice of their colleagues, use trial and error in their classroom to develop enhanced practices, and engage in dialogue with other teachers. In this study, beginning teachers recognised the benefits of formal learning through workshops and organised events, as well as informal learning opportunities through observation and the sharing of ideas. In their discussion, Shanks et al. (2012) identified sources of professional learning to exist in and out of the classroom, across the day and outside of class time, and either with professional colleagues or as individuals.

In a large number of studies, mentoring is specifically identified as the component of the induction process that has the greatest positive impact. These studies can mostly be described as small-scale and school-based, with the aim of describing the benefits of mentoring for beginning teachers (e.g. Gholam, 2018; Grossman & Davis, 2012). Across these studies, mentoring generally refers to the professional support and guidance provided to practitioners, such as beginning teachers, by a more experienced and expert educator (Blase, 2009; Carter & Francis, 2001; George & Robinson, 2011; Halai, 2006; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Hudson & Millwater, 2008; Iancu-Haddad, & Oplatka, 2009). In a recent international case study of mentors in Australia and Finland (Heikkinen, Wilkinson, Aspfors, & Bristol, 2018), practices of the mentor included opening up opportunities for critical reflection of practice, providing guidance and advice.
to beginning teachers, facilitating professional learning and offering counselling for emotional support (primarily characteristic of Australian mentoring practices).

There have, however, been some larger-scale systemic studies (e.g. Beutel et al., 2017) aimed at analysing and developing an understanding of what effective mentoring entails. Mentoring for beginning teachers has undergone a transformation over the past decade, from a process of personal guidance (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011) to a more educative stance (Gardiner, 2012; Kahrs & Wells, 2013; McDonald & Flint, 2011), which requires that ‘the mentor not only supports the mentee but also challenges them productively so that progress is made’ (Smith, 2007, p. 43). Educative mentoring aims to move the beginning teachers ‘beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills to a transformational focus, where teachers are supported to rethink their own practice, to construct new roles for themselves as teachers and to teach differently’ (Langdon & Ward, 2015, p. 241). While social, technical and emotional support may help beginning teachers to deal with immediate concerns, this support does not develop the ‘habits of mind that lead to continuous professional growth’ (Gardiner, 2012, p. 198).

This shift in the intent of mentoring places greater emphasis on the active engagement of beginning teachers in their professional learning and requires them to be positioned as active contributors in their own professional learning. For example, the systemic-wide Mentoring Beginning Teachers (MBT) program implemented in Queensland from 2014 positions mentoring as ‘an interpersonal relationship for professional support based on a process of collaborative inquiry and encouraging critically reflexive praxis’ (Beutel et al., 2017, p. 167) with both mentor and mentee participating as equals. Reeves (2008) considers this shift to be essential if the intended outcomes of professional learning for beginning teachers are to be achieved. Research by Moss (2010, p. 44) supports this view, stating that mentoring reflects a constructivist epistemology, and builds the capacity of both the mentor and mentee through the ‘collaborative construction of knowledge’ and the articulation of personal values and beliefs. Through mentoring, beginning
teachers are assisted to identify and articulate professional learning needs and develop the necessary frame of mind for collaboration, reflection, inquiry and active professional learning (Ferguson-Patrick, 2010; Goldrick, Osta, & Maddock, 2010; McCormack, Gore, & Thomas, 2006). In the following section, I review literature pertaining to the participation of beginning teachers in these professional learning opportunities.

**Beginning teacher participation in professional learning**

Not surprisingly, research studies have found that beginning teachers vary in their uptake of professional learning. The reasons for this can broadly be categorised as ‘the quality of professional learning’ and ‘the beginning teacher as learner’.

**Quality professional learning**

In addition to the issue of access to induction and mentoring processes, as discussed in the previous chapter, researchers – both internationally (Clark & Byrnes, 2012) and in Australia (Adoniou, 2016) – have called into question the quality of professional learning provided through mentoring and induction to beginning teachers. The challenges of providing quality professional learning reported in the literature can be categorised in three broad ways. First, there are differences between the levels of quality of mentoring. The skills and capabilities of the mentors are not consistent, impacting the potential benefit of the induction and mentoring process for beginning teachers (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015; Bartell, 2005; Beutel et al., 2017; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Roehrig et al., 2008; Trevethan & Sandretto, 2017) and the motivation for beginning teachers to participate. Second, there are inconsistent definitions of what mentoring and induction should involve across school settings (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015; Torff & Sessions, 2008). Lastly, there is a diversity of school dispositions or cultures that support professional learning as a process (Lovett & Cameron, 2011; Shanks et al., 2012), which impacts beginning teacher participation. Each of these issues of professional learning quality will now be addressed.
The provision of mentoring is reported in a number of countries as problematic due to a lack of quality mentors in schools. It is important to note, however, that many of these studies are small-scale and descriptive in nature. For example, concerns were raised by Kane and Francis (2013) regarding the inconsistent skills of mentors in a Canadian study. They found that each mentor came to the process with their own idea of how mentoring should be conducted. Other studies, such as those by Cherubini (2008) in Canada and Cook (2012) in the United States, found induction and mentoring practices lacked rigour and purpose, with sustained collegial engagement diminishing as the year progressed. In Australia, a study of 16 beginning teachers by Adoniou (2016), using interviews, observations, field notes and surveys, found that mentoring created tensions for beginning teachers due to pedagogical mismatches between the mentor and beginning teacher, and the mentors’ views of the purpose of this support. In a 2016 AITSL survey of beginning teachers across Australia, only 58% agreed that they had received high-quality mentoring. Of these respondents, 43% reported they did not experience regularly scheduled times to meet with their mentor for professional discussions and support.

Importantly, mentoring is approached in a variety of ways. A critical review of approximately 135 mentoring studies by American researchers Wang and Odell (2002) identified that mentoring approaches could be categorised in three ways: humanistic and emotional/social (focusing on emotional well-being), practical (focused on providing practical knowledge and information) and critical-constructivist (approaching mentoring as a co-construction of knowledge through collaboration with others). A shift towards the use of a critical-constructivist approach, also referred to as ‘educative mentoring’ (Beutel, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2012), has gained momentum. This approach proposes that mentors can help new teachers to critically review their understandings about teaching and build their capacity through consideration of alternative classroom practices (Kemmis, Heikkinen, Goran, & Aspfors, 2014; Langdon & Ward, 2015).
Despite this conceptual shift, Kane and Francis (2013) found the impact of mentoring to be primarily humanistic in nature or focused on the provision of information and practical knowledge. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, 2009) refer to this stance as ‘knowledge for practice’, where information is transmitted to the beginning teachers. In their study, they showed that mentors often failed to position beginning teachers as learners. From the United States, research by Achinstein and Athanases (2006), using both questionnaire and case study data, indicates that mentoring is highly characterised by advice and information giving. This finding was supported almost 10 years later in a two-year qualitative study in New Zealand by Langdon and Ward (2015, p. 241), who found that mentors could be preoccupied with providing insights for the beginning teachers into ‘how things are done around here’. This point is also pursued by Wang and Odell (2002, p. 499), who state:

Although effective in helping novices to overcome their personal problems and feel comfortable in the teaching profession, teacher mentoring with a humanistic perspective fails to challenge prior knowledge about teaching and learning and does not necessarily develop dispositions necessary for reform-minded teaching. It assumes that the content and process of learning to teach will automatically follow when novices’ personal problems are resolved.

Such approaches to mentoring are argued to lack sufficient rigour and depth to fully support the beginning teacher, so may not assist with issues such as early career attrition (Wang and Odell, 2002).

It has been argued that a focus on the Standards has impacted the rigour of mentoring as professional learning. An Australian study of graduate teachers by Leonard (2012, p. 59) suggests that professional learning has been impacted by ‘a narrow technicist conception of teaching that has entered the discourse of mentoring beginning teachers’. It has been suggested that the Standards have contributed to this issue by providing a skills-based benchmark to describe quality teachers (McDaid, 2010; Tuinamuana, 2011). In Leonard’s (2012) study, feedback from mentors to their
novice colleagues centred on what teachers know and do according to the Standards, as opposed to what it means to be a professional or building a disposition for ongoing learning. The need to involve and train quality mentors has been reported within the research as paramount to the success of building the capacity and habits of mind essential for beginning teachers’ development (Bartell, 2005; Beutel et al., 2017; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009).

Alongside the skills and approaches of the mentor, the provision of mentoring and induction is influenced by the culture of the school (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015; Bullough Jr, 2012; Kidd et al., 2015). In an Australian narrative study by Hunter, Rossi, Tinning, Flanagan, and MacDonald (2011, p. 34), the professional learning cultures of two schools where two beginning teachers worked were investigated. One of these schools was found to support the implementation of quality professional learning through an open and invitational climate. The other created a void for such opportunities due to the isolation experienced by the beginning teacher and a lack of physical spaces for collegial interaction to occur. Contextual conditions can restrict the ability of the beginning teacher to contribute to their professional learning community and can lead to beginning teachers ‘assimilat[ing], rather than contribut[ing], to the professional space’ (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2004, p. 6).

In a Canadian study involving 75 beginning teachers across two induction programs in Ontario, Cherubini (2009) found that in the first induction program, beginning teachers were positioned as agentic professional learners and were provided with opportunities for professional learning for which they themselves were responsible. This program was reported to be beneficial in terms of learning about the profession, raising confidence and reducing anxiety. In the second induction program, the provision of professional learning opportunities was fully controlled by the school, with limited responsibility delegated to the beginning teachers. This program was found to have limited influence on practice or on the ability of beginning teachers to cope in their environments.
Similarly, Shanks et al. (2012) found Scottish school settings to vary in their support for the professional learning of beginning teachers. These researchers described those settings that position the teacher as a learner by using the school site as a setting for a meaningful and collaborative inquiry into teaching as expansive. In this environment, beginning teachers are expected to take responsibility for professional learning. Evans, Hodkinson, Rainbird, and Unwin (2006, p. 45) refer to these workplaces as ‘invitational environments’. On the other hand, Shanks et al. (2012) describe as restrictive school settings that determine the professional learning needs of beginning teachers based upon their novitiate status and that seek to control the provision of professional learning.

The benefits of positioning beginning teachers as active learners rather than passive recipients of professional learning experiences emerge as a consistent finding within the literature. Patrick, Elliot, Hulme, and McPhee (2010) found in a multi-case study conducted in Scotland that beginning teachers who were involved in formally implemented induction and mentoring programs – including working parties, curriculum development initiatives and whole-school improvement initiatives – felt that they were ‘given a chance to work as fully contributing staff members’ (Patrick et al., 2010, p. 283). In this setting, the majority of beginning teachers found that the provision of opportunities in which they could participate actively enhanced their capacity to cope and build capacity in the profession.

These studies illustrate the diverse nature of professional learning contexts experienced by beginning teachers. In a case study of beginning teachers across three school settings in New Zealand, Lovett and Cameron (2011) describe the professional learning settings encountered by first-year teachers as a continuum from those in which professional learning is highly planned with limited input from the beginning teachers to those in which beginning teachers take responsibility within the induction process. Interestingly, in an Irish study of beginning teachers by King (2016), schools described as positioning beginning teachers as active participants in the learning (that is, expansive or invitational contexts) through professional learning communities were perceived by
teachers to be heavily ‘managed’ and contradictory to their real purpose. Beginning teachers therefore arrive at their own interpretations of how they feel they are positioned as learners in school contexts.

The beginning teacher as professional learner

In addition to having access to professional learning opportunities, the learner dispositions of beginning teachers can strongly influence how or what they learn (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Shanks et al., 2012). According to Shanks et al. (2012), teachers’ learner dispositions include their professional learning history, attitudes to participation in professional learning opportunities and how they respond to environmental factors. These learner dispositions can be expansive or restrictive – similar to the categories proposed to describe the learning cultures of differing contexts. Shanks (2012) reports that beginning teachers who have an expansive learner disposition create their own professional learning opportunities and access learning opportunities through communities of practice and beyond the school site. In contrast, a restrictive learner disposition is associated with a survival mentality that can persist throughout a teaching career.

Defined by Shanks et al. (2012, p. 184), participation in professional learning is the ‘extent to which teachers take part in learning and how this impacts on their practice’. A study by Billett (2010) and another by Evans, Hodkinson, Rainbird, and Unwin (2006) found that teachers can choose not to participate in workplace learning practices. As stated by Billett (2010, p. 2), ‘the self … stands as the personal basis that mediates relations about work and learning throughout working life’.

Researchers such as Evans (2002) argue that teachers’ professional learning is partly an individual process, although reflective of contextual factors. From Evans’ (2002) perspective, the individual beginning teacher has the responsibility to position themselves as a learner within their teaching context. This positioning varies, as demonstrated by a recent international study by You,
Lee, Craig and Kim (2018) of Korean first-year teachers who were found to demonstrate three key learner dispositions towards involvement with professional learning communities. The first, referred to as a ‘potential’ learning disposition, was representative of engagement in professional learning for the purpose of compliance within the teacher’s school context. The second, a ‘passive’ learning disposition, was characterised by a lack of participation in professional learning due to contextual challenges such as workload. The last, an ‘active’ learning disposition, was characterised by active engagement in professional learning, both within and beyond the school context, with notable positive impacts on the instructional capacity of the teacher.

For some beginning teachers, the challenges of the first year, outlined in previous sections, can lead to survival response whereby professional learning is not prioritised. First-year teachers in survival mode focus on coping with the day-to-day demands of their work (Hong, Day, & Greene, 2018) as opposed to those teachers who manage and flourish in their teaching contexts. According to Long, Hall, Conway, and Murphy (2012), beginning teachers respond to their contexts and experiences in individual ways, which ultimately impacts their proclivities to participate in professional learning. Graduate students in an Australian study by Crosswell and Beutel (2013, p. 152) reported that the focus for their learning in the first year of teaching was on the application of the skills they had acquired during their initial teacher education. As such, ‘professional competence and arguably survival is driving the professional learning needs of beginning teachers.’ Similar findings were reported in another Australian study by Mansfield, Wosnitza, and Beltman (2012) of 218 graduating pre-service teachers. They found that the primary goals of these beginning teachers were task and socially oriented, focused on day-to-day teaching tasks such as planning daily lessons and building relationships with others in the school environment. This type of orientation was also reported in a four-year study of 133 new teachers by McNally and Blake (2012) in Scotland, where beginning teachers showed a lack of interest in comprehensive pedagogical development as they sought to deal with their new working context.
The first-year teacher as a survivor is a commonly projected image in the literature. In survival response, beginning teachers operate at a level in which they are focused on themselves and the everyday tasks they face (Choy et al., 2013; McNally & Blake, 2012). Their long-term vision is restricted as they work to cope with daily demands of their role, and there is a perception that professional learning needs to be suspended until they are able to cope with the unfamiliar realities of school life (Huberman, Grounauer, & Marti, 1993; Torff & Sessions, 2008). Findings such as these seem to support stage theories of teacher development (e.g. Burden, 1982; Burke, Fessler, & Christensen, 1984; Fuller, 1969) that have ‘driven the “curriculum” of professional development based on what teachers “need” to learn and be able to do across each year of their career’ (Langdon & Ward, 2015, p. 241), such as that seen in the Standards.

The escalation of teacher performance processes against the Standards has been shown to create a dualism between teacher evaluation and assistance by juxtaposing evaluative processes with their need for support. Beginning teachers can view the need for professional learning as an admission of their inability to meet mandated performance standards and therefore withdraw from being involved. Referred to as ‘probationary-related risk aversion’ by O’Sullivan and Conway (2016, p. 4), this issue is the result of probationary processes (during which teachers may feel they are employed on a trial basis) and increasing focus on teacher performance accountabilities against the Standards. International researchers (e.g. Priestley, Miller, Barrett, & Wallace, 2010) and Australian researchers (e.g. Buchanan, 2015; Mockler, 2015) have found in their studies on teacher learning that accountability and standardisation may inhibit teachers’ proclivity to be active as professional learners.

Long et al. (2012, p. 622) refer to this motivation as ‘a desire to remain invisible’ as learners. In their interpretive study of 17 beginning teachers in Ireland, such vulnerability was especially discernible where beginning teachers felt that requiring professional learning was a deficit or where they felt that ‘real teachers’ could solve their own problems and should not need to
be ‘thrown a lifeline’ (Long et al., 2012, p. 622). Such ‘invisibility’ effectively disempowers beginning teachers as professional learners and is shown to occur across the continuum of restrictive to expansive professional learning contexts.

Some studies have revealed that even where there is a supportive context, some beginning teachers may still withdraw from learning activities. In a qualitative study by Gardiner (2012) in the United States, beginning teachers took a passive role in the mentoring process in order to preserve their sense of self and avoid appearing ineffective. These findings are supported in a mixed methods study conducted by Caspersen and Raen (2014) in Norway, which found that, despite professional support and mentoring being available, beginning teachers were the least likely to engage in planning with colleagues and were in fact found to withdraw from participating in opportunities to collaborate with mentors. It is suggested by Qian et al. (2013, p. 450) that ‘for mentors and mentees, even though the relationship is formally assigned, the interactions between them largely depend on voluntary behaviour, which leads to a great variation in the frequency and nature of mentor-mentee interactions’. Qian et al. (2013) argue that, while a number of studies have discussed the lack of support by the school and by the mentor, participation is also partly the beginning teacher’s responsibility.

In contrast, other studies demonstrate a more expansive learning response by beginning teachers to their teaching contexts (Coll & Falsifi, 2010). Keogh et al. (2012), in a narrative study of 16 Australian beginning teachers, found that while some beginning teachers moved to a survival stance in their context very quickly after starting their role, others actively sought professional learning to overcome challenges. Similar findings were reported by Australian researchers Crosswell and Beutel (2017), in a study of career changers in their first year of teaching. These beginning teachers were found to be agentic, self-initiating and self-activating in their responses to the challenges of entry into the profession. A comparable finding was also reported by New Zealand researcher Trevethan (2018), who shared the story of ‘Courtney’, who overcame a highly political context lacking in access to support and professional learning to maintain her optimism.
and work as a learner through her own resourceful actions. Similarly, in Cherubini’s (2008) grounded theory analysis of beginning teacher experiences in Canada, participants demonstrated a strong ability to actively participate in and influence their school contexts during their first year despite an absence of induction processes and consistent mentoring.

A later study conducted by Fox, Wilson and Deaney (2011), involving 17 novice teachers in England, sought to investigate the interaction of these teachers with their workplace with regard to their professional learning; it yielded similar results. These researchers found that beginning teachers with an expansive disposition were able to create a learning environment for themselves, even where an expansive environment was not offered, through proactively engaging with personal and professional networks beyond the school setting. A recent study of beginning teachers in remote Central Australia (Papatraianou, Strangeways, Beltman, & Schuberg Barnes, 2018) reported on the ways in which participants reached out for professional learning outside of their immediate contexts to overcome limited resources, geographic isolation and high teacher turnover that were impacting the availability of professional learning opportunities at the school site. Such findings indicate that many beginning teachers can, and do, aspire to engage as professional learners regardless of the professional learning restrictions of their context.

Shanks et al. (2012, p. 196) argue that ‘changing an individual’s expectations of their own learning and encouraging them to be more expansive may produce longer-term benefits acting as a solid foundation for engagement with a lifelong learning model of professional development’. A key finding discussed by Fox et al. (2011) was the need for beginning teachers to be encouraged to find their own professional learning and not remain dependent on their context, requiring them to respond to their experiences in ways that prompted them to be proactive and effortful in their participation in the workplace. This proactive professional learning stance requires learner dispositions that are agentic (Billett, 2010; Calvert, 2016; King, 2016). From a case study of Irish beginning teachers, King (2016) identified learner agency to include an openness and willingness to
participate as a professional learner. A study of learning in the medical profession by Richards, Sweet, and Billett (2013, p. 251) supported this perspective, arguing that affordance of professional learning is insufficient in that professional learning is only as effective as the learner’s engagement with it, and their ability to ‘negotiate around factors inhibiting the process of accessing it’. In this study, medical students were expected to develop their capacities to be self-directed and proactive learners within their profession, requiring them to be both assertive and communicative about their learning needs.

Calvert (2016, p. 14) concurs, stating that teachers need to ‘lean into their own learning more often’. By this, Calvert (2016) refers to the need for beginning teachers to act proactively as self-directed learners. In order to do so, it would be reasonable to conclude that the development of a teacher identity that is characterised by an expansive learning disposition is necessary to support teachers to engage as professional learners across the range of professional learning contexts in which they may work. The next section reviews the literature pertaining to teacher identity with a specific focus on that aspect of teacher identity referred to in this thesis as professional learner identity.

**Teacher identity and the professional learner**

Over the past decade, there has been an increase in research about teacher identity. The concept of teacher identity has developed out of the understanding that our lives are multifaceted and that teacher identity, although linked to personal identity, is situated within the work life of the teacher (Day & Kington, 2008; Day et al., 2006; Hamilton, 2010). Teacher identity is that component of ‘the self’ associated with work as a teaching professional (Gee, 2000). In the literature, this concept has been referred to as both ‘teacher identity’ (Flores & Day, 2006) and ‘professional identity’ (Cohen, 2010). Both terminologies refer to the teacher’s understanding of what an effective teacher is, and their own beliefs and values about the teacher they want to become (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007). This conceptualisation of teacher identity encompasses both the functional roles undertaken by the teacher and the values, beliefs and inclinations that underpin those roles (Beauchamp &
The proposed significance of teacher identity to teachers’ work has served as the catalyst for a notable proliferation of research in this area. Teacher identity has been shown to drive the decisions that beginning teachers make about their professional behaviour (Chong, 2011), with identity serving as a lens through which teachers interpret, organise and respond to new experiences using their values, beliefs and aspirations as a guide (Danielewicz, 2001). As stated by Mockler (2011, p. 517):

Teachers’ work, encompassing the decisions they make on both a short and long-term basis about approaches to things such as curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment (to name a few), is framed by and constituted through their understanding and positioning of themselves as a product of their professional identity.

The development of a teacher professional identity ‘is an important part of securing teachers’ commitment to their work and adherence to values and norms of practice’ (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005, p. 383) as they develop their own understanding of what being a teacher entails. In doing so, ‘teachers define themselves to themselves and to others’ (Lasky, 2005, p. 901). In the context of this study, beginning teachers’ identities as professional learners are significant to the commitment they may afford to their work as learners.

In the teacher identity literature, learner identity has been recognised as a key aspect of teacher identity (Coll & Falsifi, 2010; Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005; Lee & Schallert, 2016). Some researchers cite the centrality of professional learner identity to all identities, as learning is the means by which identity construction occurs (e.g. Coll & Falsifi, 2010; Osguthorpe, 2006). As learners, beginning teachers make meaning of (or learn about) new situations, challenges and experiences, and thus construct new meanings about their teacher identity and their identity as
learners (Chong, 2011; Cook, 2009). Beginning teachers’ perception of themselves as learners has the capacity to influence all aspects of their professional work.

**Teacher identity construction**

Of particular interest in teacher identity research, and of specific relevance to this research study, is how teachers construct their own identities. Using primarily qualitative research, with an emphasis on narrative, storied and biographical perspectives, researchers have identified identity as both individually and contextually constructed and reconstructed in response to lived experience. The significance of past experiences (Lortie, 1975), current context (Lasky, 2005), the individual (Day, 2012; Day et al., 2006) and the interaction of both the individual and the context (Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, Eteläpelto, Rasku-Puttonen, & Littleton, 2008) have all been discussed in the literature as significant to teacher identity.

The significance of past experiences was raised in the seminal work of Dan Lortie (1975) over four decades ago. In *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*, Lortie (1975) claims that an individual’s prior school experience makes a strong contribution to how they frame their identities as teachers once they commence in the profession. Lortie (1975) explains that ‘anticipatory socialisation’ occurs as a result of an ‘apprenticeship of observation’, whereby individuals observe and are influenced by significant others such as family, friends and former teachers, and are socialised into the ways of teaching through their own schooling and life experiences. He suggests that beginning teachers bring these understandings of teacher identity with them to both the pre-service context and their work in the classroom.

A large amount of research focuses on identity construction as influenced by socio-contextual factors, such as power and norms of practice, which operate within a beginning teacher’s school setting (Beauchamp et al., 2015; Buchanan, 2015; Lasky, 2005). Beginning teachers will think about who they want to be as teachers in ways that are heavily influenced by the school and
political context. They are at a particularly vulnerable stage of their careers, working in heavily performative and evaluative contexts, where they may feel pressured to conform to the expectations of community members. From this perspective, beginning teachers may develop their identities in ways that respond to their need to belong (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011). This has significant ramifications for beginning teachers’ construction of their identities as learners.

As beginning teachers enter the profession, they may seek to feel recognised by others within the community as valued and accepted members of that group (Danielewicz, 2001). The well-referenced work of Gee (2000) refers to this process as ‘recognition work’. This ‘recognition’ refers to how individuals are ‘seen’ by others as a result of the individual’s characteristics or actions. According to Gee (2000, p. 110), individuals may work actively to be recognised as ‘a certain kind of person’ in order to belong to a particular community or group. In other instances, individuals may be recognised as a certain kind of person without actively choosing to do so. Gee’s (2000) work on identity describes four interrelated ways to view identity. Nature identity, as the name suggests, is a consequence of nature and not attained through self-accomplishment or societal influences. Gee (2000) provides the example of ‘being tall’. Institutional identity is achieved through an individual’s authorised position in society, such as the position of a teacher in a school. Discursive identities are achieved as a result of being recognised by others through interaction with them. In this context, Gee (2000) refers to discourse as the dialogue that occurs between individuals and within groups. Gee (2000) uses the example of someone recognised as being ‘charismatic’. An individual is charismatic if others talk to and about that individual in ways that acknowledge their charisma. Finally, affinity-identities are those achieved through being recognised as adhering to a particular set of practices characteristic of a particular ‘affinity group’. Beginning teachers may therefore work to be discursively identified (that is, in others’ interactions or dialogue) as a certain kind of teacher – for example, one that values professional learning – to acquire affirmation of their belonging to the teaching community or affinity group.
According to Vähäsantanen et al. (2008, p. 3), different contexts also have their own degree of ‘social suggestion’, which is defined as those organisational, cultural and situational normative conditions that may constrain personal agency and the enactment of individual teacher identity (Vähäsantanen et al., 2008). Vähäsantanen et al. (2008) coined the term ‘social suggestion’ from their meta-analysis of five empirical studies investigating the autonomy and agency of beginning teachers in school contexts. These researchers found that depending upon the degree of social suggestion operating in a context, teachers may have autonomy to enact their identities as they wish (where a weak degree of social suggestion is present or beginning teachers’ identity is in alignment with contextual norms).

Alternatively, teachers may experience a sense of dissonance between who they would choose to be (and how they aspire to act) and the expectations of the school context (Pillen, 2013). In a narrative inquiry by Lauriala and Kukkonen (2005), teachers were found to feel compelled, in some instances, to adopt a particular way of working that was perceived to be professionally or culturally acceptable in a specific context. There is a risk that, in some cases, beginning teachers may feel compelled to hide personally and professionally valued aspects of their identities as teachers from colleagues for fear of judgement or criticism. According to Luehmann (2007, p. 828), ‘moving beyond these expectations of teacher identity within dominant discourses involves a certain element of courage on behalf of most beginning teachers’. For beginning teachers seeking to enact their identity as professional learners in a restrictive learning culture, this can have negative implications as they work to ‘fit in’ among their colleagues.

While Gee (2000) states that individuals may ‘accept, contest and negotiate identities’, Ahearn (2001, p. 118), argues that the agency of beginning teachers to negotiate their identity is ‘only available to the extent that the context enables it’. A recent three-year longitudinal study of early career teachers in the United States by Hong, Day and Greene (2018) found that beginning teachers’ professional identities were challenged and changed by the way in which they either
managed or coped with the inherent tensions of classrooms and schools. They did not, however, negate the important influence of supportive school contexts on the extent and ease with which their coping and managing behaviours could be enacted. In other words, identity construction is an interaction between human agency and social context (Stentoft & Valero, 2009). Sisson (2016, p. 671) concurs, stating that ‘context is important in understanding identity formation as it can serve to support or constrain one's assertion of their professional identities’. From this perspective, beginning teachers may struggle to negotiate the development and maintenance of a professional learner identity in a school context that demonstrates a restrictive professional learning culture. This socio-culturally oriented perspective of identity construction offers a two-dimensional approach, with an ‘overlap’ between the dimension of the individual and that of the social environment (Coll & Falsifi, 2010, p. 217).

Other research, such as that of Day (Day, 2012; Day et al., 2006) and Billett (2010), offers a more agentic explanation, arguing that identity construction is influenced by the unique way in which the individual teacher manages individual and contextual factors, and makes sense of their experiences. Similarly, a narrative study of one beginning teacher in the United States by Sisson (2016) found that critical incidents, and the ways beginning teachers respond to these incidents, have a significant role in shaping identity. For this reason, reflection emerges as a significant factor in the construction of teacher identity in the literature (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Lee & Schallert, 2016). According to Sutherland, Howard, and Markauskaite (2010, p. 456), teacher identity is ‘refined through the processes of reflection … through ongoing mindful consideration of events and experiences’.

In this same way, the identity of the professional learner is shaped by and enacted through intentional reflective practice (Juanchich, Dewberry, Sirotka, & Narendran, 2016; Pilarska, 2015). An international study by Hseih (2015) investigated the varying identity orientations of beginning teachers towards making meaning of and responding to their teaching experiences in the one school.
This qualitative study found that beginning teachers developed three kinds of identity orientations: self, classroom and dialogic orientations. These orientations were influenced by the beginning teachers’ participation in reflective practice, and each orientation resulted in different levels of professional learning involvement. For the self-oriented beginning teachers, a fixed image of what teaching should look like was connected to limited reflective practice and restricted professional learning, even where outcomes of teaching were perceived to be unsuccessful. Pillen et al. (2013b) also reported that beginning teachers who adhered strongly to their own practice were less likely to engage in reflective practice and professional learning. Hsieh’s (2015) study also found that classroom-oriented teachers, focused on conforming to school norms, engaged in limited intentional reflection and showed evidence of frustration and burnout.

For those beginning teachers in Hsieh’s (2015) study found to be ‘dialogically oriented’, deep reflection led to a proclivity to learn. A study by Huisman, Singer and Catapano (2010) in the United States went further to provide some descriptive detail about the content of these reflections that impacted professional learning intentions. In this study framed by positioning theory, these researchers found that some beginning teachers in one challenging urban school context were found to reflect in ways that blamed the school or the students for their negative experiences, positioning themselves as victims in the context. As a consequence, these teachers disengaged as professional learners. Others reflected in ways that examined challenges from different perspectives, recognising the hopefulness of the situation, consequently reaching out as professional learners. This study provides some very early insights into the impact of beginning teachers’ responses to their experiences and the development of their identities as professional learners. I now provide a brief summary of this review and present some conclusions.

**Summary and conclusions**

In this chapter, I reviewed literature relevant to the research problem for this thesis. In each section, I reviewed a key theme relevant to this study. In the first section, I focused on beginning teachers
and their experiences as they commenced their teaching careers. I outlined the magnitude and range of experiences encountered by beginning teachers with regard to their practice and their working contexts. In the second section, I positioned professional learning as an important aspect of the work of beginning teachers to manage their experiences and develop their capacities to teach effectively from the beginning of their careers. I addressed the evolution of professional learning as defined in the literature, with a particular focus on key professional learning opportunities for beginning teachers. Significantly in this section, the participation of beginning teachers in professional learning was addressed, and the identified barriers to participation reported in the literature were reviewed.

Through this review of the literature, I have outlined the circumstances and experiences of first-year teachers at work. I have elucidated the varied ways in which professional learning is represented in the literature with a specific focus on beginning teachers and their engagement with professional learning. Finally, I have investigated the importance of teacher identity to beginning teachers’ commitment to their work as professional learners.

I now close this chapter by offering the following conclusions. First, the intent of professional learning for beginning teachers has changed significantly in recent times, underpinned by a focus on meaning-making and transformative thinking about practice that leads to professional growth and improvement. It has become particularly incumbent on beginning teachers to actively participate in and take responsibility for their professional learning in order for meaningful and transformational learning to occur. Participation in deep reflective practice that involves investigation of both teaching and the self as professional is part of this conceptual evolution from professional development to professional learning. The goal of commonly researched professional learning activities for beginning teachers, such as mentoring, has shifted to an educative stance, with learning considered to be critically and dialogically co-constructed with others.
Second, the extent to which beginning teachers engage with quality professional learning is, as would be expected, varied. Several barriers impact beginning teachers’ participation in professional learning including inconsistent access to high-quality professional learning and professional learning contexts. Government-mandated initiatives can fall short of ensuring that beginning teachers will encounter the kinds of expansive learning environments deemed supportive of positive engagement with professional learning. Across varied professional learning contexts, some beginning teachers demonstrate a survival response, deprioritising professional learning in order to manage their day-to-day workload and, in some circumstances, choosing to leave the profession. Others remain self-directed and proactively engaged with professional learning, both within and beyond the school context.

Third, the extent to which beginning teachers develop the kind of learner orientations that lead to proactive and intentional engagement with professional learning is significant to their ability to remain positive in the profession. Enforced compliance to participate in professional learning, however, neglects to consider the importance of internally motivated and self-directed teacher learning. Beginning teachers with a positive sense of identity as professional learners are greatly assisted to manage their entry into the profession across diverse school contexts and to develop both professionally and personally as teachers.

Finally, a vast amount of literature about beginning teachers and their professional learning is focused on the benefits of participation for beginning teachers and the constraints on them participating and experiencing the kinds of support advocated as critical for their successful transition and progress in the profession. While contextual and personal factors are identified as significant to teacher identity construction, there is less research to explain how beginning teachers can be supported to specifically develop and maintain meaningful learner orientations and a sense of professional learner identity in the first year of teaching. Moreover, there is limited research about how first-year teachers may be assisted to sustain their sense of identity as learners across
different kinds of professional learner settings and in contemporary contexts characterised by accountability and external requirements. This study investigates beginning teachers’ interpretations and responses to their teaching experiences that develop and sustain their identities as learners in their first year. In the following chapter, I explain the theoretical framework for this study and justify its appropriateness in addressing this limitation in the literature.
Chapter 3 Theoretical framework

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe and justify the theoretical framework for this study, which aims to generate deeper understandings of the ways in which beginning teachers develop their identities as professional learners in their first year of teaching. The theoretical framework for this research is underpinned by key principles from Weiner’s (1985, 1986) theory of attribution. I draw from both his foundational work as well as his later work as he expanded and refined his theory (Weiner, 2000, 2010, 2014, 2017). I further develop the framework through the inclusion of work by attribution style researchers (e.g. Seligman & Schulman, 1986) and researchers of attribution processing (e.g. Augoustinos, Walker, & Donoghue, 2014; Grotzer & Tutwiler, 2014; Yeigh, 2007). Where relevant, I refer to the work of other key theorists, such as Bandura (1989, 2001, 2006) and empirical researchers to elucidate key theoretical points and to elaborate on concepts that emerge during my explication of this framework. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the key theoretical tenets of this framework – attributions of causality, attribution style and attribution processing – and to justify the appropriateness of this theoretical framework to addressing the research problem for this study.

Weiner’s theory of attribution

Attribution theory as first proposed by Weiner (1985, 1986) seeks to explain how individuals think about and respond to their own experiences. Earlier attributional theorists, such as Heider (1958) and Jones and Davis (1965), proposed theories that focused on attributions of causality for others’ behaviour – that is, individuals’ explanations of why others behave in the way they do. Weiner’s
theory of attribution is focused on personal attributions, and therefore is most applicable to this study.

According to Weiner, individuals have an innate need to understand their own experiences and to seek explanations for the outcomes of these experiences. As mentioned in a previous chapter, attribution theorists use the terms ‘successful’ and unsuccessful’, or at times ‘successes’ and ‘failures’, to categorise these outcomes. In the context of this study, this language is used to represent the ways in which individuals describe the way their experiences have turned out (that is, along a continuum from unsuccessful to successful), based on their own thoughts and feelings. Other terms used in this study include ‘achievements’ and ‘accomplishments’, ‘difficulties’ and ‘hurdles’. The individual’s evaluation of the outcome is reflective of that individual’s subjective, or individualistic, interpretation of the experience at that particular time (Kelley, 1973; Kelley & Michela, 1980; Malle, 2010; Weiner, 2010a; Yeigh, 2007; Zultan, Gerstenberg, & Lagnado, 2012). As a consequence, ‘attributions are not objective truths’ (Miller, 2003, p. 145). This innate tendency to attribute causality is prompted by the need for individuals to understand and gain control over their lives. Their attributions of causality can influence subsequent behaviour.

Attribution theory provides an alternative way of thinking and talking about beginning teachers, their identity work, and professional learning, which has not previously been used (at least to the best of my knowledge) in previous research. For the purposes of this research, attribution theory provides a useful framework to investigate first-year teachers’ responses to their teaching experiences and the influence of these responses on the subsequent development of their professional learner identities. The perceptual nature of attributing causality positions the individual in this study as the agent of interpretation of experience, and provides the

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3 In alignment with attribution theory, the term ‘outcomes of the experience’ refers to what happens during, or results from, a specific experience.
opportunity to understand the personally perceived impact of practice and context-related experiences on both the individual and selected social group – in this case, first-year teachers. According to Weiner, the most conspicuous attributions are evidenced from outcomes perceived by the individual to be important, novel or negative (Weiner, 1985, 1986; Weiner et al., 1971). Therefore, it is likely that the experiences referred to by participants in this study will include those deemed to be of (most) significance in their first year of teaching.

The framework for this study provides a set of theoretical principles that frame this investigation of the lived experiences of first-year teachers (that is, experiences deemed by them to be significant) as well as their reflective practice (through which they make personal meaning of these lived experiences). Furthermore, attribution theory provides a means of conceptualising the ways in which the first-year teachers’ personal interpretations and subjective understandings of their experiences impact the ways in which they feel they are able to enact their work as professional learners as they navigate their way through the contemporary school contexts and policy environment in which they work.

**Dimensions of causality**

According to Weiner (1985, 1986), individuals attribute causality for the outcomes of their experiences across three dimensions: locus of causality (Who or what is responsible?); stability (How likely is it that the cause of an event will continue to exist in the future?); and controllability (To what extent do I or others have control over this cause?) (Figure 3.1). While these dimensions may initially appear as dichotomies, Weiner (2017) clearly proposes in his later work that each dimension should be considered along a continuum. I now explain each of Weiner’s dimensions of causality in turn.
According to Weiner (1985, 1986), the individual seeks to ascertain locus of the causality (or the perceived source of responsibility) as either internal or external to their own self. Locus of causality that is internal to the self includes those characteristics pertaining to the individual, such as ability, attitude and effort. External locus of causality can include causes attributable to others, such as the ability or decisions of others, or to the context itself, such as geographical location, physical resources and personnel. External locus of causality can also include intangibles such as luck.

To apply Weiner’s (1985, 1986) dimension of locus in a classroom setting, a teacher who attributes poor student behaviour to their own low level of behaviour-management skills would be attributing internally. In contrast, they would be attributing externally if, for example, they attributed the student behaviour to contextual factors, such as the students just returning from an excursion and feeling unsettled. While the outcome of the experience is the same – that is, students displaying inappropriate behaviour – the attribution for locus of causality is dependent on the
individual’s own perception of the experience, including their own role in the experience and characteristics and conditions of the context at that time.

**Dimension of stability**

Weiner (1985, 1986) also proposes that individuals attribute causality along the dimension of stability. The causal dimension of stability refers to an individual’s perception of how likely the cause is to change into the future (Weiner, 1985, 1986). On the one hand, a highly stable cause would be deemed to be fixed, and unlikely to change in the future. On the other hand, an unstable cause would represent a cause with the possibility for change across time. Weiner (2010a) states that the stability dimension is a powerful indicator of the level of hope and optimism that an individual carries for the future.

Using the previous example, a first-year teacher attributing limited success in managing classroom behaviour to their own behaviour-management skills may perceive this issue to be something that will always be a problem – that is, they do not believe they have the capacity to change the situation in any significant way. This represents a perception of causal stability. Conversely, a teacher in the same circumstances who believes their behaviour-management skills will improve with experience would be demonstrating a perception of causal instability – that is, their skill level is likely to change.

**Dimension of controllability**

The third dimension is controllability. Weiner conceptualises controllability as the extent to which an individual believes they have the personal capacity to influence a cause. Personal controllability thus implies the ability to enhance, inhibit or eliminate a cause that may be perceived to be the source of responsibility for a particular outcome. As explained by Weiner (2014, p. 356), ‘control refers to the amenability of a cause to volitional alteration. A controllable cause is one that the agent may change.’ High personal controllability refers to a high degree of perceived influence over either
an internal or external cause. Weiner holds that some individuals perceive their personal ability to be innate, and therefore beyond their control to change. In contrast, other individuals perceive ability as a something that is developed and therefore personally controllable – for example, through effort.

In Weiner’s (2014) later research, he expands his conceptualisation of controllability beyond the personal and discusses the notion of external controllability. He proposes that, along with perceptions of personal controllability, individuals also ascribe a level of controllability that others are perceived to have over an identified cause. By way of example, he provides the scenario in which a student who fails an exam perceives the cause to be teacher bias. At the same time as ascribing a low level of personal controllability over this cause, the student assigns a high degree of external control to the teacher. External control was previously considered in the work of McAuley, Duncan and Russell (1992) as they revised the Causal Dimension Scale II (CDSII), a quantitative data instrument developed to measure attributions of causality (see Chapter 4). This extended conceptualisation of control takes account of influences (beyond the individual) on the outcomes of experiences that exist in social contexts. For the purposes of this research, this theoretical framework enables an investigation of how perceptions of personal agency and control are manifested in the attributions of first-year teachers where multiple influences may converge to influence the way their teaching transpires.

Responses to attributions

Weiner holds that individuals’ behaviour, thoughts and emotions follow on from attributions of causality across the three dimensions of locus, stability and controllability (Weiner, 2010). In other words, individuals’ actions following something or a range of things that they have experienced are related to the way in which they attribute causality (Figure 3.2). Weiner (2010b, p. 34) refers to
these types of attributions as ‘goads to action’. Individuals’ expectations and hopes for the future, as well as their motivation to act, are all influenced by attributions of causality.

**Figure 3.2** Adapted from Weiner’s (1985, 1986) conceptualisations of attributional responses

**Responses to the dimension of locus**

Locus of causality has been linked closely to an individual’s affective responses and feelings of self-efficacy. As stated by Weiner (2014, p. 355), ‘locus is of prime importance because internal attributions for success are hypothesised to elicit pride and increments in self-esteem’. This type of response is particularly notable when the successful outcome is deemed to have been hard earned and valued (Weiner, 1986, 2000, 2014). Individuals place less value on a personal achievement that they expect or consider to be less remarkable within the social context, and consequently they feel less pride. Weiner (1985, 1986, 2014) also suggests that external attributions for successful outcomes (that is, someone else is assigned the credit) do not evoke this same sense of pride and may, in fact, lower the individual’s sense of self-efficacy as they perceive that the success was not due to their own personal input.
In the case of experiences perceived to be unsuccessful, individuals attributing causality to an external locus can preserve their sense of self-efficacy and avoid personal negativity by placing the responsibility for the outcomes on others or other factors, such as the context (Coleman, 2013). Where others are blamed for an unsuccessful outcome, anger and relational negativity can ensue (Bazarova & Hancock, 2012), particularly where an individual places a high value on a particular outcome and they may feel powerless to influence their situation. In contrast, self-attribution for a negative outcome has been shown in a number of studies to lead to feelings of guilt and can subsequently compromise their sense of self-efficacy (Amankwah-Amoah, 2015; Bazarova & Hancock, 2012; Coleman, 2013; Schlenker, Weigold, & Hallam, 1990; Stajkovic & Sommer, 2000).

To illustrate, consider the following scenario. A numeracy teacher failing to raise student outcomes in their class attributes causality to the students’ non-participation in homework activities. In this situation, the students’ actions, or non-actions, are perceived by the teacher as the cause for their lack of mathematical improvement, and the teacher is considered to have identified an external locus of causality. In this situation, the teacher deflected blame to the students and the teacher’s own sense of self-efficacy – in this instance, as an effective numeracy teacher – is preserved. Conversely, the same teacher attributing this unsuccessful outcome to their own lack of mathematical understanding (an internal locus of causality) may feel guilty and experience a lowered sense of self-efficacy about their work as a numeracy teacher.

**Responses to the dimension of stability**

Weiner (2010b, p. 31) explains that the dimension of stability gives rise to an individual’s determination regarding what to expect in the future, and therefore influences their sense of hope. He argues that an individual’s perception that the cause for an outcome is stable or unchanging is likely to create an expectation that ‘the prior effect will … recur’. When applied to a successful outcome, such stability evokes a positive outlook for the future, as success is expected to continue. However, when applied to an unsuccessful outcome, an attribution of high stability could evoke a
‘downward shift in expectancy’ for improved outcomes in the future. In extreme cases, this can extend to ‘a state of hopelessness’ (Weiner, 2010b, p. 31).

Some researchers (e.g. Eren, 2014; Eren & Yesilburşa, 2016) argue that hope among teachers is critical to their success and persistence. In the case of first-year teachers, it would be probable that attributions of stability for success would have a positive impact on their expectations for success into the future. In contrast, attributions of instability for causes linked to success could compromise such hopes and expectations. Importantly, the reverse would be applicable for causes connected to unsuccessful outcomes experienced by a beginning teacher. A perception of instability following unsuccessful experiences would be more likely to yield a sense of hopefulness due to their expectation that things could improve.

**Responses to the dimension of controllability**

Weiner (2011, 2014) explains that the extent to which an individual perceives they have personal control is directly linked to affective states. Individuals who perceive themselves to have personal control may feel regretful when unsuccessful outcomes have been experienced and the cause is attributed internally. In this case, Weiner argues that the individual may feel a sense of remorse for not acting on their capacity to control the cause and possibly influence a better outcome. In contrast, he explains that when individuals perceive personal controllability for a successful outcome, they can feel motivated. Motivation can be impacted negatively by perceptions of low personal controllability, as feelings of personal agency for future improvement are undermined (e.g. Coffee & Rees, 2008, 2009; Coffee, Rees, & Haslam, 2009; Weiner, 1985, 1986). In this regard, it is helpful to consider the strong link between the dimension of controllability and Bandura’s (1989, 2001, 2006) work on the individual’s sense of agency to regulate and influence their environment and themselves.
According to Bandura (1989), the extent to which the individual perceives a level of agency, or a sense that they can manage or influence the environment, influences their levels of anxiety, motivation and engagement. A high sense of agency could lead the individual to believe that they have a degree of control over their own actions, such as increased effort, as well as contextual conditions. This can result in increased sense of personal motivation and commitment to the task at hand. In contrast, an individual with a low sense of agency may feel that circumstances are at the whim of chance or the actions of others, increasing their anxiety and frustration. As stated by attributional researchers Chipperfield, Perry, and Stewart (2012, p. 45), ‘generally speaking, the more one believes he/she can influence outcomes (i.e. the stronger their perceived personal control), the more motivated he/she will be to engage in goal-directed behaviour’.

Weiner (2010) warns, however, that internal causes for outcomes are not necessarily associated with perceptions of personal controllability. There are situations in which an individual may consider an internal locus of causality to be outside their personal control. The earlier example of ability is one such case. Those individuals displaying a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2010, 2013) would have the view that one is born with a level of ability and that the individual does not have any personal influence or control over improving their natural level of ability. However, a generally positive correlation between both locus and controllability dimensions has been found in previous research (e.g. McAuley et al., 1992), with an external locus of causality linked to low perceptions of personal control, and vice versa.

To put Weiner’s conceptualisation of controllability into a classroom context, a first-year teacher attributing causality for an unsuccessful mathematics lesson to the low numeracy skills of the class may perceive limited personal control over this cause. Weiner holds that the teacher would preserve their own sense of self-efficacy; however, they would experience low motivation to try to change this outcome in the future. This dimensional response could have significant consequences
 Attribution styles: Positive and negative

As Weiner refined his theory of attribution, he explained the interrelatedness of the three dimensions of causality—that is, individuals will consider an outcome’s causality with regard to locus, stability and controllability. He holds that their subsequent actions, feelings and thoughts are a consequence of the dimensional combination used to understand the reason for the way their experiences turned out the way they did. A number of studies have reported that individuals have a ‘habitual pattern’ (Schulman, Castellon, & Seligman, 1989, p. 505) for attributing causality for perceived outcomes across contexts and experiences. These patterns have been referred to in attribution research as attribution or explanatory styles (Fineburg, 2010; Peterson, Semmel, von Baeyer, et al., 1982; Schulman et al., 1989) (see Figure 3.3). Positive and negative attribution styles have been the focus of research, named on the basis of the associated emotions and behaviours resulting from each (Alloy, Peterson, Abramson, & Seligman, 1984; Ashforth & Fugate, 2006; Boyer, 2006; Fineburg, 2010; Higgins & Hay, 2003; Martinez, Martinko, & Ferris, 2012; Martinko, Moss, Douglas, & Borkowski, 2007; Ostell & Divers, 1987; Schulman et al., 1989).
Figure 3.3 Attribution styles (adapted from Alloy, Peterson, Abramson, & Seligman, 1984)

Used to explain the differences in how individuals assign causality for events and outcomes (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Weiner, 1985), Alloy, Peterson, Abramson, and Seligman (1984, p. 682) describe attribution style as most obvious ‘in situations in which informational cues about the causes are sufficiently ambiguous’, as in a novel situation where the context may not be understood completely. This notion is extended by Perry et al. (2008, p. 460), who state that ‘the transition to new achievement settings places more emphasis on this appraisal process.’ Attribution styles are thus useful to understand the ways in which beginning teachers interact with, and respond to, their contexts, which could be considered to be unfamiliar to them as they begin work in the teaching profession.

As the terms ‘positive’, ‘negative’ and ‘neutral’ suggest, each of these attributional styles is characterised by a set of behavioural and affective responses (Boyer, 2006; Higgins & Hay, 2003; Peterson, Semmel, Baeyer, et al., 1982; Yeigh, 2007). Attribution style research has identified a positive attribution style to be dimensionally characterised by, in the case of an unsuccessful outcome, low stability (the cause has the capacity to be changed), high personal control (this cause can be influenced by the individual) and an external locus (responsibility for the lack of success does not reside with the individual) (Seligman & Schulman, 1986; Weiner, 1972, 1986, 2014). In contrast, an individual attributing negatively may perceive the cause to be internally located (the cause is the responsibility of the individual), low in personal controllability (the individual has limited or no influence over the cause) and stable (the cause for the unsuccessful outcome is likely to continue into the future) (Higgins & Hay, 2003).

In the event of a successful outcome, the individual with a positive attribution style would be positioned to remain optimistic through attributing causality as internal (the individual takes credit for the success), stable (the cause will continue to exist) and controllable (the individual has the agency to influence, and even improve, this cause for success) (Boyer, 2006; Janssen, de Hullu,
& Tigelaar, 2008). Conversely, an individual with a negative attribution style may attribute this outcome as external, unstable and uncontrollable (Weiner, 1995, 2011; Weiner et al., 1971). In other words, the individual would not assume credit for the success, nor foresee that this successful outcome would be likely to continue into the future. The individual might also believe that they lack the capacity to personally influence the cause in way/s that might ensure ongoing success.

The attribution styles adopted by beginning teachers as they reflect on their experiences during their first year of teaching is central to this research study. Importantly, the applicability and influence of positive and negative attribution style in the beginning teacher context is yet to be fully understood with regard to the development of professional learner identity. It is reasonable to suggest from this theoretical perspective, however, that the ways in which first-year teachers attribute causality for their experiences are likely to impact their attitudes and beliefs about their responsibilities, agency and who they are motivated to be as a teacher. The beneficial impact of a positive attribution style has been reported in research into teacher burnout and wellbeing (e.g. Fineburg, 2010; Wang, Hall, & Rahimi, 2015), with teachers who demonstrate positive attribution styles found to show greater resilience and use of coping strategies. In addition, Perry, Stupinsky, Daniels, and Haynes (2008) found teachers who attributed positively had high expectations for their students’ learning outcomes. Similarly, researchers in higher education have identified that a positive attribution style supports university students to maintain motivation (Elliot, McGregor, & Gable, 1999), and to hold positive expectations for their success, as well as to set goals (Eberley, Liu, Mitchell, & Lee, 2013). According to Masui and De Corte (2005, p. 353), ‘the skill to attribute outcomes in a constructive way is a crucial one’. This thesis investigates the characteristics of constructive attributions for the development of a professional learner identity.

The process of attributing causality

The work of researchers in the area of reflective practice and cognition has contributed to understandings about the process, rather than the product, of attributing causality. Two significant
processes have been identified (see Figure 3.4). First, the individual is required to have access to relevant information or knowledge that can inform their attribution of causality. Second, the individual needs to process (or interpret) this information in order to arrive at an attribution of causality. According to Oyserman, Elmore, and Smith (2012), the ways in which individuals interpret their experiences are influenced greatly by the information accessible at the moment of decision-making and what meaning is made of that information. Both processes are significant to the attribution process (Grotzer & Tutwiler, 2014; Hamilton, Grubb, Acorn, Trolier, & Carpenter, 1990; Luyckx et al., 2007; Yeigh, 2007).

Figure 3.4 The process of attributing causality
Attributions of causality are dependent on the ‘information available in the environment’ (Grotzer & Tutwiler, 2014, p. 98) and without this information, causal inferences may be constrained due to ‘situational invisibility’ (Cramton, Orvis, & Wilson, 2012; Grotzer & Tutwiler, 2014). In the case of beginning teachers, it could be anticipated that access to relevant information might be limited by their lack of familiarity with the new school context, along with a limited range of teaching experiences upon which they can potentially draw. According to Mason and Morris (2010), individuals in these circumstances may resort to ‘mind-reading’ or making meaning based upon personal assumptions about the experience and the context in which that experience occurs. According to Grotzer and Tutwiler (2014, p. 97):

> Reasoning well about our world requires cognitive flexibility in perceiving and attending to the parameters of the problem space and in considering how patterns are constructed … It involves detecting non-linear, indirect, and interactive relationships and considering agentive and non-agentive causes … Human cognition appears to be heuristic-driven in ways that may be adaptive in some instances and yet in others can derail an ability to discern and understand these complex causal features.

In other words, individuals will gather information in ways that may, or may not, enable them to see the complexity of their experiences.

Prior expectations of causality may inhibit the search for alternative causalities (Augoustinos et al., 2014; Chapman & Chapman, 1969). Consider, for example, a situation where a first-year teacher expects that the students in a particular class have little ability to manage the work they are given. In this case, the teacher may be inclined to discontinue their search for causality to explain unsuccessful student outcomes beyond the perceived lack of ability of the students. They may not consider it necessary to consider alternative options for causality. Information processing can be inhibited where attributions of causality are undertaken without full exploration of causal possibilities (Augoustinos et al., 2014; Yeigh, 2007).
An individual needs both the personal and contextual resources to undertake a full exploration of causal possibilities through reflective practice (Masui & De Corte, 2005). During reflective practice, individuals can take the time to access and process relevant information and knowledge (Hamilton et al., 1990), which provides them with the opportunity to challenge initial intuitive judgements, misconceptions and taken-for-granted assumptions (Mason & Morris, 2010; Sun & Anderson, 2012; van Seggelen-Damen, 2013). This kind of reflective practice has been found to be positively correlated with more considered and complex attributional thinking (reflection-for-meaning) and the ability to generate appropriate plans of action (reflection-for-action) in response to events and outcomes (Campitelli & Labollita, 2010; Juanich et al., 2016; Luyckx et al., 2007; Moritz, Siemsen, & Kremer, 2014). However, Moritz et al. (2014) warn of the propensity for individuals to be content to trust their initial, often unconscious thinking. Grotzer and Tutwiler (2014, p. 104) concur, contending that:

When addressing complex causality, the issue is more than whether or not one is able to reach higher level grammars … Issues related to available information and its salience, learned heuristics and reductive reasoning patterns, and tendencies when dealing with the tension between efficiency and extended analysis lead to different patterns of engagement.

For many individuals, attributional thinking is compromised by ‘perception, attention, and motivation in the moment against a complex backdrop of environmental noise that competes for one’s attention’ (Grotzer & Tutwiler, 2014, p. 98). In the context of this study, beginning teachers often find themselves time poor and with a plethora of competing responsibilities. According to Oyserman et al. (2012), attributional thinking only becomes active when the individual has the time and motivation to reflect fully on the meaning of their experiences; otherwise, ‘people end up with lean information from which to make causal inferences’ (Grotzer & Tutwiler, 2014, p. 98).
Moreover, Forgas (1998, 2005), as well as a number of other researchers (e.g. Allen, Jones, & Sheffield, 2009; Avramova, Stapel, & Lerouge, 2010; Barrowclough & Hooley, 2003; Coleman, 2013; Dasborough & Ashkanasky, 2002; Eberley et al., 2013; Weiner, 1986, 2014), foreground the need to acknowledge emotions as a motivational antecedent to the gathering and processing of causal attributions. According to these researchers, a positive mood generally limits the extent to which an individual will systematically seek and process information to arrive at attributions of causality and a negative mood produces a more intensive, systematic approach during which an individual will more intentionally consider available information. This understanding would explain why unsuccessful outcomes are most likely to produce more overt attributions of causality (Martinko & Thomson, 1998; Weiner, 1985, 1986, 2000).

The impact of personal bias also features in attribution research. According to Kelley and Michela (1980, p. 473), individuals are likely to take account of their standing in their social context when attributing causality for the outcomes of their experiences. Motivated by self-enhancement and self-preservation, self-serving bias (Schlenker et al., 1990) can lead the individual to attribute success to themselves (thus assuming credit for success) and to attribute shortcomings to others (thus diverting blame elsewhere). This is particularly the case where individuals perceive that others are in a position of power or authority. Given the increased performative culture in schools that beginning teachers may experience, concerns about professional judgement from those others perceived to be in evaluative positions are relevant to this conceptualisation of personal bias in attributions of causality.

This can be seen as a type of risk-aversive thinking that can arise when beginning teachers attempt to ‘play it safe’ (O’Sullivan & Conway, 2016, p. 4) and ‘fake it’ (Atkinson, 2012, p. 74) in the presence of colleagues in order to maintain their professional standing. Weiner (2010b), who refers to this process as ‘impression management’, maintains that individuals often work to attribute in ways that protect them from blame and responsibility for
Perceptions of the context thus come into play as beginning teachers work to comply with norms of practice and respond to possible power relationships among those with whom they work (Haugen, Lund, & Ommundsen, 2008). Attributional thinking therefore does not occur in isolation from the social complexities inherent to the contexts in which individuals’ experiences occur (see Figure 3.5).

**Figure 3.5** Theoretical framework based on Weiner’s theory of attribution (1985, 1986)

**Synthesis and discussion**

There are four key tenets to this framework that underpin its selection for use in this research. First, attributions of causality are most likely to occur in new and unfamiliar contexts, as is the case for
first-year teachers entering the teaching profession. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, beginning teachers’ experiences tend to be new, important and often challenging to them (Choy et al., 2013; Dicke et al., 2015; Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Fox et al., 2011; Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Hong, 2012; Pillen et al., 2013b). Individuals have an innate tendency to seek attributions of causality to explain the cause for the outcomes of their experiences, particularly when these experiences are novel, important and negative (Weiner, 1985, 1986). Attribution theory therefore provides a pertinent frame for investigating the lived experiences of teachers in their first year in the profession.

Second, this framework describes the ways in which individuals make meaning of their experiences through a process of attributing causality across three dimensions of locus, stability and controllability. Individuals use their knowledge and access information to identify why they believe particular experiences result in certain outcomes. In this way, attributions of causality can be considered an important part of reflective practice as teachers seek to understand why particular experiences are more or less successful than others. The theoretical framework thus enables investigation beyond ‘What worked?’, ‘What didn’t?’ and ‘Why?’ to a detailed examination of how first-year teachers reflect about their experiences and the impact of their interpretations on them, personally and professionally.

Third, attributions of causality influence individuals’ subsequent responses in the form of actions, thoughts and feelings, all of which are significant to teacher identity construction. As stated in Chapter 2, teacher identity construction is influenced by the ways in which the individual teacher manages individual and contextual factors and makes sense of their experiences (Billett, 2010; Day, 2012; Day et al., 2006). Attribution theory proposes that individuals make meaning of their contextually based experiences in different ways, and that how they interpret their experiences will influence their subsequent responses. I argue that their responses – that is, thoughts, feelings and actions – influence how first-year teachers develop and sustain their attitudes as professional learners. While attribution theory has been used previously in educational research on, for example,
teacher burnout and teachers’ wellbeing, this study focuses on first-year teachers’ sense of their professional learner identity, and thus makes a new contribution to the field.

Fourth, attribution theory acknowledges the interplay between the individual and social context, important in this study of first-year teachers working within the highly social and political contexts of schools. Teachers’ experiences occur as part of these contexts, so attributions of causality are inherently connected to the socio-political spaces in which they occur. For first-year teachers, any attributions of causality will occur in settings characterised by social relationships, power and cultural norms (Schlenker et al., 1990). Attribution theory is therefore a way of thinking about how contemporary contexts may serve to influence how first-year teachers feel they can, or should, make meaning of their experiences. The investigation of attributions is particularly appropriate given that the performative and standardised regimes within which first-year teachers work may seem, in some ways, to place blame for perceived issues in teaching quality on individual teachers (Singh, Märtsin, & Glasswell, 2015). The extent to which first-year teachers feel themselves to be accountable in classrooms, and the extent to which they feel they have the capacity to influence their work amidst accountabilities and prescribed standards, are important to understanding their work as teachers and learners.

In the next chapter, I describe and justify the methodology used in this study.
Chapter 4 Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter, I explain and justify the selection of methodological design for this study. First, I explain the selected methodology and advance a justification for the appropriateness of this choice with regard to the research problem and theoretical framework for this study. I then detail my role in this research and provide context to the research conducted, before explaining and justifying the specific methods used for sampling and participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis and reporting. Finally, I address research quality and ethical considerations for this study.

A mixed methodology

This research used a mixed methodology to investigate the experiences, subsequent responses and development of professional learner identities of first-year teachers across multiple school sites in the independent school sector in Queensland, Australia. I first address the main tenets of the specific mixed methods design selected for this research.

According to Creswell and Clark (2007, p. 5), mixed-methods research

focuses on collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.

Specifically, a sequential mixed methods approach (Creswell & Clark, 2011) was adopted for this research involving the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data in a linear sequence. According to Creswell and Clark (2011), a sequential approach enables one method to expand on the next. For the purposes of this study, quantitative data collection and analysis were
used to inform subsequent qualitative data collection and analysis. The qualitative phase was used
to explore in greater depth the findings from the quantitative phase. The final analysis drew on both
the qualitative and quantitative data to generate the findings from this research.

I commenced this research with an online survey to collect information about first-year
teachers’ responses to teaching experiences from an attribution perspective. After analysing these
survey data, I then used the findings generated to develop a semi-structured interview schedule to
elicit rich data about participants’ attributions of causality, and the impact of these attributions on
the development of their identities as professional learners.

The sequential mixed methods design for this research, using both types of data source,
enabled me to comprehensively address the aim and respond to the research question for this study.
The use of an initial survey enabled me to collect attribution data from a sample size
(57 participants) of first-year teachers across Queensland with whom I would have been unable to
interact directly. I then analysed and used these data to generate the semi-structured interview
protocol for the second phase of the study. Subsequent interviews provided me with the means to
seek deep explanations for the initial findings better addressed through direct contact with the
participants. This design provided me with a method of including multiple individuals and dual data
sources.

The sequential mixed methods design of this research is significant in that the use of both
qualitative and quantitative methods in attribution research has had limited application in prior
studies. Most often, quantitative methods using pre-developed attribution survey tools have been
used as a means of measuring attributions of causality (e.g. Ashforth & Fugate, 2006; Chamberlain,
Haaga, Thorndike, & Ahrens, 2004; Coffee & Rees, 2008; Jager & Denessen, 2015; McAuley et al.,
1992; Peterson, Semmel, von Baeyer, et al., 1982). To a much lesser extent, an interview method
has been used to investigate attributions of causality, particularly where researchers have sought to
explain the reasons behind, and the consequences of, specific attributional thinking in naturalistic
research settings (refer to studies by, for example, Eberley, Holley, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2011; Larsen & Allen, 2014; Martinez et al., 2012; Neiderdeppe, Robert, & Kindig, 2011; Schulman et al., 1989; Stratton, 1997). In this study, the use of quantitative and qualitative methods has served to combine previous methodological choices, thus making a contribution to methodology in attribution theory research.

**My role as researcher**

In all research, the researcher plays an important and influential role as they select methodology, collect data, analyse data and make inferences. The credibility of the data is dependent on the ability of the researcher to be self-aware as to their influence on the credibility of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the researcher for this study, I was aware that my professional background had the potential to exert influence over aspects of the research, both positively and negatively. I first provide some professional background, then discuss how potential issues were addressed.

**My professional background**

For over 25 years in Australia, I worked in both state government and independent school sectors as a classroom teacher, literacy coach and mentor for beginning teachers. On leaving the classroom, I worked for six years as Manager (Teaching and Learning) with Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) to conceptualise, develop and implement professional learning for teachers working in many and varied independent schools across the state of Queensland.

**My role in this study**

At the time this research commenced, I had been in the role of Manager (Teaching and Learning) at ISQ for approximately two years. My connection with the independent sector is relevant in that I was working with schools across the education sector from which participants in this study were drawn. This connection had potential benefits. First, I was familiar with the governance, policies
and the ways of working of independent schools when recruiting participants. Second, I was familiar with the working contexts of first-year teachers at both a sector and individual school level. While I had not worked directly with any of the participants in the study, this familiarity meant we shared a language that alleviated the need for ongoing clarification of independent school specific terms or issues. Third, I was able to ascertain an appropriate purposive sample of school contexts from which to draw participants for interviews due to my familiarity with schools in the state.

Conversely, my connection with independent schools also raised some issues that had to be addressed. First, I identified the risk that first-year teachers may feel pressured to participate through a misplaced belief that ISQ had authoritative status in their school. As mentioned previously, ISQ is not an authoritative body over independent schools and my work in the schools was not regulatory in nature. To address this potential issue, I contacted participants via their school principals so that there was no direct contact until the first-year teacher had consented to participate.

Second, my role at ISQ had the potential to compromise the openness and honesty of participants during interviews if they perceived that I had a close relationship with their leaders, or that I held some authority in their school context. In response, I began each interview with a brief explanation of my role at ISQ, assuring participants that my work was separate from my research and that their anonymity and confidentiality were my first priority. Participants were asked whether they had any questions about my role to clarify any concerns they may have had.

Last, my knowledge of the school contexts in which the participants worked had the potential to bias my interpretations of participant data. Breen (2007, p. 163) warns that ‘greater familiarity can lead to a loss of “objectivity”, particularly in terms of inadvertently making erroneous assumptions based on the researcher’s prior knowledge and/or experience’. To address this final concern, I adopted a strategy advocated by Kanuha (2000), developed from her work as an insider researcher. This strategy requires the researcher to consciously prompt the participant for further information whenever the researcher begins using their own knowledge to ‘fill in gaps’ in
meaning during an interview. These gaps can occur either because the participant assumes that the researcher will know what they mean, or they do not completely explain their thinking. To exemplify, Nadia (see Chapter 6) explained that there was a class that was difficult to control, and went on to say, ‘The kids are difficult here, as you know.’ Due to my familiarity with the context, I could have assumed what she meant. However, following additional prompts for meaning, I discovered that her intended meaning was something quite different from my original assumption.

**Phase 1 research methods**

In Phase 1 of this research, I administered an online survey adapted from the Causal Dimension Scale II (CDSII) (McAuley et al., 1992) to a sample of first-year teachers working in independent schools in Queensland during 2015 (see Appendix A). The survey was used to collect data about the way in which first-year teachers attributed causality for the outcomes of their teaching experiences.

**Data instrument: An online survey (CDSII)**

The CDS was developed by Russell in 1982 and then revised in 1992 (McAuley et al., 1992) (see Appendix B). It was this revised version, the CDSII, that I determined to be the best fit for this research for the following reasons:

- It was developed directly from the work of Weiner (1985, 1986) which forms the basis of the theoretical framework for this study.

- While originally used in research in sporting contexts, adapted versions of the CDSII have more recently been used in education settings, such as in a study by Atkinson (2012) measuring attributions of causality made by pre-service teachers for unsuccessful teaching outcomes with children with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder. This study further extends the empirical application of the CDSII in an education context.
The CDSII has been accepted as a reliable and valid measure of attributions of causality across contexts in the research community (Ashforth & Fugate, 2006; Crocker, Eklund, & Graham, 2002; McAuley et al., 1992; McAuley & Gross, 1983).

For the purposes of this research, I made two adaptations to the CDSII data instrument (see Appendix A). First, I altered the scenarios to which participants responded. The CDSII uses a set of eight hypothetical scenarios (referred to as events), four considered of a positive nature and four negative. Participants are required to identify a cause or causes for the hypothetical event and attribute causality across each of Weiner’s dimensions of causality using a Likert scale. In using hypothetical events for attributional scoring, participants are required to anticipate how they believe they would respond to these events. The advantages of using hypothetical events is that standardisation of data for coding and analysis is considered to be easier (Ashforth & Fugate, 2006) and the influence of an individual’s heightened attributional response to ‘real-life’ events may be avoided (Alloy, Abramson, Metalsky, & Hartlage, 1988). The disadvantage of using hypothetical events, as noted by Chamberlain et al. (2004) and Jager and Denessen (2015), is that events may not be relatable or significant to participants, and reported attributions may therefore be forced and lack authenticity. In my administration of the instrument, I elected to adapt the CDSII so that participants were asked to attribute causality for self-identified experiences. This adaptation enabled participants to identify those experiences that were significant to them and therefore more likely to prompt reports of authentic attributions of causality. I also reduced the length of the instrument in order to support the completion rate of my survey. Research has demonstrated that participants are less likely to complete surveys that are time intensive (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). I therefore reduced the number of events from eight to four.

I used QUALTRICS (Academia) Software (2014) to make the aforementioned adaptations to the CDSII. The adapted survey was divided into three parts (see Appendix A), with Part A pertaining to demographic data about the school and the participant. In Part B, participants were
first asked to describe two successful events (in their view), identify their perceived causes for these successes, then allocate scores which indicated their attributions of causality across each of the dimensions of locus, stability and controllability. In Part C, participants followed the same process in relation to events that they felt did not go as they intended.

Prior to administering the survey, I carried out a small pilot in order to ascertain how easily participants were able to understand the language and instructions of the adapted CDSII data instrument for this study. The pilot involved four second-year teachers, opportunistically recruited from independent schools in Queensland through my role as Manager (Teaching and Learning) at ISQ. The use of second-year teachers ensured that my potential sample of first-year teachers remained available. Minor changes to the wording of the Likert scale occurred as a result of feedback from the pilot participants to enhance accessibility and consistency of interpretation of the language used.

Participants

The following sections outline the participant recruitment methods used in this research and demographic information about the survey participants.

Participant recruitment in Phase 1

Phase 1 involved opportunistic sampling of first-year teachers. As discussed, the schools from which these participants were drawn were those from the independent school sector in Queensland. Independent schools in Australia are characterised by their independent governance. Therefore, when engaging multiple independent schools in educational research, it is not possible to access a common database to find specific school information, such as the number and contact details of first-year teachers at each school, as required for this research study. This poses as a significant challenge for researchers working with the independent sector. For this reason, it is noteworthy that in this study I have drawn exclusively on participants from multiple sites across the independent school sector. Previous multi-site research in Australia has mostly involved teachers from the state
government sector, the Catholic Education sector or a combination of sectors, sometimes including independent schools. Where research has been undertaken exclusively in an independent school setting, this has most commonly involved a single or dual school setting (e.g. Allen & Rimes, 2014; Fielding & Vidovich, 2017; Holmes, 2016), as opposed to multiple site research.

The following steps were used for participant recruitment.

*Step 1: Developing a database*

The first step in participant recruitment was to contact all independent schools in Queensland so that a database of potential participants could be developed. In 2015, 191 schools were listed on the Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) website. Table 4.1 provides information as to their size at that time and location.

**Table 4.1** Geographic location and size of Queensland independent schools (June 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Small Student Population 1-199</th>
<th>Medium Student Population 200-599</th>
<th>Large Student Population 600+</th>
<th>Total number of schools</th>
<th>% of total schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan (South East Queensland)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional (North, Central Queensland)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote (Far North Queensland)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of schools</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total schools</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I succeeded in contacting 189 of the 191 schools listed by phone to determine where first-year teachers were located (two did not respond to my repeated calls). Although I was not able to obtain the personal contact details for first-year teachers through this process, I managed to...
ascertain from most schools whether there were first-year teachers on staff and whether the principal of the school was willing to forward information about this study on to first-year teachers.

As contact with schools was made, I developed an excel spreadsheet to indicate:

- the number of first-year teachers at each school
- the contact person at the school (name and position) and their email, and
- school principals who did/did not wish to assist with this research.

In total, 198 first-year teachers were located across 104 schools (see Table 4.2). In addition, 22 schools were unsure whether first-year teachers were on staff at the time of contact, or how many there were, and requested that they still receive information about the study. This represented the opportunistic sample for this phase of the research.

**Table 4.2** Number of first-year teachers by geographic location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Confirmed first-year teachers on staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan (South East Queensland)</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional (North, Central Queensland)</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote (Far North Queensland)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total teachers</strong></td>
<td><strong>198</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Step 2: Distributing the survey**

I then sent an email (see Appendix C) to the principals of each of the 126 schools in my database where (1) first-year teachers were confirmed as being on staff at the school, and/or (2) the principal agreed to this information being sent to the school for distribution to the first-year teachers. Each
email contained a Plain Language Statement (see Appendix D) and an attached document to be forwarded on to first-year teachers (see Appendix E).

The Plain Language Statement clearly outlined the purpose and procedures for Phase 1 of the research and advised first-year teachers how to access and submit their survey anonymously, using the link provided, should they wish to participate. The submission date (four weeks from when the email was sent) was also included, as was a statement about the voluntary nature of the research, with the submission of the survey indicating consent. Potential risks to participants were outlined. No material incentives were offered for participation.

Subsequent to sending this email, three of the schools declined to forward the survey information (providing no reason), reducing the potential sample to 194 teachers. I sent reminder emails (see Appendices F and G) to 123 schools one week before the requested submission date. Of these schools, three principals revised their initial first-year teacher numbers, reducing the possible sample by six teachers to 188. Nine additional principals also confirmed distribution of the survey information to their first-year teachers. The number of first-year teachers receiving the information increased by 20 to a confirmed distribution sample of 62 first-year teachers. By the due date, 32 surveys had been submitted via the online link provided. I sent a final reminder email to the school contacts advising them of a one-week extension to the submission date (see Appendix H).

From the potential sample of 188 first-year teachers, 93 surveys were submitted, constituting a response rate of 49.5%. Only 50 surveys were determined to be complete, however. Of the 43 incomplete surveys, two teachers indicated that they were not first-year teachers, although identified as such by their schools, thus reducing the potential sample to 186. Of the remaining incomplete surveys, seven were determined to be suitable for inclusion in data analysis. These comprised of three surveys at 40%, three at 60% and one at 80% completion. The total number of survey responses included for data analysis therefore totalled 57, constituting a response rate of 30.6%. According to many researchers (e.g. LaRose & Tsai, 2014; Nulty, 2008; Reips, 2002, 2009),
low response rates and high dropout rates for online surveys have been an ongoing issue. In a large-scale study of online survey response rates by Madariaga et al. (2017), an overall response rate of 22.5% was considered typical where incentives were not provided. In a smaller scale study by LaRose and Tsai (2014), their online survey without an attached incentive produced a response rate of 14.5%. With this in mind, the response and dropout rates for this survey were considered acceptable.

Survey participant demographics

Part A of the online survey provided basic demographic data about the survey participants and their school contexts. The demographic data provided an understanding of the diversity of school contexts and employment types represented in this phase of the study.

There was no significant difference between the number of participants working in metropolitan schools, at 47%, and regional locations at 46% (see Table 4.3). The number of remote locations represented was significantly lower, at 7%, as would be expected due to the significantly smaller number of remote independent schools in Queensland (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.3 Survey participants by geographic location of the workplace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic location</th>
<th>No. of surveys</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the size of participating schools, there was a fair distribution across small, medium and large-sized schools, at 25%, 35% and 40% respectively (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Size of participating schools
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School size</th>
<th>No. of surveys</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small (0-199)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (200-599)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (600+)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions about employment type revealed that most of the participants held full-time contract positions, with 15% of participants employed part time in either permanent or contract positions. Only one participant reported being employed on a casual basis (see Table 4.5). The low number of casual teachers in this study could be because principals may not have forwarded the information to staff doing relief teaching across a number of schools.

**Table 4.5 Survey participants by employment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>No. of surveys</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time contract</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time permanent</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time contract</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time permanent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All year level groups were represented by the participants. Early childhood teachers (those teaching three- to five-year-olds), however, had very limited representation (see Table 4.6)

**Table 4.6 Survey participants by year level taught**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year levels</th>
<th>No. of surveys</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood (K)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior (P-2)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary (3-6)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle years (7-10)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Secondary (11-12)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This could be reflective of the fact that not all independent schools in Queensland have a kindergarten on-site. Junior and primary year levels were best represented in the survey sample, at 30% and 35% respectively.

Data analysis

I used a process of analysis for these survey data based on simple descriptive statistics and aimed to generate findings regarding the participants’ teaching experiences and subsequent attributions of causality. As stated by Cohen et al. (2011), descriptive statistics are relevant where the researcher intends to use these data for further interpretation and analysis. First, I allocated a number to each of the 57 surveys that were to be included in the data analysis for retrieval purposes. I then analysed participants’ open-ended responses using descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013) to categorise successful and unsuccessful experiences, and the causes identified for the outcomes of these experiences. I drew initially on broad a priori codes such as behaviour management, workload and relationships from the literature reviewed. I added further codes that did not ‘fit’ with these initial codes, or where codes were not specific enough to represent these data. Frequency counts were then applied to each of these codes to identify trends in the types of experiences and causes identified.

Following this, simple descriptive statistics were developed from the aggregated survey scores across each of Weiner’s (1985, 1986) dimensions of causality from the survey Likert scale questions. Each attribution dimension (locus, controllability and stability) was represented by three questions within the survey (see Table 4.7) with a bipolar scale (Schweizer & Schreiner, 2010) from nine to one provided (see Appendix B).

This analysis revealed patterns for attributing causality for each of the dimensions of causality across the participants. Some aggregated scores and descriptive statistics were accessed through the QUALTRICS Software used for survey development, distribution and collection (see Appendix I). Next, total Likert scale scores reported across all three dimensions of causality were calculated to
identify the attribution styles used for each participants’ reported experiences (see Table 4.8). I then calculated the frequencies of identified styles across all participants.

**Table 4.7 Causal Dimensional Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of attribution</th>
<th>9-6</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Locus of causality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Who or what is responsible for the outcome of this event?</em></td>
<td>That reflects an aspect of yourself</td>
<td>Neutral response</td>
<td>Reflects an aspect of your context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within you</td>
<td>Outside of you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>About you</td>
<td>About others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controllability</strong> (personal)</td>
<td>Manageable by you</td>
<td>Not manageable by you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How much control do I perceive I have?</em></td>
<td>You can control</td>
<td>You cannot control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over which you have power</td>
<td>Over which you have no power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controllability</strong> (external)</td>
<td>Over which others have control</td>
<td>Over which others have no control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How much control do I perceive others to have?</em></td>
<td>Within the power of other people</td>
<td>Not within the power of other people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other people can control</td>
<td>Other people cannot control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stability</strong></td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Is this cause likely to change in the future?</em></td>
<td>That is stable across time</td>
<td>That varies across time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unchangeable</td>
<td>Changeable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4.8 Total scores for Causal Dimension Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of attribution</th>
<th>Total scores</th>
<th>Locus of causality</th>
<th>Controllability (personal)</th>
<th>Controllability (external)</th>
<th>Stability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27-16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3-14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Locus of causality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Who or what is responsible for the outcome of this event?</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That reflects an aspect of yourself</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Reflects an aspect of your context</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within you</td>
<td></td>
<td>Outside of you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About you</td>
<td></td>
<td>About others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controllability (personal)</strong></td>
<td>Managed by you</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Not manageable by you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How much control do I perceive I have?</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You can control</td>
<td></td>
<td>You cannot control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over which you have power</td>
<td></td>
<td>Over which you have no power</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controllability (external)</strong></td>
<td>Over which others have control</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Over which others have no control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>How much control do I perceive others to have?</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the power of other people</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not within the power of other people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people can control</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other people cannot control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stability</strong></td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Is this cause likely to change in the future?</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That is stable across time</td>
<td></td>
<td>That varies across time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unchangeable</td>
<td></td>
<td>Changeable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following my interpretation of data from this analysis, I began Phase 2 of the research study.
Phase 2 research methods

In the following section, I explain and justify the choice of the semi-structured interview as the data instrument for this phase of the research. I then outline the method of participant recruitment, analysis and the reporting of interview findings.

Data instrument: A semi-structured interview

Phase 2 consisted of face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The use of interviews was appropriate in two important ways. First, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 described how teacher identity is representative of beliefs, values, thoughts and feelings, revealed through our social interactions. Given that interviewing acknowledges ‘the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and … the social situatedness of research data’ (Kvale, 1996, p. 14), the use of interviews enabled participants to share their beliefs and thoughts, thus providing insight into their identities as professional learners. Second, Weiner’s (1985, 1986) attribution theory, which frames this study, highlights the subjective nature of attributions in response to perceived outcomes of experience. According to Cohen et al. (2011, p. 409), interviews enable participants to ‘discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view’. The use of interviews therefore provided the participants with the opportunity to discuss their interpretations of their experiences, and subsequent attributions, from their personal perspective.

The specific use of semi-structured interviews was particularly fitting for this research. According to Cohen et al. (2011), semi-structured interviews allow for a priori concepts to be investigated while providing the opportunity for unexpected concepts and data to emerge. For this to occur, Cohen et al. (2011, p. 413) state that a semi-structured or ‘interview guide approach’ requires the development of an interview schedule with topics and issues specified in advance. These researchers explain that such an approach enables data collection to remain fairly systematic
for each respondent. However, they also warn that there is a chance that some conceptual omissions may occur in data collection due to the flexible nature of the schedule. Kvale (2007) concurs, stating that conceptual omission in this form of interview is particularly problematic in research studies with a strong theoretical framework. As a result, the interview schedule consisted of specified open-ended questions while maintaining the flexibility to explore unexpected or emerging themes through additional questioning (see Appendix J). Kvale (2007, p. 12) asserts that this approach preserves opportunities for ‘subjects to bring forth the dimensions they find important’.

Multiple drafts of the interview schedule were developed. During the drafting process, I responded to multiple sources of feedback, including my doctoral supervisors, peer review completed by two academics at separate universities in Australia and a pilot of the interview schedule. The final draft schedule consisted of three parts:

1. A mixture of open and closed questions in Part 1 permitted me to gather demographic information about the participants, revealing the diversity of the participant sample as well as assisting me to build rapport with each participant.

2. Open-ended questions in Part 2 focused on the concept of teacher identity as a professional learner. This section also enabled me to ensure that there was a shared understanding of the meaning of the terms professional learning and professional learners in this interview. According to Cohen et al. (2011, p. 383), entering the interview with the belief that the participant has a full understanding of the vocabulary and topic of the interview is a ‘dangerous assumption’.

3. Open-ended questions in Part 3 sought to provide participants with the opportunity to share their teaching experiences and subsequent attributions, as well as elaborate on their subsequent thinking and actions as a professional learner. Unexpected topics or concepts were explored.
Participants

The following sections outline the participant recruitment methods undertaken in this phase of the research and demographic information for interview participants.

Participant recruitment in Phase 2

For Phase 2, I recruited a sample of first-year teachers working in independent schools in Queensland in 2016. To include first-year teachers with enough teaching experience to respond comprehensively to the interview questions, I sought those with at least six months of teaching experience. Given that these first-year teachers could have commenced practice in 2015 or 2016, and may have relocated schools in 2016, the database developed for Phase 1 needed to be reviewed to determine which schools in 2016 offered a potential source of interview participants. The use of Phase 1 survey participants as interviewees in Phase 2 was not practicable due to the anonymity of survey responses (a requirement of ethical authority to conduct the study).

Step 1: Reviewing the database

From the 196 schools in Queensland listed as independent in 2016, I first identified which schools were practical for me to access, accounting for the time and resources available to me as a researcher who was also working full time. For this reason, schools in remote and some regional locations were discounted. From the remaining schools, I then identified a purposive sample of 37 schools that would provide a diverse set of school contexts across geographic location and school size. From these 37 schools, I sought 15 interviews in total. According to Kvale (2007, p. 44):

In common interview studies, the number of interviews tends to be around 15 ±10. This number may be due to a combination of the time and resources available for the investigation and the law of diminishing returns.

To account for the possibility of a diminished return on initial contact, I contacted all 37 schools by phone to determine whether first-year teachers were on staff and to ascertain whether
principals were willing to forward research information for Phase 2 on to their first-year teachers. Of these schools, 20 indicated there were first-year teachers at the school and a potential sample of 25 first-year teachers was identified.

**Step 2: Distributing interview information**

Emails were then sent to the principals of these 20 schools (see Appendix K). This email gave a brief synopsis of the study for the principal, and a request to forward the Plain Language Statement (see Appendix L) and Consent Form (see Appendix M) to the first-year teachers on staff. The Plain Language Statement outlined the purpose and procedures for Phase 2 and clearly articulated the voluntary nature of this research using the attached Consent Form. Any potential risks were also addressed.

From the 20 schools emailed, 18 first-year teachers from 14 schools consented to participate in a semi-structured interview. I negotiated the timing of the interview with each participant and all elected to be interviewed at their school site. Prior to conducting interviews, two of the original consenting participants chose to withdraw from the process, one because of increased workload and the other for personal reasons. A total of 16 interviews were therefore conducted.

**Interview participant demographics**

Four men and 12 women participated in Phase 2 interviews. Participants worked across schools of varying size and geographic location (see Table 4.9). There was greater representation of participants from small schools across regional and metropolitan school contexts, possibly due to close contact between staff in small school settings, making dissemination of research information easier. Alternatively, first-year teachers in small schools may have felt a particular interest in participating in research if these opportunities are generally less prevalent.

**Table 4.9** School by size and geographic location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the 16 participants, 14 interviews occurred at or after six months of teaching (see Table 4.10). For two of the participants, interviews had to be conducted slightly earlier, one so that participation could occur before their teaching contract ended, and the other due to difficulties with scheduling.

**Table 4.10 Teaching experience (in months)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time teaching (in months)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 16 participants, eight held permanent, full-time positions at their school (see Table 4.11). All were still within their probationary period and all but two of the teachers had not yet had confirmed that they had passed this probationary period. Of the remaining eight participants, seven teachers were employed on a one-year contract basis, with five of these teachers in a full-time position. These seven participants were also waiting to be advised of continuing contract work in 2017. The remaining teacher worked as a relief teacher. The limited involvement of relief teachers was also identified in the survey sample.

**Table 4.11 Employment of participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th>Casual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relief</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of note, however, is the lower proportion of these participants employed on a contract basis compared with the survey participant sample. This difference could be explained by the method of participant recruitment for this phase of the research, which aimed to interview participants after six months of teaching where possible. Principals may have been deterred from forwarding the information on to teachers on short-term contracts.

The participants interviewed represented teachers from a range of year levels as shown in Table 4.12. Participants from the early years and primary classrooms constituted half the interview sample. The remaining participants were middle and/or senior secondary teachers (Years 7 to 12).

**Table 4.12** Participants by year level/s taught and geographic location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Level/S Taught</th>
<th>Metropolitan location</th>
<th>Regional location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early years Prep–Year 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Years 3–6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Years 7–9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Senior secondary Years 10–12</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle and senior secondary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data analysis**

The following sub-sections provide a detailed description of the method of analysis used in this phase of the research based on the hybrid approach to thematic analysis proposed by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006).

**Fereday and Muir-Cochrane’s (2006) approach to qualitative analysis**

The method of thematic analysis as proposed by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) is a hybrid approach combining data-driven inductive and deductive approaches. This hybrid approach acknowledges the importance of a priori codes derived from theoretical frameworks while still allowing for additional concepts to emerge from these data. I deemed that analysis based on this hybrid approach was appropriate to this study in the following two ways. First, the deductive
component of the approach enabled the tenets of attribution theory to be addressed using a pre-developed code manual (Crabtree & Miller, 1990). In the case of this study, a priori codes were drawn from the theoretical framework, research question and key findings from Phase 1 of the study. Second, the use of inductive coding allowed for important alternative concepts to be identified that could enhance my ability to respond to the research question.

Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) identify six stages to their hybrid approach. I now explain these six stages and how they were applied to analyse interview data for this study.

**Application of the hybrid approach**

**Stage 1: Developing the code manual**

The code manual acts as the data management tool during analysis, used to organise text segments and assist with interpretation (Fereday D & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). A priori codes for this study were developed from concepts in the theoretical framework and the research question for this study. Eight broad code categories (split into 16 more specific codes) formed the basis of the initial code manual (see Table 4.13).

**Table 4.13 Initial codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Sub-codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiences and outcomes</td>
<td>Activity, event or experience and the resultant outcomes, including evaluation of success</td>
<td>Successful, Unsuccessful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes</td>
<td>Cause/s for the outcome of the experience identified</td>
<td>Personal, School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus</td>
<td>Perception of self or others’ responsibility</td>
<td>Internal, External</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>Perception of continuity</td>
<td>Stable, Unstable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controllability</td>
<td>Perception of influence-self or others</td>
<td>Personal, External</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to</td>
<td>Professional knowledge and</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Stage 2: Testing code reliability**

In Stage 2, Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) propose testing the applicability of a priori codes on a test piece to ensure that codes are applicable and sufficiently distinguishable from each other. I elected to use the transcript of the first interview. After I manually transcribed the interview, I then applied a priori codes. I subsequently noted a need to separate ‘experiences’ and ‘outcomes’, as these broad codes were found to be sufficiently different in meaning to warrant standing as two distinct codes. I also added the sub-code ‘purpose’ to enhance the sufficiency of the broader code ‘professional learner identity.’ I adjusted the code manual accordingly.

**Stage 3: Summarising the data**

Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) consider the development of interview summaries to be the first point of analysis to enable the researcher to generate an overall impression from these data. I used such summaries as well as the transcription process for this purpose. I made a summary of each interview, noting key messages both immediately after conducting each interview and again while transcribing each interview. According to researchers such as Lucas (2010) and Kvale (2007), transcription can be a powerful step in the analysis process. From the transcription process and summaries, I developed overall impressions of how a priori codes were represented within the interviews and considered concepts introduced by participants that were unexpected.
Stage 4: Applying codes

In Stage 4, Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) propose first that a priori codes are applied to the interview transcripts, so I first matched segments of transcribed text to the codes. I then organised and stored these segments of text under that code with interview numbers (e.g. FT1 as in First-year Teacher Interview 1) used for retrieval of specific participant data for further analysis. I followed this process for all codes. An example of this text sorting is shown in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14 Example of sorting under a priori codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad code: Locus</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>External</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don’t think I really understood the content or the concept trying to be learnt. FT9</td>
<td>Um, there are a lot of kids in that class who don’t care, and it shows that they don’t care a lot and that affects the whole class, so they are always talking, misbehaving, talking back at you and because I am young as well, they like to challenge me. FT14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I probably started them off a bit too hard. FT1</td>
<td>I have so many kids – I have the DE classes and they have huge numbers in them I think it makes it a little bit worse because Year 11 English that is a subject that a lot of kids need so I’ve just got a lot of kids in there so it’s a bit hard to juggle. FT3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The problem was that I hadn’t done that before and I probably didn’t have the relevant behaviour management strategies in the back of my mind when I started. FT8</td>
<td>I also have a new student that has now made friends with another difficult student in my class so now he has a buddy and they bounce off each other. FT15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As explained by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006, p. 88), ‘analysis of the text at this stage is guided, but not confined to, the preliminary codes’. As a priori codes were applied to interview data, inductive codes were also developed, representative of new concepts emerging in these data.

In some cases, new codes refined those already in the code manual. Examples are provided in Table 4.15. In other cases, new codes emerged that further enriched the interpretation of these data. For example, codes such as teacher evaluation and work intensification were added to the coding manual. In total, 50 codes were identified. All codes were then reviewed to identify any duplication of codes (where different codes represented the same meaning). This process reduced the number of codes to 47 (see Appendix N).

**Table 4.15 Inductive codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A priori codes</th>
<th>Refining/emerging inductive code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional learner</td>
<td>Compliant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tensions-teachers evaluation, work intensification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>Hope/optimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing information/knowledge</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing information/knowledge</td>
<td>Communicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assumed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intentional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unintentional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The inductive codes were then applied to all transcriptions and sorted as per a priori coding processes.

Stage 5: Connecting codes
I then considered possible connections between codes using matrices. As an example, I looked at those text segments representing each of the locus codes (shared, self, others) with the codes used for the professional learner (proactive, inactive, compliant) (see Appendix O). I used this process to arrive at initial themes that represented my understanding of these interview data.

Stage 6: Corroborating themes
In this final stage, themes were further clustered and assigned succinct phrases that captured the meaning underpinning these meta-themes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). In total, three core themes emerged from these data that were found to be representative of the research phenomenon and responsive to the research question: envisaged and enacted professional learner identity tensions; teacher positioning as professional learners; and barriers and aids to this positioning. During this process, I revisited the original interview transcripts to check that themes were representative of the original data. These themes provide the basis for the findings chapters and subsequent discussion chapter.

Reporting of findings from interview data
To report on the findings from the interviews, I used ‘composite narratives.’ In the development of composite narratives, ‘a number of interviews are combined and presented as a story from a single individual’ (Willis, 2018, p. 2). Composite narratives have been used previously in a range of contexts, such as Willis (2018) who used this method for the reporting of findings drawn from interviews conducted with a group of high-profile politicians in the United Kingdom to research their views on climate change. Educational researchers have also utilised this approach in a number of studies, such as in an investigation by Housego and Freeman (2000) of teacher responses to
technology integration in their practice, as well as in a longitudinal study conducted by Duke (2010) in the United States of multiple schools that researched the varied transformational pathways taken to achieve school improvement.

In each of these studies, the researchers aimed to protect the confidentiality of specific participants and sites, while at the same time ensuring that the voices and experiences of all participants could be represented within the reported findings. Additionally, composite narratives allow for the experiences of multiple participants to be told within a realistic situational account, as opposed to siloed segments of data from multiple interview participants that may compromise the meaningful communication of important concepts and understandings to stakeholders (Duke, 2010).

In my research, I developed five composite narratives to report on the experiences and responses of all participants including those whose accounts varied from the majority of the participants. These composite narratives enabled me to share the experiences of all first-year teachers in the study while taking careful account of my responsibilities to maintain their anonymity. As preservice teachers, my participants represent a group in the school community where speaking openly and freely may result in feelings of vulnerability.

In the work of Duke (2010) and later, that of Willis (2018), both researchers draw attention to the importance of ensuring that protocols are followed to ensure that the narratives presented are a “fair portrayal” (Duke, 2010, p. 9) of the participants’ interview data and that the approach utilised to both develop and communicate the narratives is transparent and trustworthy. In this research, I adopted the protocols described by these researchers.

Rather than creating stories that capture the essence of the participants’ stories (Orbach, 2000), Willis (2018) and Duke (2010) formalise a method by which:

- each composite is based on the interview transcripts from a selected group of participants
- quotations come directly from these interview transcripts, and
• paraphrasing of interviews is taken from the source interviews.
• the composition of each narrative is reported in the methodology of the study.

According to Willis (2018, p. 5), the development of composite narratives using this method ensures that ‘there is a clear link between the original interview transcripts and the final narratives’.

Each composite narrative developed for this study included those participants who shared a common account of the way in which they responded to their teaching experiences (see Table 4.16).

Table 4.16 Original pseudonyms allocated to each participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FT1</td>
<td>Helen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT2</td>
<td>Becky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT3</td>
<td>Kristine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT4</td>
<td>Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT5</td>
<td>Dylan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT6</td>
<td>Jasmine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT7</td>
<td>Chris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT8</td>
<td>Bev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT9</td>
<td>Susan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT10</td>
<td>Nelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT11</td>
<td>Myles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT12</td>
<td>Dianne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT13</td>
<td>Jill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT14</td>
<td>Kelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT15</td>
<td>Lyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT16</td>
<td>Jennifer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all, I created five composite narratives (see Table 4.17).
### Table 4.17 Composite narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name assigned to each composite narrative</th>
<th>Participant groupings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mark</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Success</td>
<td>Myles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Unsuccessful</td>
<td>Becky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative professional learner response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive outlook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Damien</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal success</td>
<td>Chris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Unsuccessful</td>
<td>Dylan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative professional learner response</td>
<td>Dianne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative outlook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liz</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal unsuccessful</td>
<td>Kelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative professional learner response</td>
<td>Lyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heather</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative to positive attributions</td>
<td>Jasmine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative to positive professional learner response</td>
<td>Helen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nadia</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex and shared attributions</td>
<td>Jennifer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive professional learner response</td>
<td>Jill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Susan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kristine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Becky</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I grouped the participants, as suggested by Duke (2010), using a set of criteria that would enable me to respond to the research question. I therefore grouped participants by attribution style and the way, or ways, in which they were found to respond to their experiences as professional learners during their first year of teaching. These criteria were reflective of the key theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of this study and would therefore position me to respond to the research question. Five categories emerged that would form the basis of each narrative (see Table 4.17). I sought clear examples of the dispositions, actions and thinking of each participant that I would later synthesise into a contextually situated narrative representative of each participant’s interview. I drew on the dialogue of these participants, and their descriptions of their lived experiences to provide authentic accounts in the reporting of this research. All participants were provided with the opportunity to examine the composite narrative to which their data contributed to cross-check that it was representative of their interview.

Damien, Mark, Liz, Nadia and Heather’s narratives represent the stories of the 16 participants interviewed for this study. Nadia’s narrative is representative of that of the majority of participants in the study, while Damien, Mark, Liz and Heather’s stories demonstrate the experiences of a smaller group. Important to this study was the consideration of both the more common experiences of these participants and those that presented as outliers. These outliers served to provide a ‘more intricate picture’ (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 302) of the topic.

**Consistency and trustworthiness in mixed methodology**

A key responsibility of any researcher is to demonstrate the trustworthiness and consistency of data, findings and interpretation (Creswell & Clark, 2011). In mixed methods research, this process is made more complex by the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). I therefore discuss consistency and trustworthiness pertaining to Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this research in separate sections, while also referring to the interaction between both phases.
**Phase 1: Trustworthiness (validity) and reliability (consistency)**

Trustworthiness – more commonly referred to as validity in regard to quantitative methods – is determined by the extent to which the instrument used to measure a specific construct is accurately measuring that construct, and to which scores obtained from using the instrument are representative of the construct being measured (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell & Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Reliability, or consistency, refers to the measure of how ‘repeatable over time’ (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 211) results are found to be. This is based on the assumption that if the same or similar results can be obtained on separate or multiple occasions, then it is more likely that the results are accurate and reliable.

I sought validity and reliability in the first phase of the research in several ways. First, I ensured that the data instrument selected for this study had been psychometrically tested in previous research. The CDSII, as well as other adaptations of the instrument, has been reported to be valid and reliable. I also conducted a pilot of the adapted CDSII used for this study to address the validity of the tool. Importantly for this study, the use of the adapted CDSII was to inform the second phase, where findings could be further examined, challenged and developed (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Quantitative data collected in Phase 1 were not intended to address the research question of the study in isolation but were further examined through the use of a qualitative approach in Phase 2.

**Phase 2: Consistency and trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the accuracy and credibility of the account provided by the researcher and the participants (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Data quality in qualitative research has long been of particular interest to researchers due to the social nature of data collection, as captured by Freeman, de Marrais, Preissle, Roulston and St Pierre (2007, p. 27) in the following explanation:
Data are produced from social interactions and are therefore constructions or interpretations. There are no ‘pure,’ ‘raw’ data, uncontaminated by human thought and action … In other words, qualitative data and information are always already interpretations made by participants as they answer questions or by researchers as they write up their observations. Neither research participants nor researchers can be neutral, because … they are always positioned culturally, historically, and theoretically.

In order to address trustworthiness in Phase 2, I employed a range of internal validation techniques. First, I developed multiple drafts of the semi-structured interview schedule using peer feedback to improve the design, as well as the implementation of a pilot of the interview schedule with a convenience sample of four beginning teachers from independent schools in Queensland. Second, I used ‘member checking’, explained by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p. 213) as a strategy whereby participants are asked to ‘verify the investigator’s representations of events, behaviours, or phenomena’. Before any formal analysis of transcripts occurred, I provided a copy to all but two participants of their transcript and my summary of key understandings for their feedback. Of the two participants who did not receive their transcripts, one planned to leave the school and they did not feel that it was necessary and the other felt it would add to their workload and requested that I not provide it. During the interview, I also used a process of member checking referred to by Kvale (2007, p. 102) as ‘sending the meaning back’ to the participant for their confirmation or correction. Throughout the interviews, I used phrases such as ‘What I think you mean is …’ and ‘What I am hearing is that …’ According to Kvale (2007, p. 102):

This form of interviewing implies an ongoing ‘on-the-line interpretation’ with the possibility of an ‘on-the-spot’ confirmation or disconfirmation of the interviewer’s interpretations. The result can then be a self-correcting interview.

Furthermore, I used multiple individuals and methods (such as qualitative and quantitative) in this study as another approach to research validity. According to Creswell and Clarke (2011), this
approach ‘builds evidence for a code or theme from several sources or from several individuals’. In Phase 2, evidence for a priori and inductive codes was built through both the availability of Phase 1 quantitative data based on 57 participants and the inclusion of 16 participants in Phase 2 interviews. Finally, I maintained a journal to provide transparency regarding the research process for this study. Lincoln and Guba call these reflexive journals, and explain that

the investigator on a daily basis, or as needed, records a variety of information about self … and

method … the journal provides information about methodological decisions made and the reasons for making them (1985, p. 327, italics in original).

In these journals, I recorded details of interview interpretations and subsequent inquiry actions, codes, themes and ongoing ideas as I progressed through the study.

Consistency in qualitative research refers to whether findings are consistent with data collected, achieved through the use of strategies that ensure uniformity and agreement of coding and interpretation across data and between researchers (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). I used several strategies to address consistency in this study. First, I discussed code and thematic development from these data with my doctoral supervisors, and with two academic colleagues at two separate Australian universities. This occurred on several occasions throughout the analysis of both Phase 1 and Phase 2 data. In these collaborative sessions, I raised issues where there were coding uncertainties and discussed the connecting of codes into initial and final themes. Second, I spent significant time revisiting data and recoding as the study progressed to respond to new codes and to verify that coding was consistent. According to Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014), although such recoding work is time-consuming, the process supports the consistency of analysis across time and data.
**Ethical considerations**

This research was conducted within the ethical standards outlined by Deakin University’s Human Research Ethics Committee, the policies of which are in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (2007, updated 2018). Ethical considerations were addressed and approved in the application made to the Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG) at Deakin University prior to commencing data collection in 2015 (Ethics Reference: HAE-15-074) (see Appendix P). This ethics approval was then accepted by GGRS when I transferred to Griffith University in 2016.

As stated by Cohen et al. (2011, p. 83), ethical considerations pervade the whole process of research. Throughout the planning, implementation and reporting of this research, I paid heed to ethical considerations inherent in the nature of the research project, the context, the procedures, the participants, data types and the reporting of these data. Maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of participants was the highest priority. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, beginning teachers are working in a climate of high accountability and evaluation, and assurance that their openness and honesty was protected was a significant responsibility. I provide details pertaining to ethical considerations for each phase of this study in Appendix Q.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explained the methodology used in this study – a sequential and explanatory mixed method research design – and the specific methods of data collection, analysis and reporting used. I described my role in the research, and I considered how research validity and reliability were addressed. I also justified this choice of methodology with regard to the theoretical framework and the research question underpinning the study.

Through the use of a mixed methods design, I was able to investigate the content of multiple participants’ attributions of causality (that is, how they attributed in particular situations), and then
go further to investigate the subsequent impact of their attributions on their teaching lives in order to address the research question for this study. The use of a mixed methodology extended on the traditionally quantitative research designs used previously in research framed by attribution theory and was essential to access and make sense of the beginning teachers’ personal accounts, which were inherently socially complex and contextual.

Methods of data collection also supported the perceptual and reflective nature of attributional thinking and teacher identity development, providing opportunities for participants to explore and share the meaning of their experiences through an online survey and semi-structured interviews. In each method, although different, the perceptions and subjective interpretations of participants’ teaching lives formed the basis of investigation. The use of a hybrid approach to analysis (using both inductive and deductive coding) allowed for analysis to draw on the theoretical concepts of attribution underpinning the study while equally valuing the importance of new understandings emerging from participants’ personal accounts of their teaching.

In the next chapter, I present the findings from Phase 1 of this study.
Chapter 5 Survey findings

Introduction

‘There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.’

— William Shakespeare, Hamlet

In understanding the experiences of the participants in this study, Shakespeare’s renowned quotation from *Hamlet* acts as a reminder that experience is not defined by the event itself, but by the way that the individual makes meaning of it. Shakespeare challenges his audience to understand how experiences are individually interpreted, then goes on to warn of the importance of hearing the voices of others to understand their thinking lest we run the risk of misunderstanding the reasons for what makes an experience ‘so’.

In the first phase of this study, I used a revised CDSII survey administered online to hear the voices of 57 first-year teachers working in independent schools across Queensland, enabling them to share their thinking about their experiences. This survey included both open-ended questions and a Likert scale. The open-ended questions provided the opportunity for participants to describe their experiences, perceived to have resulted in varying degrees of success, and their own thinking about what caused them to be ‘so’. Participants then used the Likert scale to indicate how responsible they felt for these causes, and how responsible they felt others to be. They also identified the extent to which they felt they and others had influence in these situations, and the degree to which they anticipated that things were likely to change in the future, thereby providing a comprehensive representation of what they understood to be the causes of their experiences.

I have divided this chapter into two sections. In the first section, I present findings from qualitative data drawn from the open-ended questions of the survey. I draw on descriptions of
participants’ experiences and their explanations for ensuing levels of success to present the first two survey findings:

1. *The complexities of teachers’ work:* Participants included a range of experiences as significant, constitutive of both specific incidents and longer-term experiences. Obvious in their experiences were the complexities arising from the involvement of others in the school context and the relationships between them. This finding is significant for understanding the kinds of experiences that they are trying to make meaning of in their teaching.

2. *Shared responsibility:* Most participants identified multiple causes for the outcomes of their experiences, with responsibility for these causes shared between themselves and others, such as leaders, colleagues, mentors, students and parents. In doing so, participants accepted neither full credit nor complete blame for how their experiences turned out; nonetheless, a small group of participants consistently blamed themselves or others for their circumstances.

In the presentation of these findings, I refer to aggregated participant responses as well as individual survey examples to illustrate each finding.

In the second section, I draw on data obtained via the Likert scale to present the degree of control participants felt they had over the experiences they reported in the survey, and the degree to which they felt their level of achievement could change in the future, for better or worse. Due to the quantitative nature of these data, I present the remaining findings primarily using descriptive statistics, as explained in the methodology chapter:

3. *Shared control:* Participants determined the outcomes of their teaching experiences to be controlled by themselves, as well as by others. The sharing of control meant that most participants experienced some perceived diminishment in their personal agency to influence their achievements.
4. A sense of hope: Shared agency to influence teaching achievements did not appear to reduce participants’ hopes for a successful future. Participants mostly determined that the causes for their success would continue to exist and that influences creating less successful outcomes would change. This finding drew attention to the importance of hope and optimism about the future for these participants.

I noted that, on a number of occasions, participants remained indecisive about the causes of their experiences. They appeared to be either unable or unwilling to clearly identify who or what was responsible for some of their experiences and who had the ability to exert influence over the outcomes.

The first two findings

In this section I present the first two findings drawn from the qualitative responses in the online survey.

The complexities of teachers’ work

Overall, participants foregrounded aspects of their work (see Figure 5.1) that are similar to those reported by beginning teachers in previous research (e.g. Mayer et al., 2015). For example, aspects of practice commonly found to be challenging by first-year teachers, such as behaviour management (e.g. Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Lew & Nelson, 2016) were also identified by these participants.

As would be expected, some participants perceived particular aspects of their work to have been successful for them, while others categorised these same aspects as unsuccessful (as demonstrated in Figure 5.1).

For example, on one hand, Participant 29 (a primary teacher) described her experiences in behaviour management as successful, having implemented a strategy with her primary years class based on a ‘raffle ticket system’. Students earned raffle tickets for on-task behaviour and in return
received ‘free time’. Students were eager to earn their raffle tickets, and the teacher noted an improvement in their behaviour. On the other hand, Participant 17 identified behaviour management as an ongoing issue in practice across the year in her secondary classroom, with students continuously demonstrating disruptive behaviour.

![Reported experiences](image)

**Figure 5.1** Teachers’ work

Participants’ descriptions of their experiences highlighted the complexities of their work as teachers. They described how their experiences generally included the involvement of others, such as students, teaching colleagues, mentors, leaders and parents. Participants described how their experiences involved the development and management of relationships, including those with colleagues in positions of authority. They recalled specific incidents, as well as general aspects of their teaching across the year, as significant experiences. The potential impact of this complexity on participants’ interpretations of these experiences was significant in the context of this research.

One illustration of this complexity involved a primary school teacher (Participant 34) who shared her experience of her school’s cultural exhibition. Her task was to train a dance team that
would perform for current and potential families to the school. She described the experience as follows:

I choreographed four dances and put them together. I taught both Grade 1 and Grade 2. The students had a wonderful time and many people commented on how well all the students did. The students worked really hard and the parents made sure they got them there to every practice!

She was not alone in this experience, with others making a significant contribution to this achievement.

Similarly, Participant 12, from a regional secondary school, explained how she had responded to the needs of a particular student in her class who displayed a number of behavioural issues. She had worked collaboratively with the principal and lead teachers to support this student. She stated, ‘We had to work together, or the parent was going to pull the student out of the school.’ In this situation, the participant’s experience involved significant authority figures from her teaching environment. The involvement of authority figures could potentially be both helpful and daunting for a first-year teacher.

As would be expected, students were most commonly involved in the experiences of these participants, as Participant 49 illustrated in her recount of a lesson with her Year 3 class. She had planned and developed a treasure hunt based on mathematical clues with her students. While she felt the planning stage went well, she was disappointed by the behaviour of the students during implementation, as demonstrated in her comments:

The students planned it out using number patterns and various mathematical concepts and set it up. However, when the students participated in it, it turned into arguing, fighting and lots of trouble. I cancelled it.
Despite the fact that this teacher had engaged the students through the planning stage, their subsequent engagement during the lesson was less than optimal. She eventually chose to cancel the activity, but not before the students had negatively influenced the outcomes of what she had intended to be a fun and exciting way to learn.

In a similar vein, Participant 39 from a metropolitan secondary school shared the outcomes of a Year 10 lesson centred on the use of technology, which had not gone to plan. As he explained:

I was attempting to teach the Year 10 students how to utilise their graphics calculator to generate lines of best fit for data when performing problem-solving. They had already been taught how to input data and generate lines of best fit; however, many students did not feel confident and made a lot of errors.

In this lesson, the students did not engage in the way the teacher had anticipated, despite careful planning and preparation. Rarely does the teacher work in isolation from others, and it makes sense that the involvement of others adds to the complexity of their experiences.

Many participants referred to their experiences more generally, such as when identifying their experiences with managing student behaviour or trying to build relationships with students or colleagues. Participants’ descriptions of these experiences were less indicative of specific incidents and more representative of an accumulation of events that had occurred across the school year. Participant 44 summed up this notion of cumulative experience, stating that what happens in teaching is ‘not instant or confined to one period of time’. For example, Participant 5 shared his struggle with building a relationship with his mentor, describing how her ongoing lack of interest in working with him had left him feeling ‘misunderstood and shut out’ throughout the year. Conversely, Participant 12 reported that she had developed a very strong connection with her mentor, explaining how the mentor was ‘very open to helping and giving ideas’. She did not provide specific occasions where the mentor was helpful; rather, this experience appeared to be the
result of multiple occasions on which the mentor had proven herself to be approachable and supportive. The centrality of relationships and the cumulative nature of events served to add to the complexity of participants’ experiences.

In the following sections, I present findings pertaining to the various ways in which participants made meaning of their experiences.

**Shared responsibility**

Participants in this study looked inwardly to consider how they themselves had influenced their teaching experiences, and outwardly to determine how others may have also contributed. In doing so, participants indicated where they believed responsibility lay for the way their experiences turned out. For example, Participant 43 explained how multiple influences in the workplace, in combination, contributed to the success she had experienced with a particular student who had been struggling to cope academically. She identified the input of others in the teaching context, as well as her own teaching, as the reasons for the student’s academic progress through the year as indicated in the following statement:

Success with this student has many contributing factors including teacher aides, school support staff, the principal, the student himself and me.

In other words, she identified that the multiple people involved shared responsibility for this achievement.

Figure 5.2 illustrates the range of causes identified by participants for their experiences. The surveys showed that some influences, such as life experience, were associated predominantly with teaching success, and other factors, such as a lack of experience, more often with perceived problems in the beginning teachers’ practice. Other influences were identified by participants as responsible, at least in part, for both accomplishments and difficulties encountered in their work, such as participants’ own practice and that of colleagues. In general, participants identified multiple
reasons for the outcomes of their experiences, whether these were associated with their own practice, the actions of others or a combination of both.

In some cases, participants identified multiple aspects of their own practice as responsible for the way their teaching turned out. For one secondary school teacher (Participant 14), this meant accepting responsibility for the low academic grades achieved by his students after teaching an English unit. He explained how his own lack of planning and preparation, and limited attention to formative assessment throughout the unit, had resulted in disappointing student results.

![Key identified causes](image)

**Figure 5.2** Key causes identified to explain outcomes of teaching experiences

Similarly, Participant 39 held herself accountable for a number of ineffective lessons using technology, citing her lack of preparedness, insufficient planning to ensure there were adequate resources and ‘a deficiency in classroom management’. In both cases, participants seemed to place the onus of responsibility for what went wrong on themselves.

Interestingly, participants also seemed willing to take the credit for what went well in their teaching, with 57% of survey responses indicating that they considered particular successes to be the result of their own planning and teaching skills, relational and communication capacities,
proactive seeking of professional learning and their own life experiences. Participant 8, for example, recalled how she had developed positive connections with the parents of the students in her primary school classroom. She credited her own strong communication skills and her development of a communication book to remain in regular contact with parents for this success.

Contrary to these previous examples, participants also demonstrated that, in some circumstances, they did not feel that they should accept full or even partial responsibility for what occurred. In 46% of survey responses, participants considered that others were responsible for their less-successful experiences. To illustrate, one primary teacher (Participant 6) overtly held to account the ‘inadequate training and preparation regarding how to manage deliberate disregard of instructions’ he had received during his pre-service teacher education program for the problems he encountered in managing his class. He indicated that the program had failed to provide him with strategies for managing the very challenging behaviours he faced among his students. Participant 8 also laid blame elsewhere when explaining the reasons for the low reading outcomes of students in her class. She indicated that the principal had not provided her with the adequate educational support worker assistance she required to effectively implement a reading program in her early years classroom.

Participant 23, located in a large regional secondary school, further exemplified this thinking. She explained how the poor attitudes and ‘laziness’ of her secondary students made it virtually impossible for her to raise their academic results, so she was not to blame for the ongoing low grades of the class. Another participant, working in a large metropolitan school, indicated that the large number of refugee students at her school with names that were difficult to pronounce made it a challenge for her to address them by name in the classroom and playground. Consequently, she identified that she struggled to build the same kind of relationship with these students that she had with other students. She did not feel she was responsible, as the students’ names were very difficult to pronounce.

Across all positive experiences shared in the survey, participants gave credit to others for their positive teaching experiences on 43% of occasions. For example, Participant 39 explained how the
engaging lessons he had implemented with his primary class were due to the support provided by a
teaching colleague and the school leaders in this small regional school, as seen in the following response:

What caused this experience to be successful was the collaboration and assistance offered by
[colleague]. Their valuable knowledge and experience helped me and the resources in the
school just topped it off.

Similarly, Participant 36, a middle years teacher, credited the improved grades of her English as a
Second Language and Dialect (EALD) students in her English class to teaching colleagues and
support staff at her school. This participant overlooked her own contribution to attribute credit to
others. In delegating credit elsewhere, participants denied themselves the opportunity to celebrate
their contributions and distanced themselves from the outcomes. Still unclear in these survey data
are the participants’ motivations behind giving credit for success to others in the school setting.

Nevertheless, most participants indicated they felt that responsibility for the outcomes of
their experiences was shared between both themselves and others. One secondary teacher
(Participant 30) illustrated this sense of shared responsibility, explaining that the positive
relationships that existed in his class were the result of both the class itself as a ‘good bunch of kids’
and his own careful planning of activities at the start of the year to build rapport. Participant 45, a
teacher in a large metropolitan primary school, explained how the excellent behaviour of the students in
her class, who previously had been known for being ‘unruly and difficult’, was due to advice she had
received from teaching colleagues, as well as the effort she had put into carefully developing an
effective behaviour-management plan for her class. This same participant indicated that her difficulty in
supporting two students in her class with significant academic issues stemmed partly from her own
professional inexperience, as well as a lack of information provided to her from their previous teacher
about the students’ learning needs.

Notably, most participants’ individual surveys revealed that they did not use a consistent
approach to explain why their experiences turned out the way they did. Instead, they were most
likely to accept sole responsibility on some occasions, place the onus of responsibility on other people on other occasions, yet feel a sense of shared responsibility between themselves and others at other times. Nevertheless, three survey responses did not demonstrate this balanced or shared approach to attributing responsibility for the outcomes of their teaching. In one of these surveys, Participant 9 consistently assumed responsibility for his successes, considering them to have been the result of his own capacity and skill. For example, when recounting the success of parent-teacher interviews, this participant stated:

I tried to get to know the parents of the students before the interviews, so it was easy to talk to them.

I was also very prepared in what I was saying as I knew my students well.

When explaining his teaching achievements, this participant attributed his high level of success in teaching to his sound knowledge of the content and his understanding of how to teach it. Notably, this participant did not mention having been involved in any negative experiences, stating, ‘I have not had any unsuccessful experiences this year.’ Such an explanation would be very positive for his sense of self-efficacy; however, in the context of this study, it was unclear from the survey what the impact of such explanations would be on this participant’s intentions to develop his professional capacities and access relevant professional learning.

Participant 20’s survey responses indicated that she held herself solely accountable for the problems she was experiencing in her teaching at her small regional primary school. She cited a lack of content knowledge, expertise and time-management skills for behaviour-management issues, and a lack of personal communication skills for difficulty in developing relationships with colleagues and students. This participant went on to report that she felt she was ‘a failure as a teacher’. These survey data, however, did not reveal why she felt compelled to explain her experiences in this way.

Conversely, Participant 31 deflected blame almost entirely onto others. For example, he identified both students and school leaders as responsible for the difficulties he was facing. He
indicated that school leaders had failed to give him sufficient time to plan the lessons he was required to teach and that his students came to his classes without the appropriate respect for his classroom rules. In deflecting responsibility elsewhere, this participant appeared to distance himself from the outcomes of these experiences.

**Further findings**

In this section, I draw primarily on data from the survey’s Likert scale responses to present the following findings.

**Shared control**

Most participants reported that in the majority of their experiences, both they and others – such as students, colleagues and parents – had the capacity to exert similar levels of control and therefore influence their teaching achievements. Figure 5.3 illustrates how participants reported shared control in almost 60% of successful experiences.

![Control over causes for success](image)

**Figure 5.3** Perceptions of control for successful outcomes

Participant 5, for example, reported that both he and the school leaders in his primary school had influenced the quality of the new English work program developed for Year 6 in his school. He indicated that he had control over the level of effort that he himself had put into this task, yet
acknowledged that he did not have control over whether or not his school leaders would provide him with extra release time to complete the task. Despite his ability and will to do well, the additional time provided by the leaders significantly assisted him to produce a quality program.

Similarly, Participant 16, working as the only preparatory (pre-Year 1) teacher in a small regional primary school, recounted the open day for prospective parents and families that she had planned and overseen. She recalled:

Being in my first year, I wasn’t too sure how everything was supposed to be done. I took ages to organise everything because I didn’t want to look disorganised in front of the prospective students and their families. I made sure all the materials I needed were ready to go and easily accessible to make the day run as smoothly as possible.

She explained that the open day was a success because of her own hard work, as well as that of two educational support workers assisting on the day. While she acknowledged that she was in control of the effort and time she had spent preparing for the event, she had had no control over the level of effort and interest the educational support workers had elected to demonstrate on the day. This collegial support was beyond her control.

Participants also identified similar shared control when referring to those experiences that had not gone well in their teaching. In nearly 40% of cases, participants determined that both they and others had the capacity to influence the outcomes achieved (see Figure 5.4). For example, Participant 25 recalled a lesson in which the students in his Early Years class did not grasp the science concept he was trying to teach. He considered both himself and the students to have influence over this situation. As he explained:

One science lesson was particularly frustrating as group work was required and the groups were not working well together. Lots of petty arguments and the dominant personalities took over. The outcome of the science lesson was lost to a lesson in self-control and cooperation.
He identified that, while he had control over the choice of teaching strategy he used for this lesson (admitting his choice of activity had not been age-appropriate), the students made their own choices that day as to how they would behave during the group work. He felt a level of agency to improve his choice of teaching strategy for the next lesson, yet he recognised that his lesson was still open to disruption by the students.

This is not to say that participants consistently perceived control as shared. Figure 5.3 also shows that participants determined that they had complete agency over their positive teaching achievements in nearly 30% of situations. Similarly, participants indicated that they had control over the causes of difficulties in their teaching in 40% of cases (see Figure 5.4). Only in 13% of the experiences reported where things turned out well did participants consider themselves dependent on others to influence these positive outcomes (see ‘External control’ in Figure 5.3).

![Control Over Unsuccessful Causes](image)

**Figure 5.4** Attributions of control over causes of unsuccessful outcomes

In these situations, participants indicated that they relied on a ‘good class’ (Participant 42), ‘supportive colleagues’ (Participant 39), or a ‘well-resourced school’ (Participant 57) for their successes. Similarly, participants indicated on only a small number of occasions that they had minimal influence with regard to the difficulties they were facing (see Figure 5.4, External). To
illustrate, Participant 41 stated that she was required to use pre-developed lessons and unit plans with her Year 2 class. She indicated that, because of this mandatory school requirement, she had no control over how she delivered the content to her students even though she believed it was not effective for them. I now present the next finding pertaining to participants’ expectations of their teaching into the future.

*A sense of hope*

Most participants indicated that they maintained a positive outlook for their teaching futures. For the most part, they expected that they would continue to experience the same successes they currently enjoyed and that the difficulties they were experiencing in their teaching would improve. For instance, Participant 30, a secondary teacher from a large metropolitan school, explained the difficulties she faced every day in trying to manage the behaviour of an off-task and non-compliant student in her class. Despite this challenge, she remained optimistic that this student’s behaviour would improve as her behaviour-management skills increased.

In 65% of the cases, participants indicated the same sense of optimism as expressed by Participant 30 above for difficulties in teaching (see Figure 5.5). This was interesting in that participants reported this sense of optimism whether they determined themselves to be responsible for the problem (this can be seen in Figure 5.5 as ‘Personal 2’), or whether they determined others to be so (refer to ‘External 2’ in Figure 5.5).
To illustrate, one middle years teacher (Participant 39) described how she had not managed the start of the year well, having neglected to ensure that the students understood the classroom rules and procedures right from the first day. Consequently, she had experienced some ongoing issues with behaviour management in the class. She blamed herself, stating, ‘I knew it was important, but I didn’t do it well. I just didn’t know how to do it.’ Despite the challenges she faced, she still indicated that this situation would get better in the future.

Participant 4 also maintained her positivity despite feeling that some of her colleagues at her regional primary school were unwilling to share their planning materials or other teaching resources with her. She did not feel that she had done anything to warrant them behaving in this way and surmised that they were the reason that she felt quite disconnected from the staff and anxious about her teaching. Nonetheless, she still expected that their attitudes towards her were likely to change for the better even though she considered herself to have little influence over the situation.

Participants also anticipated that the causes on which they predicated their success would remain unchanged. Participants were most likely to make this prediction where they identified the causes to be their own knowledge, skills and effort. As can be seen in Figure 5.6, participants identified in 45% of situations that these personal attributes would continue to produce positive results in their teaching (represented by ‘Personal 1’ in Figure 5.6).
To illustrate, Participant 32 explained how being able to plan and deliver a ‘very successful and inspiring’ unit of work for her middle years class was due to her creativity and enthusiasm, and that these personal strengths were unlikely to change. In less than 25% of cases participants believed that their own skills and capabilities, where they were affording them teaching success, might not continue to do so in the future (represented by ‘Personal 2’ in Figure 5.6). They were less confident that they could rely on others for ongoing success (refer to ‘External 1’ in Figure 5.6). Participant 37, for example, believed that her access to the ‘amazing’ collegial support she currently received in her small regional school setting was likely to change in the future. While the survey did not provide details, she could be referring, for example, to the fact that her mentor could leave the school at some stage.

Overall, this finding points to the generally positive outlook held by the majority of participants about their future teaching success.

**Indecision**

Participants on a number of occasions selected a neutral score on the survey’s Likert scale. These non-committal participant responses pointed to their level of indecision or ambiguity about: (1) the extent to which they held themselves and others responsible for how their teaching turned out; (2) the extent to which they felt that they themselves and others influenced these situations; and (3) the level of optimism they held for the future. Almost 26% of participants’ Likert scale responses pertaining to successful experiences were neutral (a score of 5) (see Figure 5.7).
Similarly, participants used neutral scoring for 21% of Likert scale ratings in response to unsuccessful outcomes (see Figure 5.8).

This finding could point to a level of survey respondent fatigue (Hoerger, 2010). Due to the nature of the data instrument and the inclusion of an extensive Likert scale, it is important that this finding is treated with a level of caution. Nevertheless, neutral scoring could also be indicative of a lack of time and energy available to participants to engage in purposeful reflective practice about their experiences more broadly.
Summary and discussion

In this chapter, I presented four findings from the administration of an online survey. This survey was designed to elicit initial information about the meaning participants made of their experiences during the first year of teaching and the cause/s they identified for why these experiences turned out the way they did. I now provide a brief discussion of these findings.

Participants’ teaching experiences were complex, involving multiple others from the school context. The centrality of relationships and the cumulative nature of many of these experiences meant that the way they thought about their teaching was inherently multifaceted. Previous research has shown schools to be complex and demanding workplaces, particularly for first-year teachers (e.g. Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Gu & Day, 2013; Lew & Nelson, 2016). Participants in this study generally made meaning of their experiences in ways that recognised the contributory role of both themselves and others in the school setting, as well as acknowledging schools as unpredictable and changing workplace environments. That is, how participants made meaning of their experiences, and how they explained why their experiences turned out the way they did, reflected the complexity of their working environments.

Participants’ shared attributions of causality (that is, their sense that responsibility and control for teaching outcomes extended to include others as well as themselves) seem potentially to be at odds with the current policy environment. Some researchers argue that accountability regimes, such as standardised testing of students, place significant levels of responsibility or blame on teachers where student outcomes are considered to be problematic (whether at a national, state or local level) (Singh et al., 2015; Stern, 2012). The potential influence of teacher accountability on first-year teachers’ attributions of causality, and their decisions as professional learners, was further investigated in Phase 2 of this study.

Finally, participants maintained a generally optimistic outlook for their teaching futures despite feeling at times that things were not going to plan and were not necessarily under their
control. This finding is significant to current concerns reported in the literature about early career teacher attrition and teacher burnout (Buchanan et al., 2013; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Mason & Matas, 2015; Weldon, 2018). The influence of hope and optimism on participants’ attitudes to their teaching and professional learning was addressed in the next study phase.

Additionally, the findings from administering the adapted CDSII data instrument in this first phase of the study indicates that such a tool may be useful to those working in school contexts as a means of starting discussions with first-year teachers about how they feel about their work as they progress through the first year of teaching. I return to this point in the final chapter. These findings informed the development of a semi-structured interview schedule designed to elicit rich data to address the research question for this study. I present the findings from these interviews in the next chapter.
Chapter 6 Interview findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from semi-structured interviews conducted with 16 independent school first-year teachers. These findings speak to: (1) the different ways in which participants reported making meaning of their experiences; (2) the subsequent influence of this meaning-making on their thinking and actions as professional learners; and (3) the contextual complexities that existed for participants as they tried to determine the reasons why their experiences turned out the way they did. These findings address the aim of this research to generate deeper understandings of the ways in which beginning teachers develop their identities as professional learners in their first year of teaching.

In this chapter, I present four key findings, drawing on five composite narratives that represent the accounts of the participants interviewed. As explained in Chapter 4, the use of composite narratives in the reporting of research is a powerful method of combining interview data that honours the voices of the participants (Willis, 2018), while at the same time providing additional reassurance to participants that their anonymity and confidentiality have been protected.

The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I present the composite narratives of Damien, Mark, Liz, Nadia and Heather. In the following section, I present the four key findings, drawing on these narratives, which I summarise below.

• Finding 1: Individualised versus collective responsibility and accountability.

Participants reported making meaning of their teaching experiences in different ways. They attributed responsibility and control for the way things turned out to a range of influences, including their own teaching knowledge and skills, as well as to others in the school environment, such as students, colleagues and leaders. Their interpretations of their
experiences served to influence their sense of self-efficacy, wellbeing and motivation in distinct ways.

- **Finding 2: The envisaged versus lived experiences of the professional learner.**

  Although all participants articulated an almost idealised understanding of what it was to be a professional learner, the extent to which they enacted these learner identities in the workplace varied, influenced by the way they made meaning of their teaching experiences. In some cases, participants’ proclivity to think and act as professional learners was contrary to the professional learning available to them in the school context.

- **Finding 3: Perpetuating the status quo – individual, social and critical reflection.**

  Participants generally spent limited time reflecting purposefully on their experiences during their first year of teaching. Many of them thus experienced little opportunity to consider how they might make meaning of their experiences in different ways. This served to perpetuate cycles of thinking that influenced their professional learner identities.

- **Finding 4: Disruption and reinforcement of professional learner identities.** Participants’ intentional and unintentional interactions with others in the context reinforced, or conversely disrupted, how they made meaning of their experiences. In some cases, their thinking changed in ways that became more conducive to their engagement with professional learning. In other cases, these interactions reinforced participants’ less constructive thinking, further inhibiting the enactment of their learner identities.

**Five narratives**

In the following section, I present the five composite narratives, which serve to elucidate the findings summarised above.
Damien was employed as a permanent, full-time primary teacher shortly after completing a Graduate Diploma of Teaching and Learning (Secondary). Although he preferred secondary teaching, he accepted this job offer for Year 4 and 5, anticipating that it would lead to a position in the secondary part of the school at some point in the future. The school was large, located in a regional city. He was a mature-age graduate, employed in an executive management position prior to his career change to teaching. He believed that the school had employed him partly because it was looking for someone with a ‘bit of maturity and life experience’. Damien felt that he was a highly skilled and capable teacher, having achieved excellent results at university in both his studies and professional experience practicums.

He cared deeply about his students and felt that they both liked and respected him. He also believed that the parents from his class were well aware of the ‘quality sort of arrangement’ he had in place. He had worked particularly hard to build strong relationships with these parents, giving his time at school, in the evenings and on weekends so that they could discuss their children’s education with him. To support this close communication, Damien provided his school contact details as all teachers were required to do, as well as his own personal mobile number. Although he knew this to be unusual, he believed it was his job to ensure that he did all he could to be available if parents needed to speak with him. He found, however, that as the year progressed parents took up a substantial amount of his time. He lamented the fact that ‘parents took advantage’ of his willingness to support them.

This first year of teaching had not gone as Damien originally planned. While he was used to working hard in his previous roles before entering the teaching profession, he had not anticipated the many expectations that had been placed on him, which he felt were both unreasonable and unmanageable. He felt particularly burdened by the time taken to plan and prepare lessons as well as liaise with parents. The requirement that he also take on a role as a sporting coach added to his
workload. Moreover, Damien did not agree – even though he was teaching in the primary years – that he should be required to teach science and mathematics. He was a specialist English teacher and felt that he should not teach in the areas of the curriculum in which he felt he was less qualified. He questioned the sense of the school policy with regard to this expectation.

Consequently, Damien felt that, despite his teaching ability, his planning and lesson delivery were not up to standard. He struggled to find time to plan his lessons – particularly those for science and mathematics, in which he felt far less confident about the content. He found that on many occasions he was forced to ‘wing it’ and the lessons he delivered were less than optimal. Furthermore, he believed he was failing to meet the diverse needs of the students in his class because of the school’s non-streaming policy, with which he disagreed. His teaching was suffering, as was his relationship with his family. He explained how often on weekends and evenings he missed opportunities to be with his family as he tried to meet work demands.

Damien indicated that he had tried to speak with the school leaders and explain that his workload was unreasonable. He had also requested that he not be required to teach science or mathematics, as it was both an unfair burden on him and detrimental to the learning of the students, who he believed should have teachers with expertise in these learning areas. Despite these attempts, Damien believed that the leaders would not make any changes to his workload or his teaching role, and that no respite from his current situation was forthcoming. He felt that the school leaders responsible for developing and implementing the school policies that dictated this workload had failed him:

I don’t even try to argue it with [them] because you’d never win. They say go home because I am the last car out in the evening, but they still keep giving me stuff to do! I’ve been in management where people want to climb up ladders. They get an idea and that idea inevitably involves us doing some kind of work … now that might sound cynical, but that’s just what I’ve observed.
Damien was also critical of his mentor, to whom he had tried to explain the complexity of his situation. As he saw it, she did not seem willing to listen to him or support his requests for a change to the expectations placed on him as a first-year teacher. Rather, she approached their mentoring sessions as an opportunity for reflection, which did not satisfy Damien’s needs. Rather than needing to reflect, Damien wanted to ‘vent’, and therefore turned away from his mentor and towards his teaching partner, with whom he felt his frustrations were heard and shared. Damien explained how he took solace from the fact that he felt he was not alone in feeling the way he did, as illustrated in the following comment:

There are experienced people around who are pedalling very hard as well … there are people around here that don’t look happy, and that’s honest. I don’t see many happy teachers. I am sure they blame the leadership like I do. I can see that they want to see changes, but they know as well as I do that won’t happen.

He strongly believed that school expectations placed on staff were intended to make the school and the leaders ‘look good’, regardless of the impact they had on the wellbeing and job satisfaction of the teachers.

When asked about his perceptions of professional learning during the first year of teaching, Damien laughed, explaining that while ‘all that professional learning stuff sounds good on paper, it doesn’t work in reality’. At university, he had conscientiously engaged as a learner and had intended, when entering the profession, to continue that commitment:

I really thought that as a teacher I would be able to keep up that love of learning. When I got into teaching, I knew I should always be seeking to expand that and be up to date.

He acknowledged that the school ‘did all that sort of thing, and constantly had induction meetings and workshops about this and that’. However, as the year progressed he could see little relevance
between the professional learning opportunities made available and his particular situation, as illustrated in the following comment:

Believe me, I am not against all that sort of thing but, seriously, what good would professional learning have done for me? It wasn’t going to change the way the leaders worked. It wasn’t going to make them ease up or understand that I should not be teaching science. It wasn’t going to get the parents to leave me alone.

Damien was angry and frustrated, and held little hope for any improvement to the challenging experiences he faced. He claimed that he rarely even thought about professional learning, arguing that it was the last thing that he needed. He only participated in mentoring sessions and workshops when it was a school requirement that he believed he could not ‘get out of’. After seven months of teaching, Damien was trying to decide whether he should look for an alternative school or leave the teaching profession altogether.

Mark

Mark was a secondary school teacher in a large metropolitan school, where he taught English and Art in Years 8 and 10. He found the school to be a very enjoyable place to work, with highly engaged students and limited issues with student behaviour. He had also worked for two months of the previous year at another school close by, where he had enjoyed a highly successful entry into the profession with very few issues to concern him. He considered that the knowledge and skills he brought with him after completing a Master of Teaching accounted for this positive start to his teaching career.

Mark was therefore very optimistic about his first year of teaching and believed that his particular approach to teaching was significant to his success. He stated:
I think the way I approach my teaching is different from some of the other teachers here … when it comes to the English, I have a different approach to the other teachers in my presentations and the way that the information is really clearly and simply presented.

Mark explained how he developed very clear PowerPoint presentations for each lesson, which provided relevant examples of the content specifically tailored to the teenagers in his class. He had gone to university straight from school and he felt that his young age made it possible for him to connect with his students. As he explained:

I think I am a bit more relatable as we are similar in age and we have a lot more in common and I can sort of make references to the popular culture that they are in which I think really helps that teacher–student relationship.

He explained how, in some ways, he was leading by example and raising the expectations around classroom practice for the older, more experienced English teachers with whom he taught. He could not foresee any reason why his success would change in the future. He commented:

My only concern is that I might create this divide between me and other teachers as the students may want to have me and then they get disappointed because they get someone else but what can I do about that … I can only just keep doing what I am doing and hope they lift their game or change or whatever.

Mark felt that most things had worked out well for him during his first year of teaching. He did recall an incident where a student complained to her parents that she was not receiving adequate support in Mark’s class. The parents had contacted the principal of the school about the matter. Mark explained how this student was ‘very lazy’ and that, when he spoke with the principal about the incident, the principal had told him ‘not to worry about it as students can do some silly things sometimes’. While Mark was eager to take credit for his successes, he seemed less likely to ‘take things personally’ when less positive things occurred.
He also recounted a particular art lesson where the students had ‘not done a very good job’. Mark had used the same lesson plan in the previous year with another class of students and the lesson had been very successful, with students creating an impressive collaborative art piece. Mark believed the students in his current class had not demonstrated the same commitment to the task. He stated:

I think they just didn’t try. I went through it step-by-step but ultimately they have to put in the effort … I can only do what I can do … hopefully, their attitudes will change and they will come around.

He considered that these issues were not his fault and he was therefore not responsible for ‘fixing’ them. Consequently, he did not believe he had any need to source help or professional learning, despite describing the school context as one focused on providing ample professional learning opportunities to staff, as noted in the following comment:

They are very big on professional learning here. They give you a mentor and they give you a budget to go to professional learning, and they have regular professional learning at the school about a whole range of things.

Mark did not see the need to meet regularly with his mentor, as he believed he did not require the type of support a mentor would provide. He stated:

I haven’t really needed any professional learning so far as there haven’t really been any issues. I haven’t really even reflected that much- I just haven’t needed to.

After the ‘push on professional learning’ he felt he had experienced at university, he had anticipated that professional learning would feature as a notable part of his work. As the year progressed, he considered himself to be a compliant rather than a proactive participant in professional learning. He attended the required workshops on pupil-free days and the set induction sessions for first-year teachers at the school as a way to cross off Standard 6 of the Australian Professional Standards for
Teachers. In doing so, he saw these professional learning opportunities as useful for fulfilling the requirements of his application for full teacher registration, rather than being of any particular benefit to his practice.

**Liz**

Liz was full of enthusiasm about the year that lay ahead when she began teaching, having secured full-time employment as a Year 4 teacher in a small metropolitan school. She had applied for the job immediately after completing her Bachelor of Primary Education. Many of her university peers had not yet found work, and this immediate start to her teaching career made her feel full of confidence.

She happily recounted some of her achievements from the year, such as the academic improvements made by one of her students who had a history of struggling in English. Liz had planned a differentiated program for the student and he had shown notable improvement within one term. She also recalled her success in building a good relationship with a student known for his ‘bad attitude’. She had worked hard to ensure she was providing him with positive feedback and supporting him as much as possible so that he was experiencing success in her classroom. Although he was a long way from fully participating in class, his behaviour had improved significantly. However, she admitted that usually she spent little time thinking about these achievements, as illustrated in the following comment:

> I have never reflected on the good stuff as much as I have with you in this interview. It feels really good.

Despite these successes, from the very start of the year Liz had been preoccupied with the problems she was encountering. She experienced considerable difficulty managing the generally disruptive behaviour of the class. Students would call out, back-chat and ignore instructions she gave during lessons. A small group of students in the class refused to participate and their behaviour
often escalated to the point where Liz sometimes felt that she could walk out of the classroom and they would not even notice.

At first, Liz worked actively to address the problems that she was experiencing. She believed when she started the year that professional learning was an important part of being an effective teacher, stating:

I think it is about continually learning … you are always learning, you can always do better, and you are on a continuous journey.

She reflected at length on what was happening and tried to identify what she was doing wrong. She would go to work each day with a strategy she had learnt about from a friend, or online, to try to improve the students’ participation and behaviour in the class. She availed herself of the support provided by the school leaders and her mentor, a teacher with many years’ teaching experience who was more than willing to discuss any problems that arose. The school leaders also provided a range of in-school professional learning activities and Liz attended with the intention that her practice would improve.

As the year progressed, though, Liz became increasingly overwhelmed by her teaching workload coupled with the demands of continually addressing these problems she was experiencing. Finding the time to plan and prepare lessons, teach each day in her classroom and actively engage in professional learning to rectify the faults she continued to find in her practice became unmanageable. She blamed herself for her challenging circumstances, considering her ineffective planning and behaviour management to be the reasons for ongoing difficulties in her teaching. This reached a point where she was both physically and mentally exhausted. As she stated:

It gets overwhelming because you feel you need everything, and there is no time to do that.

How can you fix it all?
Moreover, Liz began to avoid seeking the assistance of her colleagues, worried that they would form negative conclusions about her as a teacher. As she explained:

It is going to be my fault because that is how everyone sees it, don’t they? … the assumption is that we have to get everything right the first time … so, when things go badly … well, they say well what was that teacher doing? We are like ultimately responsible for everything that happens.

Liz observed how the other teachers in the school appeared to cope with the demands of planning lessons and implementing engaging lessons. She also noticed that they worked incredibly long hours. She therefore reasoned that they would decide she was not working hard enough. Instead, she tried to ‘fake it’, limiting her interactions with colleagues about her experiences in case they considered her teaching to be less than effective. This was despite the fact that, as she suggested, ‘they probably already knew’ she was not coping.

Liz had shifted from being a motivated learner to someone who felt she no longer wanted to reflect or participate in any professional learning. The following comment explains how her thinking and motivation changed throughout the year:

I don’t like it because you are never fully good at your job. It makes me feel negative, and you are always problem-solving and when I am tired, I don’t want to have to problem-solve. It makes me feel like I am not good enough. So I used to go in and say, ‘Today things will be better’, but now I don’t even think that today will be better. I can’t see it getting better. Even when there is an idea provided to me, I think it won’t get better, so why bother?

Liz felt that reflecting on her experiences required too much effort – she felt totally overwhelmed, as she disclosed in the following comment:

I am struggling to even reflect on it. Like I can’t even think straight and so I think that is why I haven’t been able to reflect on what is going on. I don’t tend to think about it … it is very
stressful … you can’t really switch off … sometimes I think you just dig and dig, and it can actually make it worse. It makes you feel incompetent.

She saw no respite from her situation in the future, and her motivation to seek professional learning had diminished.

_Nadia_

Nadia found employment in a relatively large metropolitan Prep (pre-Year 1) to Year 12 school after graduating from a Bachelor of Secondary Education at the end of the previous year. She had been at the school for eight months and was teaching Physics and Maths in Years 10 and 11. To take up the position, she had moved from her home to an area about three hours’ drive away, where she had quickly settled in and was enjoying her new community.

In recalling her start to the school year, Nadia received what she referred to as ‘limited induction’. School staff had supplied keys for the classrooms where she would be working, showed her the location of the photocopier and allocated her a car parking space. She was also provided with the curriculum documents she would need for her teaching areas, as well as being introduced briefly to her department colleagues. A more experienced staff member was her mentor, although they had not met for some time. Nadia explained that the mentoring process at the school was very informal and she was not entirely sure how often she and the mentor should meet. She estimated that it had been a least a term since their last meeting. While she acknowledged that it would have been helpful at times to have greater support, she understood that she could not make the school provide something that it did not normally provide. She commented:

Don’t get me wrong – I’ve got wonderful teachers around me but support wise, it’s pretty minimal. It was kind of like, the first day, off you go! Be free! Do your thing!

Nevertheless, Nadia experienced what she described as ‘real achievements’ during this time. For example, the school had a policy that all teachers were required to lead an extra-curricular
activity, so she started up a girls’ volleyball team as her extra-curricular commitment; the team subsequently placed third at an interschool competition. She also revised the out-of-date curriculum and assessment documents after discovering that those provided to her were outdated and needed complete redevelopment. She was excited to receive positive feedback from school leaders on the quality of her work. Moreover, Nadia had decided to integrate the use of technology into her lessons, given that the school required each student to have a laptop. Technology was not her strength, yet she had managed to deliver some very effective lessons using Google docs for collaborative work and simple simulation apps in her Year 11 Physics classes.

Nadia was proud of her successes. That said, she was also appreciative of the contributions made by others to these achievements. For example, she knew the time and energy she had invested in her volleyball team had been significant, yet she was also very grateful for the effort and commitment shown by the girls on the team. They had spent hours practising, both in and out of school hours. As she stated, it was a shared achievement:

The students … and their effort and hard work. That’s on their part, and then me. I don’t think you can narrow it down to just them, or just me. Students can choose not to do anything, and you can’t make them do it.

She also appreciated that the school leaders had trusted her enough to review the curriculum documentation, even though she had just commenced at the school. Their trust enhanced her belief in her own capacity regarding assessment and curriculum planning. Furthermore, Nadia considered that the high levels of student achievement in her Year 11 Physics class were due to the students’ strong interest in the subject as well as the way she had pushed herself to learn how to use technology to create engaging lessons. She had accessed professional learning independently using online resources, as the school did not have professional learning available and the technology team seemed to be unable to assist. Even after this success, she continued to search for ways to further embed technology into her lessons, determined that she would remain up to date. As she stated:
If I can figure out how to make it work and teach the kids, and I have done it really well, then I want to do more. I’ll look for ways to learn it, like online webinars. Technology is always changing.

Although Nadia felt that she was managing the demands of her first year of teaching quite well, she acknowledged she had experienced a number of challenges throughout this first year. One such area was with the behaviour management of her Year 10 Mathematics class. Many of the students were disengaged and she found it challenging to keep them on task. She was constantly required to reprimand them for playing on their phones during class and attempts to pause their constant chatter appeared to be futile. Their poor academic results concerned her. She was often annoyed by their ‘couldn’t care less attitudes’, yet she also felt that she should be able to do more to reach them. She explained:

They are a very interesting bunch of kids. There are a lot of kids in that class who don’t care and it shows that they don’t care a lot, and that affects the whole class … but I also get that students can only do what the students can do – and to a point that will dictate what results they get. On the same token, I could have pushed them along in a better way.

Nadia sometimes wished she could ‘just make’ the students engage with their learning; however, she had come to understand very quickly that she could not expect to have control over everything in the school environment, including the students, as indicated in the following comment:

It definitely feels like that [teaching] is sometimes out of my control and that’s OK … even when you’ve got good strategies in place it [the outcome] can still be up to something else. You just manage it the best you can and work on the stuff that you can.

Interestingly, when she spoke to other teachers in the Mathematics Department about her Mathematics class, they explained that these students had ‘bad attitudes’ and that changing their negativity towards learning, and mathematics in particular, was unlikely. Their advice was to ‘just
ride out the year’. She said she found that knowing other teachers had experienced these challenges as well was something of a relief, as suggested in the following comment:

They said that it took a couple of years before they could actually be in control of that class, of that particular age group, and it sort of makes me feel better that it is not just me.

Nevertheless, she also recognised that she was bound to encounter students like this again in her career and she needed to know what worked to ‘get them on board’. She decided not to follow the advice offered by her school colleagues; instead, she sought guidance through her own network of teaching friends and subsequently accessed some online resources in the absence of professional learning offered at the school site. When asked whether accessing professional learning was challenging for her, she responded:

These days it’s so available, isn’t it! You don’t even really have to spend money … I’m a part of a few groups on Facebook for beginning teachers … I also found a few PDs [professional development courses] which have really helped with my development as a teacher … and talking to the other teachers outside of school. I watch a lot of webcasts on different topics. I stay in touch with one of my lecturers at my old university … The [professional association] helps with units and resources and all sorts of things. I will keep prodding until I get the answer. I need it, so I look for it … it all comes down to you as the teacher, so it’s up to you to use the resources around you to improve. You have to want it and think that you need it.

Nadia recognised the highs and lows of her first year of teaching, yet she remained positive about her own teaching. She acknowledged she had more to learn, and tried hard to identify when she could and should work to improve her practice.

Heather

Heather had been excited to secure a twelve-month contract at a medium-sized Prep (pre-Year 1) to Year 12 metropolitan school, teaching Year 1. She had graduated from university with a Bachelor
of Primary Education degree at the end of the previous year. She had enjoyed teaching this age
group while on professional experience, and she began the year with a reasonable amount of
confidence, but she soon identified a number of areas of her practice that she felt she needed to ‘get
better at’. She was surprised about this, given how well she had done in her university studies and
professional experience placements. From the start, it seemed to her that things were not going as
well as she had anticipated.

She recalled, for example, how she had found it hard to organise the students into groups for
mathematics, stating:

I didn’t know what I was doing. The kids were just everywhere and I didn’t know which kids I
had worked with and who I hadn’t and the teacher aide didn’t know what I wanted them to do.
It was a disaster.

She remembered looking around the room at the students and feeling her confidence drain away.
Identifying her lack of organisation and planning as the issue, she blamed herself for not thinking
through these aspects of the lesson sufficiently. She tried to work out how to ‘fix this disaster’ and
implemented numerous strategies to better organise the students. She was frustrated that on some
occasions things went well, yet at other times the classroom still ended up quite ‘chaotic’.

Following a number of literacy lessons with her class, Heather was again critical of her
planning, as she could see that the students were ‘not getting it.’ As shown in the following
comment, she felt she had neither planned these lessons sufficiently nor ensured that she clearly
understood the content she was covering in these lessons:

I just didn’t know what I was teaching, why I was teaching it and was just really disconnected
from the lesson.

She blamed herself for assuming she was already familiar with the lesson content from her time in
Year 1 while on professional experience and felt that this served as a reminder that she still had a lot
of learning to do. She had assumed that once she was teaching in her own classroom, she would no longer have to do the same intensive preparation required of her while completing her studies. Despite the time this preparation took, she determined that she was not yet ready to teach effectively without this detailed planning.

In addition to the difficulties she was encountering in lesson planning and delivery, Heather also found building relationships with the parents of students in her class challenging. She felt that she had failed to build the kind of rapport she had always hoped to have with the parents when she had her own class. From the start of the year, the parents had been unresponsive to her efforts to get to know them. Each morning, she made sure she waited by the door to greet them as they dropped their children off at the classroom, yet they remained aloof. On the limited occasions that she did interact with the parents, the conversation seemed to involve some kind of complaint about her. As she explained:

They are just critical of everything I do. I try so hard to be nice and welcoming, but they just complain about stuff like the readers I hand out and the homework I give.

According to Heather, she obviously had a lot to learn about working effectively with parents. Although she described the parents as ‘scary’, she felt they had the right to be critical if she was not doing the ‘right thing’. In her view, she had to work out better ways to connect with them.

Heather began to doubt her ability as a teacher. Increasingly, she began to withdraw from accessing school support, worried about what judgements would be made about her ability as a teacher. Although she met regularly with her mentor and talked with her colleagues, she admitted that she had not fully explained the difficulties she was experiencing or how she was feeling. She believed that divulging this information to others at the school would lead to her being seen as ‘incompetent’, jeopardising the chance of her contract being renewed the following year.

When meeting with her mentor, Heather considered it safer to filter what she shared. As she stated:
There is no stability in my future here … I guess that I felt a bit more pressure to perhaps be seen to be more capable than I was sometimes. Like if I am totally out of my depth but, you know, ‘fake it till you make it’ sort of thing.

She went on to explain:

I shared certain elements, but I knew I was selecting it and it certainly is not open slather. As a graduate teacher, there’s that element where you have to prove yourself and you kind of have to show the people around you that you can do this- you are going to be good at this.

Consequently, she described the support she received through the mentoring process as generally ‘helpful’ while not necessarily targeting her specific needs. She continued to feel a huge weight of responsibility for the areas of her teaching that seemed to her to be going wrong.

As the year progressed, Heather found that it became increasingly difficult to hide her concerns and feelings from her mentor. She felt as if she was ‘drowning’ and ‘failing’ as a teacher, and this became obvious in their mentoring sessions. As she continued to meet with her mentor, she could not always put on the mask of confidence that she had so often used before. According to Heather:

Sometimes I would just burst into tears so she [the mentor] could tell I had taken it [negative experiences] personally.

She eventually explained to her mentor that she felt like she was letting herself and everyone else down by not being able to ‘do this [teach]’. Heather credited her mentor with providing constructive criticism that encouraged her to think about the difficulties she was experiencing from a different perspective, thus helping to lift a huge weight of responsibility from her shoulders. For example, she recalled how her mentor had revealed that her troubles with parents could also have stemmed from the fact that those same students had a first-year, inexperienced teacher the previous year. That teacher had not worked well with the parents, dismissive of their enthusiasm to assist in
the classroom. Her mentor discussed how those parents might have still thought they were 
unwelcome, despite Heather’s friendliness. Until this point, Heather had known nothing about this.
She commented:

    You just don’t know that stuff. Most of the time you are just guessing. How are you going to 
know all this?

Some of her colleagues also reminded her that some lessons ‘just go badly and that it can be the 
day, the time or the weather that makes it not go well’. These conversations came as a relief to her, 
as illustrated in the following comment:

    They would help me get out of my tunnel vision and see it from another perspective- like, look 
at everything. They didn’t let me off the hook, just made me look further than my nose, I 
suppose.

After talking things through with her mentor and colleagues, Heather was excited to note that she 
was not always to blame:

    Sometimes it is not about me! When you are new, it is hard to see different perspectives. I can 
figure out what I need to work on, and there may be things that I am not going to work on at that 
time. I feel much calmer.

Without the pressure of taking on full responsibility for everything that took place, she felt she was 
able focus on those aspects of her work that she could control, and she began looking forward to the 
following year. Although she did not know whether her contract would be renewed, she was happy 
with how her teaching was progressing.

**Findings**

In the following section, I draw on the above narratives to present and illustrate the four key 
findings from the interviews. In addition to referring to specific composite narratives to illustrate
these key findings, I also use the term ‘participants’ in recognition of the fact that these composite narratives are representations of a larger group of first-year teachers.

**Finding 1: Individualised versus collective responsibility and accountability**

Participants shared similar teaching experiences, yet came to understand the reasons for them in different ways. A small group of participants identified the same kinds of reasons for things turning out the way they did across their many experiences. Some of these participants considered that less successful outcomes were predominantly the consequence of their own practice, while other participants felt that others were mostly responsible.

Damien, Mark and Liz illustrated this kind of thinking. For example, Liz perceived that whenever things went wrong in her teaching, she was responsible and that she was required to resolve all the issues that arose. Despite taking on this level of responsibility, she felt confident and optimistic about her teaching at the start of the year. She proactively looked for ideas and strategies that would improve her teaching and believed that she had the ability to overcome the hurdles she was encountering. However, as the year went on, she began to doubt her capacity to resolve all of these difficulties and found that her motivation to teach was weakening. During the course of the year, she increasingly lost confidence in her ability to deal with these perceived problems.

Damien also became less motivated throughout the school year, yet he remained strong in himself as a highly capable teacher. He believed that the problems he was experiencing in his work were the fault of others, such as school leaders, thus seeming to deflect responsibility for negative experiences to them. Nonetheless, he developed an increasing sense of frustration and felt that his aspirations about the future were diminishing. He did not envisage that the school leaders would change their expectations or the requirements they had placed on him in his teaching. In Damien’s view, it was the school leaders who had the power of agency to enact change; thus he perceived himself to be a victim of his circumstances.
In contrast, Mark felt positive about his first-year teaching experiences. He determined that, as the teacher, he had been responsible for his many successes, such as lesson delivery and relationship-building with the students. He expressed high levels of confidence about his work and could see no reason why this level of success would not continue into the future. On the few occasions where he felt that things had not gone to plan, he, like Damien, tended to place the onus of responsibility on others, such as parents or students. He saw himself as the driver of his own success, relinquishing responsibility when things did not turn out as well as he intended.

In contrast to the small group of participants illustrated by Mark, Damien and Liz, the majority of participants identified multiple and varied reasons why their experiences turned out the way they did. These participants identified a combination of influences, such as their own effort and skills, the actions of others and, at times, particular aspects of the context itself, such as the level of resourcing, as responsible for the level of success experienced. That is, they perceived their teaching as a collective responsibility.

Moreover, these participants believed that it was not realistic to think that they, as first-year teachers, had the capacity to control all things in the school environment. In an environment that was neither predictable nor static, these participants sought to discern the areas in which they themselves could influence their achievements and the areas in which they could not. For example, Nadia attributed the high achievement levels of her Year 11 physics students to their own positive attitudes and high levels of engagement, as well as the effort she put into developing her technology skills. Similarly, she considered the students in her Year 10 mathematics class were responsible for their own behaviour, yet believed it was also her duty to learn how to manage their behaviour more effectively. Nadia therefore maintained a steady optimism. She avoided taking full responsibility, while still considering that her role was to respond to her experiences in such a way that her teaching could improve.
The ways in which participants responded to their experiences had a strong impact on how they enacted their identities as professional learners.

**Finding 2: The envisaged versus lived experiences of the professional learner**

Participants described their images of themselves as professional learners as part of their interviews. They used an almost rhetorical tone in these descriptions, reflective of an idealised notion of professional learning whereby the teacher embarks on an ongoing journey of continuous improvement. Liz exemplified this idea in the following comment:

> I think it is about continually learning … you are always learning, you can always do better, and you are on a continuous journey.

Nadia’s description reflected these same sentiments, which she illustrated in this statement:

> To me, being a professional learner, I think, forms part of my identity as a teacher … so as a teacher obviously we teach and we facilitate and we impart knowledge but I need to think like a professional learner in order to effectively teach.

Similarly, Mark believed that continuous learning, including engaging in current professional agendas, was essential in order to stay current with changing practice, stating:

> I see professional learning as picking up on new ideas and more things that you can take back to the classroom and develop your teaching … I need to enhance my own skills and keep on track with how things are changing in the profession.

Much like these other participants, Damien felt that ongoing professional learning was essential for teachers to stay up to date in their practice:

> I think it is that whole lifelong learning thing that is the teacher shouldn’t really get settled in the information that we know but we should always be seeking to expand that and make things relevant and be up to date.
Participants generally agreed that professional learning constituted an important part of their work as teachers. They also concurred that their Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs at university had a substantial influence on their attitudes to professional learning at the commencement of their teaching, as Liz’s comment illustrates:

I knew that professional learning was an important part of what great teachers did – it is kind of rammed into you at uni, and I expected it to be a big thing I would do if I wanted to be good at it [teaching].

Nevertheless, their enactment of these envisaged identities in practice varied significantly. In many ways, they described an almost aspirational version of themselves as professional learners that was not always lived out in reality.

Notably, one of the significant factors that influenced the development of their learner identities was how they interpreted the reasons for the way their experiences turned out. For example, Damien, who perceived that the hurdles he faced were due to influences beyond his control, refused to engage with professional learning despite the availability of both professional learning workshops and mentoring programs in his school. He could not see how professional learning would be either relevant or useful to him, nor could he understand how engaging in professional learning would alleviate the issues he was encountering. According to Damien, it was the responsibility of others to act in different ways in order for his circumstances to improve. He did not consider it worth his investment of time and effort to engage in professional learning, given that he was already trying to manage an intense workload.

Mark was also dismissive of the purported benefits of professional learning. To him, ongoing professional learning was unnecessary, given the ongoing success he was enjoying. His sense of self-efficacy was strengthened by adopting this kind of thinking. Regrettably, this kind of thinking also failed to motivate him to adopt the aspirational professional learner role of which he
had spoken. He attended the professional learning activities at his school only as a matter of compliance.

At the beginning of the year, Liz had been motivated to seek professional learning, taking responsibility for improving her practice. However, as the year progressed, she became increasingly overwhelmed with trying to manage her teaching workload and attend to all of the areas of her teaching that she perceived were her responsibility to rectify. She gradually withdrew from professional learning activities despite their availability in her context.

In contrast, Nadia actively embraced her work as a professional learner throughout the year, overcoming the limited availability of professional learning in her workplace. She adopted a targeted approach to her professional learning, identifying those areas where she felt it appropriate to accept responsibility and control, at least in part, for improving her practice, while acknowledging that there were instances where it was not. For example, she sought professional learning through her collegial networks outside of the school to assist in developing appropriate behaviour-management strategies to implement in her Year 10 mathematics class after identifying this as a problem. Furthermore, she was future focused, anticipating areas of her practice in which she might need support in the future, such as in using up-to-date technologies in the classroom. This way of thinking enabled Nadia to maintain a balanced view of her work. She was able to remain positive about her teaching and to take responsibility for improvement in her teaching to an extent that was manageable.

**Finding 3: Perpetuating the status quo: Individual, social and critical reflection**

Participants generally spent limited time intentionally reflecting on their experiences during the first year of teaching. They found that, as the year unfolded, their workloads intensified to such an extent that they did not have sufficient time, and often enough motivation, to think purposefully about their teaching experiences. Furthermore, this workload intensification also meant that participants had little or no opportunity to consider how they might make meaning of their experiences in ways
other than they currently did. Consequently, this served to perpetuate cycles of thinking that influenced their intentions and actions as professional learners. As Nadia explained:

You have to do it [reflect] ‘on the run’ because there is just no time. I still do it, but it tends to be all in my head and fast.

With limited time available to reflect, participants often made rapid conclusions and judgements about why things had occurred as they had.

As a consequence, they seemed to draw on those aspects of their content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, classroom management, and so forth that came most readily to mind. Participants appeared to interpret their experiences based on whatever knowledge they had, regardless of whether it was incomplete or included assumed understandings about the teaching profession and others in their school contexts. For example, both Heather and Liz assumed that teachers were expected to take responsibility for how their teaching turned out – that was what good teachers did. They similarly anticipated where their more experienced colleagues would lay blame if they knew about the challenges they were experiencing as first-year teachers.

In some cases, participants’ attitudes and feelings about aspects of their work significantly impacted their motivation and willingness to engage in purposeful reflection. Damien, for example, explained how his anger and frustration had reduced his interest in spending time reflecting on his experiences. Liz found that reflection simply amplified her negativity about her teaching. As their optimism about teaching became increasingly eroded, their motivation to think intentionally about their experiences seemed to decline. Mark also exhibited a lack of motivation to spend time on intentional reflection; however, in his view, it was his ongoing success that made such reflection unnecessary.

Damien, Liz and Mark further elected to limit their interactions with others in their school environments, albeit for varying reasons. Damien ultimately avoided interacting with those colleagues who did not seem to listen to what he was trying to say. Mark perceived interaction with
his colleagues to be unnecessary and a waste of effort. Liz felt vulnerable sharing her experiences with colleagues, fearful of negative consequences in terms of her professional standing and job security. Consequently, these participants restricted their access to new knowledge and understandings about their context in ways that potentially could either challenge or expand their way of thinking about their experiences. They became stuck in an ongoing cycle of thinking that jeopardised their motivation to think and act as professional learners. Moreover, Liz, Mark and Damien were seemingly unaware of the ways in which their thinking was inhibiting their actions as learners.

Nadia also had limited time available to reflect and, like Liz, worried about the perceptions that others at the school might have of her as a first-year teacher. However, she did not experience the same level of anxiety felt by Liz or the degree of frustration experienced by Damien. In contrast to Mark, Nadia still determined that she wanted and needed professional learning. She remained motivated to seek further information and guidance to improve her teaching. She did this in the school context when she could, and most often from support networks outside of the school. In doing so, she continued to enhance her knowledge of teaching, and her familiarity with the school context in which she worked. These actions served to perpetuate her diverse approach to understanding her experiences and further enhanced her work as a professional learner.

**Finding 4: Disruption and reinforcement of professional learner identities**

Clearly, participants did not work in isolation in their school contexts, even where they may have elected to minimise the extent to which they shared their teaching experiences with others. Both intentionally and unintentionally, formally and informally, they interacted with others, and in doing so were exposed to ideas and beliefs with regard to the teaching profession, and teaching within their own particular context. Participants sometimes drew on these ideas and beliefs to help explain why their experiences had turned out the way they had.
In some cases, others’ ideas served to disrupt the way in which participants made meaning of their problems in practice. For example, Heather’s colleagues intervened to positively influence the way in which she had been holding herself responsible for why things were going wrong in her teaching. These colleagues did not seek to relieve her of all responsibility for the challenges she was facing; however, they did support her to identify other influences, such as students and parents, which may have contributed to the issues she was facing. They encouraged her to use a more diverse approach to thinking about her experiences. Through the perspectives they shared with her, she began to see how she could respond as a professional learner in a realistic and manageable way.

In other cases, these ideas reinforced the reasons participants identified for the hurdles they had encountered in their teaching. For example, Damien observed how the other teachers in the school seemed to be as stressed as he was, serving to affirm his belief that the school leaders were not sufficiently concerned about how well the staff were coping. His conversations with his teaching partner further reinforced this thinking. These interactions offered Damien an opportunity to feel like he was not alone, yet they also served to further inhibit his intentions and actions as a learner. Similarly, Mark felt justified in deflecting responsibility to others on those few occasions that his teaching did not go to plan. Both his principal and mentor had suggested that he not take these incidents personally. Feedback from these staff members – most likely intended to reassure him – thus reinforced his reluctance to participate in professional learning. Nadia experienced this same well-intentioned approach from colleagues after experiencing problems with managing the behaviour of students in her mathematics class. They reassured her that this issue was not of her own doing, and that it was beyond her control. She was, however, comfortable to accept part of the responsibility for the behaviour of the class, subsequently searching for appropriate behaviour-management strategies to improve her teaching.
Summary and discussion

In this chapter, I presented five composite narratives of the participants in this study. These narratives revealed some of the significant experiences of these participants in their first year of teaching, the ways in which they interpreted these experiences, and the influence of these interpretations on their intentions and actions as professional learners. Following this, I presented the four key findings from this research. I now provide a brief summary and discussion (further developed in the next chapter).

First, participants arrived at subjective and personal interpretations of how their teaching lives seemed to them. They explained the reasons for the outcomes of their experiences in different ways, which influenced their attitudes and feelings about teaching and their work as learners. The participants who best positioned themselves as professional learners were those who used a balanced approach to determine the reasons why their experiences turned out the way they did. In other words, those who perceived teaching as a collective responsibility maintained their optimism and motivation as the year progressed. The participants who ascribed responsibility for how their teaching worked out in the same way across their many experiences ultimately perceived professional learning as unnecessary, irrelevant and/or unmanageable.

This study has highlighted the positive impact of first-year teachers’ understanding of teaching as a collective pursuit on their sense of self-efficacy, responsibility, agency and optimism for the future. In short, a sense of collective responsibility can empower them to enact their preferred identities in ways that take account of the complex and demanding contexts in which they work. With this in mind, it is important to then consider how the current focus on teacher accountability and performance may inhibit the creation of a culture of collective responsibility for student learning. In many instances, there appears to be a passing of responsibility (and accountability) from systems to schools, and ultimately to those at the coal face of education – the teachers. The significant performative pressure placed on teachers through this process seems
counter-intuitive to how first-year teachers best maintain their commitment to their work as learners.

These findings also underscore how school staff who work with first-year teachers could be positioned to support them to think about their teaching outcomes in balanced and measured ways. This initiative would require that leaders, mentors and teaching colleagues are cognisant of the underpinning principles of attribution and the influence of their perceptions of causality on ongoing teacher identity development. The theoretical framework and tools from this study, such as the semi-structured interview (or an adaptation thereof), thus have the potential to be useful in assisting schools to work with their first-year teachers to understand their attributional behaviours.

I provide a full discussion of these findings in the next chapter.
Chapter 7 Discussion

Introduction

The aim of this study was to generate deeper understandings of the ways beginning teachers develop their identities as professional learners in their first year of teaching. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion of the findings to address this aim. To do this, I have divided the chapter into three parts that speak to the conceptual underpinnings for this study. In the first part, I discuss tensions that emerged from the study between first-year teacher participants’ envisaged and enacted professional learner identities. Next, I discuss the ways in which participants’ responses to their teaching experiences seemingly influence their professional learner identity development. Following this, I discuss factors that impact on the process of attributing causality that support positive professional learning attitudes. To complete this chapter, I provide a conclusion to the discussion that responds to the study’s research question:

*How do first-year teachers’ responses to their experiences influence the development of their professional learner identities?*

Throughout the chapter, I continue to reference the five composite narratives to illustrate discussion points as appropriate. I also draw on a number of specific quotes from participants represented within these composites (using their pseudonyms) for the purpose of acknowledging the larger group of participants represented by these narratives, and providing additional illustrations to explicate the discussion. In addition, I use the term ‘participants’ as a means of locating the discussion within this group of 16 first-year teachers.
**Envisaged and enacted professional learner identity tensions**

Participants all reported entering the profession with an image of who they aspired to be as teachers, and with the intention of living up to the standards of professionalism they had set for themselves. Identity development has been addressed previously in international and Australian research from a range of perspectives, including what identity is (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Gee, 2000), how identity influences the way in which teachers engage in their work (Beijaard et al., 2004; Mockler, 2011) and how identity is constructed and reconstructed across time and experience (Beijaard et al., 2004; Flores & Day, 2006). Previous research has also shown that first-year teachers enter the profession with a vision of who they want to be as teachers (Day, Stobart, Kington, Sammons, & Last, 2003). The identities they envisage have also been referred to as their ‘anticipatory’ teacher identities (Amiot & Jaspal, 2014).

In this study, participants’ envisaged identities included their beliefs about who they aspired to be as professional learners. They all considered professional learning to be integral to teaching as a means of continuously building on their repertoire of skills, strategies and ideas for the classroom. These participants considered that their own commitment to professional learning throughout their careers would best position them to implement effective teaching and learning, as well as to support their ongoing improvement in the profession. They wanted to become great teachers and saw professional learning as a means by which they could achieve this goal. Other studies have also shown that beginning teachers may hold these positive images of teachers’ work as learners. For example, in Crosswell and Beutel’s (2013, p. 153) study of graduate teachers from a Graduate Diploma program in Queensland, participants demonstrated their intention to ‘take up the identity of ongoing professional learners’ as an important part of their work as teachers for both the transition into teaching and ongoing professional growth throughout their careers.

Many participants in this study believed that the ITE programs they completed at university played a significant part in the formation of their identities as learners. Through these programs,
participants came to understand the importance of thinking and acting as professional learners in an ongoing way after entering the profession. To some extent, the emphasis on professional learning in ITE programs is to be expected, given that in Australia these programs are required to address each of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2014), inclusive of participation in professional learning (Standard 6). Nadia recalled being told how she ‘would need to keep learning to be an effective teacher.’ Damien also considered that professional learning would be ‘a priority’ for him, as a consequence of the emphasis placed on it in his university program. Other studies have similarly reported on the influence of ITE on the development of envisaged identities (e.g. Beltman, Glass, Dinham, Chalk, & Nguyen, 2015; Lerseth, 2013). More than a decade ago, American researcher Robert Bullough (2005) identified the critical role of ITE in the identity development of pre-service teachers. He argued that teacher educators played a vital role in the development of pre-service teachers’ views of themselves as teachers. Specific to professional learning, Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, and Bransford (2005), based on their work in the United States, identified the need for teachers to develop their identities as learners during their ITE programs in order to manage the complex environments in which they would work.

From the current study, it became evident that some first-year teachers may also require a means by which to maintain their motivation to enact these identities once they experience life in the classroom. The demands and challenges inherent to the teaching profession test their initial positive attitudes toward professional learning and their ongoing commitment as professional learners. It has been well reported in the literature that teachers entering the profession may experience a disconnect between their anticipatory, often idealised identities (Hong, 2010) and their opportunities to work in the ways that align to their identities once they have entered the profession (e.g. Cherubini, 2009; Pillen et al., 2013a, 2013b). Identity researchers such as Arvaja (2016) and Pillen et al. (2013a, 2013b) refer to these disparities as ‘identity tensions’, and show how such tensions can exacerbate the difficulties that many beginning teachers encounter as they strive to
become the kinds of teachers they wish to be. Mockler (2011, p. 524) stresses the importance of maintaining a connection between moral purpose informing identity and ‘on the ground action’. She argues that without this type of congruence, beginning teachers can experience discord that can negatively impact their motivation, job satisfaction and persistence in the profession (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, & Hofman, 2012; Day & Kington, 2008).

One of the issues associated with professional learning for first-year teachers is contextual provision and support. This can be very limited in some cases, which inevitably limits teachers’ capacity to engage in professional learning (AITSL, 2016; Mayer et al., 2015). At one end of the spectrum, some schools are highly supportive of providing and facilitating access to professional learning programs; at the other, there are schools where the provision of professional learning is almost non-existent. As would be expected, participants in this study encountered a wide range of teaching contexts across this continuum of professional learning support. Nadia, for example, described the limited induction and mentoring available to her when commencing at her school, suggesting that her introduction to the profession was about the ‘basic stuff’ that, while useful, was not what she considered to be meaningful professional learning. In marked contrast, Heather described her school as highly supportive of professional learning in that it offered both informal and formal professional learning opportunities. A number of studies have demonstrated that where ‘restrictive professional learning cultures’ (Shanks et al., 2012) exist, participation in professional learning may be inhibited (Crosswell & Beutel, 2013; Lovett & Cameron, 2011; McCormack et al., 2006). Research has also underscored the danger of newcomers to the profession becoming ‘absorbed by the cultural script’ (Hall et al., 2012, p. 109) of the context in which they work, particularly where the context is unsupportive of the kind of identity development to which teachers aspire.

The importance of context notwithstanding, the ways in which first-year teachers interpreted their teaching experiences emerged in this study as a key feature of their professional learning.
growth. For example, some participants remained strongly motivated throughout the year to pursue professional learning – in some cases overcoming significant contextual barriers as they did so.

Nadia described how she had limited opportunities to access professional learning and support and yet managed to remain very positive about this part of her work, proactively seeking professional learning through sources such as online resources and external collegial networks. Other studies have demonstrated how learner dispositions influence beginning teachers’ motivation to create professional learning opportunities and access learning opportunities through communities of practice within and beyond the school site (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Shanks et al., 2012). More specifically, in this current study how first-year teachers attributed causality (Weiner, 1985, 1985) for their teaching experiences played an important part in influencing the extent to which they were able to maintain their motivation as professional learners and view professional learning as a necessary and valued part of their work.

**Professional learner identities**

This study drew on attribution theory as a way of thinking about and investigating the ways in which individuals generated their own personal interpretations of their teaching experiences. The principles underpinning this theory provided insight into their perceptions of why their teaching transpired as it did, as well enabling an understanding how these perceptions influenced their sense of identity as professional learners. In this study, participants reported interpreting the reasons why their teaching turned out the way it did (that is, their attributions of causality or attributional behaviours) in ways that then influenced, at least in part, their attitudes toward undertaking professional learning (the outcome of their attributions). They reported having developed attitudes toward professional learning during their first year of teaching that can be broadly understood in the following three ways: (1) professional learning as purposeful; (2) professional learning as work-intensive; and (3) professional learning as compliance.
**Professional learning as purposeful**

The working contexts of teachers have long been recognised as complex social environments. In 1968, for example, Jackson foregrounded the demands and stressors inherent in working in schools in his seminal work, *Life in Classrooms*, and later (Jackson, 1990, p. iv) wrote about the classroom as a social place in which events are ‘curiously interdependent and frustratingly intertwined’. Since then, many studies have shown schools to be complex and demanding workplaces, particularly for first-year teachers (e.g. Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Gu & Day, 2013; Lew & Nelson, 2016). In this study, the first-year teachers who ostensibly maintained the most positive attitudes to engaging as professional learners were those who seemed to take account of the complex interplay of influences on their work. In doing so, they made meaning of their experiences in ways that recognised the contributory role of both themselves and others in the school setting, as well as acknowledging schools as unpredictable and changing workplace environments.

Participants demonstrated the importance of taking on a measured and balanced approach to determining the source or sources of responsibility for their teaching challenges. By doing so, they remained motivated to seek purposeful engagement with professional learning. This balanced response was characterised in one way by varied attributions of responsibility. Previous studies about teacher effectiveness have revealed that the extent to which teachers perceive themselves to be responsible for the outcomes of their teaching has a strong influence on their subsequent participation in professional learning. For example, Guskey (1984) and others (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2011, 2013; Polat & Mahalingappa, 2013) found that teachers who reported a greater sense of personal responsibility for student learning were more likely to be motivated to seek ways to improve their practice, and therefore potentially improve their instructional effectiveness. In an American study of beginning teachers in urban primary schools, Huisman, Singer and Catapano (2010) similarly found that teachers who took responsibility for the students’ learning in their classroom were more likely to seek solutions to resolve difficulties in teaching. That being said,
Attribution theorists hold that individuals who attribute responsibility to themselves for negative experiential outcomes may develop a lower sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy. First-year teachers in this study who used a varied approach to attributing responsibility for negative experiences (that is, attributing responsibility both internally and externally) were less likely to experience the deleterious effects of ongoing self-blame. In an international study of pre-service teachers and their sense of responsibility, hope and emotions, Eren (2014) also reported that teachers taking high to very high levels of responsibility for the challenges they encounter in their work may inadvertently jeopardise their teaching effectiveness, which can lead to a loss of confidence and motivation to stay in the profession.

Commonly, participants in this study sometimes took personal responsibility for the way their teaching turned out, while at other times they perceived that others, either in part or to a greater extent, should be held to account. Participants attributing in this manner maintained a balanced perception of responsibility with regard to their work as teachers. They also tended to identify those occasions where they could improve the effectiveness of their teaching through intentional and purposeful engagement in professional learning. At other times, they were less motivated to access professional learning, as they did not believe that the cause or causes for the way particular aspects of their teaching turned out were an issue that they personally needed to attend to. Thus they were able to ‘hone in’ (Dean) on what they needed to learn, and what they should do differently, and avoided feeling a sense of professional learning overload. Some participants were able to prioritise where they would spend their energy and time accessing professional learning to improve practice and avoided being overwhelmed by their work as learners through a measured understanding of where their responsibilities lay.

Another characteristic of the balanced approach adopted by some was a measured perception of the personal control they assumed themselves to have over the consequences of their teaching. They recognised the unpredictability of the school context and the unexpected and often
constant changes to the day that disrupted teaching plans and influenced the way teaching transpired. This unpredictability has been identified in a number of other studies as a challenge for all teachers, particularly those new to the profession, by creating a level of uncertainty in their day-to-day practice (e.g. Golden & Mayseless, 2013). According to Wolff, Jarodzka, and Boshuizen (2017, p. 296), ‘classrooms are perplexing, multi-dimensional environments that are not always predictable: there are numerous co-occurring events, a variety of purposes and objectives to be accomplished, and many different people to account for’. Participants in my research acknowledged that, as the environment was interactive, others – particularly students – had the agency to influence the direction of their lessons and the quality of learning that could be achieved. They determined that these influences needed to be taken into account when thinking about their work as teachers.

An important connection is made to attribution theory between perceived personal control and motivation to act. Individuals perceiving that they have personal control in a situation are more likely to consider that they have the ability to influence the situation (Weiner, 1985, 1986). The first-year teachers in this study focused on those aspects of their practice where their efforts as learners would be most effective and achievable.

Individuals attributing causality for the outcomes of their experiences in balanced ways also tend to make balanced judgements about how likely their experiences and circumstances are to change in the future – that is, they make attributions of stability (Weiner, 1985, 1986) in measured and balanced ways. This was evident in this study in a number of ways. Participants were very aware of the changing nature of the teaching profession, and most acknowledged that the circumstances in which they taught could alter from year to year. For some, this led to them remaining quite future-focused in the way they responded to their teaching experiences, recognising that their current skills and capabilities may not meet future teaching and learning needs. For example, Nadia sought professional learning to build her use of technology, stating:
Yes, I have worked out how to use technology to get the kids on board this year, but next year I could have a different group of kids and the technology might change. What worked for these kids may not work in the future.

According to attribution theorists, when individuals perceive that the types of experiences they have previously perceived as positive might be subject to change in undesirable ways in the future, they can develop a lowered sense of self-efficacy and motivation. In this study, some participants were able to remain optimistic despite their uncertainty about what lay ahead, and in some cases credited professional learning as a means of meeting future challenges. In other words, professional learning offered a mechanism by which they were able to assume a level of personal control in uncertain times. The negative impact of an unstable perception of the future was moderated when they proactively sought ways to exert personal agency to influence future experiential outcomes.

Those participants in this study who seemed to remain optimistic about their engagement with professional learning, and the profession more broadly, were those who reported taking responsibility for professional learning in a way that allowed them to also acknowledge the inevitable influences of others on their work, and the unpredictability of the teaching context. They used a mixture of both negative and positive attribution styles when interpreting the causes for their teaching experiences, thus moderating the adverse effects of attributions that can lead to a lowered sense of self-efficacy, negative emotions and feelings of limited control in the teaching environment. By doing so, they came to understand professional learning as a purposeful and manageable part of their work as teachers.

**Professional learning as work intensive**

This study and others have reported on the difficulties that some beginning teachers face at the outset of their careers (Mayer et al., 2015; Pillen et al., 2013a, 2013b). Many beginning teachers struggle in areas such as meeting requirements in planning and delivering quality curriculum,
building relationships with parents, collaborating with colleagues, engaging in extra-curricular activities and fulfilling assessment and reporting requirements (Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Kidd et al., 2015; Roehrig et al., 2008).

Issues associated with intense workloads are particularly well documented in the literature (du Plessis & Sunde, 2017; Kidd et al., 2015). Beck (2017, p. 628) draws attention to the ‘lingering residue’ of the pressures inherent in work intensification, citing exhaustion and teacher burnout, which have been well documented elsewhere with regard to beginning teachers (Bumen, 2010; Goddard & Goddard, 2006; Hultell, Melin, & Gustavsson, 2013; Kim, Youngs, & Frank, 2017; Reichl, Wach, Spinath, Brünken, & Karbach, 2014). Teacher burnout (e.g. Hultell et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2017; Reichl et al., 2014), along with attrition from the profession (Gallant & Riley, 2017; Harmsen, Helms-Lorenz, Maulana, & van Veen, 2018; Mason & Matas, 2015; Weldon, 2018), has been clearly referenced in the literature with regard to beginning teachers.

This study illustrates how, for some first-year teachers, professional learning becomes yet another layer to a seemingly already unmanageable workload. First-year teachers may feel compelled to re-prioritise and de-prioritise professional learning, despite their initial intentions as professional learners, as they deal with more pressing matters on a day-to-day basis. This finding is supported by Australian researchers Crosswell and Beutel (2017, p. 426), who suggest that, despite some first-year teachers’ seemingly ‘rapid-adaptation’ to their teaching demands early on, there is the potential for them to become overwhelmed by the increasing demands of the job as the year progresses. Mansfield, Wosnitza and Beltman (2012) claim that beginning teachers are predominantly task- and socially oriented, focusing on requisite teaching tasks and engaging with others in the school environment. In other words, beginning teachers operate at a level in which they are focused on themselves and the everyday (Choy et al., 2013; McNally & Blake, 2012). Their long-term vision is restricted as they work to cope with the demands of their role, and professional learning is put to the side (Huberman et al., 1993; Torff & Sessions, 2008).
My research showed that those first-year teachers who were likely to experience diminished motivation as professional learners were those who consistently felt that they should take personal responsibility for the difficulties they encountered in their teaching. For example, Liz explained how she felt fully responsible for the behaviour issues she was experiencing in her classroom, adding:

I don’t know how to stop it and … I know that it is my fault and that I have allowed it to happen. I haven’t done the right thing and used good strategies. If I had done this right, I wouldn’t be in this mess.

Liz, together with others who responded in a similar fashion, lost heart, overwhelmed by the enormous burden they saw ahead of them to ‘fix’ their teaching. In Liz’s case, her ongoing attributions of self-responsibility served to act as a contributing factor to the work pressure that she claimed ultimately resulted in her withdrawal from professional learning altogether. Previous researchers, such as Atkinson (2012), also show how the confessional-like attributions (made in this study by Liz and others) are unproductive to improving practice as they act to demotivate the teacher. American researcher Hsieh (2015) also found that beginning teachers trying to take on extensive pedagogical change are at risk of early burnout.

Attribution theorists hold that when individuals continue to attribute responsibility to themselves for what they believe have been negative experiences, their wellbeing and sense of self-efficacy can be jeopardised, and they often develop feelings of guilt and experience diminished confidence to persist in a task (Weiner, 1985, 1986). These are described as negative attribution styles (Alloy et al., 1984; Ashforth & Fugate, 2006; Higgins & Hay, 2003; Schulman et al., 1989; Seligman & Schulman, 1986). Negative attributions are further characterised by an individual’s low levels of perceived personal control over events and a sense that circumstances are unlikely to improve. This study found that those participants who (often increasingly) attributed in negative ways with regard to their work in general, and professional learning in particular, became
demotivated and at times exhausted by their attempts to attend to numerous perceived problems in their practice. The following comment illustrates this erosion of a sense of wellbeing:

I just couldn’t wait to go home and I would wake up in the morning and would think the sooner I get up the sooner I can go back to bed. Nothing was going to get better, no matter what I did.

That is what got me up in the morning, pretty much. That is what got me to school. (Lyn)

Considerable research has illustrated the damaging effects of a diminished sense of self-efficacy and confidence on beginning teachers’ coping abilities and resilience in the face of professional demands (e.g. Doney, 2013; Johnson et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2014; Le Cornu, 2013; Leroux & Theoret, 2014). This study illustrates how specific attributional behaviours sometimes fail to take into account the complexity of the teaching context, placing a substantial sense of pressure on the first-year teacher and placing their resilience at risk. Intensified perceptions of self-responsibility place the first-year teacher in the precarious position of feeling that they should take action to improve their teaching outcomes in multiple areas, regardless of the influence of other contextual factors that may be involved. In doing so, they are prone to experience their work as professional learners as an additional burden that does not result in the intended improvement to their teaching and teaching circumstances. Ironically, this withdrawal often occurs at times when they are most likely to need professional learning.

**Professional learning as compliance**

Some attributional behaviours reported by participants led them to participate in professional learning primarily – and at times solely – for the purpose of complying with teaching requirements, including those of external authorities, such as teacher registration bodies, as well as those stipulated by their school. Participants reported engaging in an array of professional learning activities, such as compulsory workshops, induction sessions and meetings with mentors. Particularly as the year progressed, however, some participants became quite disillusioned about
this aspect of their work, yet continued to engage simply because it was something they could not ‘get out of’ (Damien) – that is, they began questioning how beneficial professional learning was to their work as teachers, and what connection it bore to their own learning desires and requirements.

This type of attitude towards professional learning was particularly prevalent where participants placed the onus of responsibility on others for the hurdles they were encountering in their teaching. They tended to dismiss or, at the very least, under-rate the value that targeted professional learning could potentially hold for them; rather, they felt that it was others who needed to change and contextual factors that needed to be altered. As a consequence, they felt limited ownership of or responsibility for the way their teaching turned out. In attributing causality in this way (i.e. externally), participants may have been building a defence mechanism – or what Weiner (1985, 1986) and others refer to as developing a self-serving bias whereby individuals will work to attribute in ways that protect them from blame and responsibility for failure. In other words, the attitudinal behaviours reported by these participants may well have helped to free them from any personal burden of blame and thus serve to preserve their sense of self-efficacy as teachers.

The development and preservation of one’s sense of self-efficacy are particularly important for newcomers, who feel the pressure to prove themselves. Weiner (2010, p. 560) refers to this process as ‘impression management.’ Attribution theory, however, demonstrates that where individuals hold others accountable, they can be reluctant or resistant to act in ways that might improve their circumstances. This was borne out in my study, where it became evident that some participants consistently resisted taking action in situations where they did not consider themselves accountable. This is concerning, particularly as these were first-year teachers who are at a stage best served by their engagement with professional learning to improve and enrich their work. Others, such as Huisman et al. (2010) and Urzua and Vasquez (2008), have also raised concern about the impact on teachers’ motivation that can result from this type of attributional behaviour. Hsieh (2015) similarly notes that beginning teachers who were prone to placing the onus of responsibility
for problems in practice on others remained wedded to their ways of working and were likely to be disinterested in opportunities for professional learning.

The type of external attributional behaviours outlined immediately above can also be linked to feelings of limited or low levels of personal control over the contextual environment, which in turn have been shown to lead to negative responses, such as diminished motivation, frustration and anger. Participants in this study who attributed in this way conveyed the impression that much of what they experienced was ‘done to them’ and that they had limited or sometimes no personal agency to change these circumstances. This is potentially concerning, as it is clear from the work of attributional researchers (e.g. Alloy et al., 1988; Marsh & Weary, 1989) that individuals who experience ongoing perceptions of limited agency can develop a sense of injustice, which can have detrimental effects on their wellbeing and motivation to stay in the profession.

Interestingly, this study also found that positive attributional behaviours did not necessarily increase participants’ motivation to engage in professional learning. In fact, in some cases, participants attributing in this way (that is, crediting success to themselves with a high expectancy that this would continue) also undertook professional learning for reasons associated more with compliance than a sense of any potential benefit to be gained. Some conveyed the impression that they viewed professional learning as a form of remediation, of which they had little or no need, given the success they were experiencing in their day-to-day teaching. They viewed professional learning as an ineffective use of their time, given all of the other responsibilities and work demands they were trying to manage. In these instances, they neglected to consider the benefits of professional learning as a possible source of professional and personal growth.

In this era of standardisation and accountability regimes, teacher participation in ongoing professional learning has shifted from being a discretionary to a fully mandated feature of teachers’ work. In Australia, for example, first-year teachers must meet professional learning accountabilities to move from provisional to full registration. They must demonstrate their teacher capabilities (that
is, what teachers should know and do) as set out in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2014), inclusive of their engagement in professional learning. Teachers must therefore accrue and record a certain number of hours of participation in professional learning activities. In some cases, the nature of this learning is controlled by regulatory authorities and must fall under the category of accredited professional learning programs (those workshops and conferences with approval from state regulatory authorities as ‘quality professional learning’) and non-accredited professional learning (often school-based, independent and informal activities that are inherently less measurable and verifiable in nature). Thus, when participants in this study attributed in ways that minimised their motivation to engage, they mostly still participated in professional learning for purposes of compliance and accountability.

Educational researchers have raised concerns that a focus on accountability undermines the quality of learning that is generated through an authentic motivation to learn (e.g. Appova & Arbaugh, 2017; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009; Korthagen, 2017; Lloyd & Davis, 2018). Teachers may simply go through the motions of professional learning, ensuring they are ‘seen’ to be doing what is expected of them (currently outlined in the Standards), rather than engaging through a firmly held commitment to their own development as practitioners. Passive participation of this nature does little or nothing to change practice; nor does it fuel teachers’ internal motivation to engage with professional learning. For some first-year teachers, enforced participation may exacerbate negative attitudes toward professional learning, such that they come to view it as a time-waster, an unnecessary distraction or an intrusion on their time. The mandating of teacher learning can thus be problematic because it tends to fail to acknowledge that the kind of professional learning most likely to positively impact teacher practice and student outcomes occurs when teachers are internally motivated. Korthagen (2017, p. 387) refers to this omission as the ‘inconvenient truth’ often dismissed by those responsible for professional learning policy.
It is of significant concern that some teachers, as shown in this study, spend most of their first year of engaging in professional learning solely for the purpose of compliance. By doing this, they risk failing to develop the kind of attitude to professional learning that will serve to motivate and support them through their careers. Unfortunately, in relation to professional learning in Australia, the Standards do not address teacher motivation; rather, professional learning is seen as a performative task. In ways not dissimilar to Australia, teachers in the United States and the United Kingdom must participate in professional learning as a teaching improvement measure, as well as engage in professional learning communities (Department of Education (United Kingdom), 2013). As in Australia, the Standards associated with these requirements reference those functional aspects of professional learning most easily measured, yet disregard the development of teacher identities, attitudes and motivations. Australian researcher Judyth Sachs (2016, p. 417), in response to the past decade in which the ‘top-down’ approach to teacher professionalism has come to characterise the work of teachers, argues that standards have failed, and will likely continue to fail, to act as a ‘catalyst for authentic professional learning’. She states that this approach neglects the need for teachers to develop the kinds of attitudes and sense of commitment that enable them to act as self-regulated, responsive and confident professionals. Where the function of teachers’ work continues to be privileged over their identity work (Buchanan, 2015; Calvert, 2016), the development of strategies that focus on supporting first-year teachers to think and act as professional learners is in danger of being overlooked. Studies such as the research undertaken for this thesis are essential to better understand how beginning teachers can be supported to develop their inner impetus to engage in professional learning as a means of professional and personal growth.

Factors that impact attributional processing

Clearly, participants’ attributional behaviours were significant to the kinds of attitudes they developed toward professional learning. Attributional researchers explain (e.g. Grotzer & Tutwiler, 2014; D. Hamilton et al., 1990; Luyckx et al., 2007; Yeigh, 2007) that attributions of causality are
the result of a process that involves two significant, yet interrelated reflective activities – namely, accessing situational information and knowledge and the interpretation of this information. From the current study, it became evident that a number of factors influenced the extent to which participants felt they were able and/or willing to intentionally reflect on their teaching. As discussed in the following sections, these factors ranged from participants’ perceptions of time available to reflect on their teaching to their perceptions of, and concerns about, issues of performativity, to their perceptions of the kinds of attributional behaviours that were supported by their colleagues.

**Perceptions of time to reflect**

Some participants felt they had limited time to spend on intentional reflection as a consequence of their intense workloads. Previous studies have reported this same limitation for teachers (Atkinson, 2012; Poom-Valickis & Mathews, 2013; Williams & Grudnoff, 2011). Participants seemingly made ‘on the run’ (Nadia) decisions to explain why things happened the way they did, based on their understanding of their teaching experiences that came quickly to mind. As Nadia explained:

> I think at the moment I’m so focused on being prepared for the next period that I don’t always get the chance to think things through slowly. It’s kind of like when you realise you don’t have five minutes to sit down and read like an email from someone – that kind of thing – so I think it is time demand, that is the main thing.

Liz described how she was often unable to put time aside for the specific purpose of reflection:

> I don’t necessarily schedule time to do it, but I guess as I prepare lessons, I have in the back of my mind what worked and what didn’t.

Finding themselves without sufficient time to spare, participants often only reflected back on what had happened previously in a cursory and incidental way. According to education researcher Kramer (2018, p. 213), this level of reflection equates to ‘merely pausing for thinking’, offering
only a limited possibility that individuals will purposefully question why events have turned out the way they have.

Where time is not available to individuals to reflect intentionally on their experiences, they are at risk of relying on incomplete information to attribute causality. In this study, first-year teachers were prone to attributing causality in ways with which they were most familiar where they were unable to access different understandings about their experiences. Attribution theorists hold that individuals are likely to default to habitual ways of attributing in the absence of alternative explanations. Those participants in this study who habitually used a negative attribution style, for example, were likely to continue to do so across multiple teaching experiences. This is a significant concern where first-year teachers attribute in ways that do not support them to stay positive about professional learning. In the absence of new or additional information, some participants continued to hold themselves or others almost entirely responsible for their circumstances, which gradually seemed to erode their attitudes towards professional learning.

This supports other studies, which have shown that individuals need the time, opportunity and motivation to access information that may enhance their current understanding of a particular situation. This information is referred to by Cramton, Orvis and Wilson (2012) as ‘situational visibility’, and it describes the knowledge that teachers develop about their teaching practice and the specific context in which this teaching occurs. The more accessible this information about their teaching is for the individual, the more able they are to think about the multiplicity of factors that can contribute to an outcome (Fast, Reimer, & Funder, 2008; Grotzer & Tutwiler, 2014; Hamilton et al., 1990; Luyckx et al., 2007; Yeigh, 2007). In other words, when individuals have the opportunity to engage in informed reflection, they also open themselves up to new possibilities for understanding their experiences. This is only of benefit when there is sufficient information available on which to reflect.
It would be fair to say that most teachers’ breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of their teaching and their particular working context is still developing in their first year. Irish researchers Long, Hall, Conway and Murphy (2012, p. 623) refer to the ‘information gaps’ that teachers are likely to encounter in their beginning years, particularly in contexts where there are many expectations that are culturally specific and/or unstated. Most participants in my research acknowledged their particular information gaps, yet felt hindered and at times demotivated by not having sufficient time to do anything significant to address them.

It also became apparent that they developed quite emotional responses to not being able to act in proactive ways, citing frustration, anxiety and even anger. This is not unexpected, given that emotions will often come into play in social/professional contexts and interactions. Notable in this study, however, was that participants who experienced extended periods of these types of negative emotions began to question how reflective practice could improve or benefit their teaching. This supports other studies that have demonstrated how anxiety and other types of negative emotional states serve to undermine individuals’ motivation to participate in reflective practice (Hamilton et al., 1990; Yeigh, 2007). In this study, participants experiencing intense emotions in an ongoing way across the year were unlikely to search for different explanations for their experiences. Many ultimately avoided participating in intentional reflective practice altogether.

Kramer (2018, p. 214) argues that reflective practice can ‘destabilise categorical knowledge and turn it into possibility knowledge’. This means that reflection has the potential to help individuals to reconsider or reframe how they make sense of their experiences. Informed reflective practice has the potential to disrupt attributions of causality by offering alternative perspectives on an issue or problem. However, where reflective practice is adversely affected by intense emotional states, individuals may choose not to engage in the tasks they consider to be beyond their capacity at that stage. As a consequence, some individuals are at risk of experiencing diminished opportunities to develop their identities as professional learners. It is reasonable to suggest that
additional support strategies for first-year teachers, such as a greater purchase on time for reflective practice, may better enable them to participate in a more informed process of attributing causality.

*Perceptions of teacher performance expectations*

Another factor that impacts on attributional processing is the perceptions that individuals hold of functions and aspects of the contexts in which they work. In this study, it was clear that, at different points throughout the school year, all participants experienced low levels of confidence in the contextual support that they were at liberty to access, due mostly to their perceptions of how their performance was to be evaluated by others. For example, many were reluctant to seek counselling from mentors, colleagues and leaders, and resisted doing so, for fear of how they might be judged. Some participants felt that, as new teachers, they were exposed to significant levels of scrutiny and judgement. They were fearful that conversations with their peers might amount to an evaluation of their progress in the profession and a judgement of their suitability to work at the school, and they believed that this would be likely to impact on their opportunities for ongoing employment or permanent teaching positions. This is a commonly-reported issue in the literature, particularly now that teachers are increasingly subject to the requirements and expectations of professional standards. Le Cornu (2013) points to the danger of beginning teachers being assessed and evaluated by their peers and leaders at a time in their careers when they should be trying to establish social and professional relationships with others in the school context. Sachs (2016, p. 416) makes the argument that accountability regimes may ‘erode trust and develop risk-aversive dispositions’, evidence of which emerged clearly among the study participants.

Some participants sought to alleviate their concerns about this function of their working environment by looking for advice beyond the school context, seeking help from teachers in other schools and accessing online resources. Other participants, however, became disheartened to the point that they limited or ceased their engagement with others for the purpose of gaining support.
and advice. For example, Liz held herself so much to account for the flaws in her teaching that she became less and less willing to engage in open dialogue with her school colleagues:

I don’t really talk to the others as I feel like they are judging me … I am sure they are not, but it’s a risk you know. I’m not going to advertise it.

In this way, she felt that her problems would remain unnoticed. Kelly, by contrast, believed that filtering what she shared with her colleagues was the most appropriate course of action:

So there is no stability in my future here although I think, or I hope, I have made a good impression here and that they keep me on … I guess that I feel a bit more pressure to perhaps be seen to be more capable than I am sometimes. Like if I am totally out of my depth but, you know, ‘fake it till you make it’ sort of thing.

Kelly made sure that when she met with her mentors, she projected an image of the capable and confident teacher that she felt they wanted to see. The identification of this type of professional reticence adds to the results of Atkinson’s study (2012, p. 79), in which she uses the phrase ‘strategic compliance’ to describe the tendency for teachers to share only what they believe will protect their professional standing. As far as participants in my study were concerned, their hesitation to engage in shared reflection meant that they often failed to gain access to information on which to base and possibly reframe their attributions of causality.

Individuals who associate extensive professional risk with collaborative reflection may seek to create a level of professional anonymity that limits the extent to which they can learn more about their working contexts. Collaborative reflection has been demonstrated to offer individuals an opportunity to challenge their existent assumptions and beliefs, interpretations and understandings about their experiences through the co-construction of meaning with others (Farrell, 2016; Martinez, 2018). Through shared reflection, individuals have the opportunity to collectively negotiate the meaning of experiences (Kramer, 2018; Thompson & Pascal, 2011, 2012), bringing
what might be unconscious and habitual thinking to front of mind (Akram, 2012; Campitelli & Labollita, 2010). Collaborative reflection thus opens up opportunities for habitual attribution styles to be disrupted through the co-construction of alternative explanations for how events transpire. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the contemporary focus on teacher performativity in both policy and practice places some of the most vulnerable first-year teachers at risk of withdrawing from the very support that they need in order to develop positive attitudes towards reflection and professional learning more generally.

**Perceptions of collegial support**

Clearly, participants interacted in different ways with their colleagues. Some participants opted to engage actively in collaborative discussions and activities that they believed would help them to reflect meaningfully on their teaching experiences, while others (as described above) tended to try to keep their formal interactions with colleagues to the minimum. Regardless of participants’ preferred approaches to collegial interaction, all – by necessity – engaged in daily, often informal, conversations with an array of peers and leaders; and it became readily apparent in this study that these conversations had the potential to influence the ways in which participants went on to attribute causality for their experiences. That is, collegial conversations often served to disrupt or reinforce participants’ attributional behaviours in ways that were likely to impact on their growth as teachers and, by association, as professional learners (see below), thus reinforcing the findings of previous researchers, who have shown that interpersonal communications may be used by individuals to frame or ‘anchor’ their causal attributions (Lyden, Chaney, Danehower, & Houston, 2002, p. 100).

In this study, collegial interactions varied with regard to the extent to which they served to support participants’ attributions of causality, which led to positive attitudes to professional learning. Heather’s scheduled meetings with her mentor, for example, provided what could be
considered an early point of disruption to the way she persistently blamed herself for all the problems she encountered. The mentor challenged Heather’s thinking and encouraged her to consider how others in the context may have contributed to her teaching. In other cases, colleagues’ ideas reinforced the ways in which participants interpreted the meaning and nature of events that had occurred previously. Nadia’s online colleagues agreed with her that dealing with the challenging class she had was as much about the effectiveness of the behaviour-management skills she implemented as it was about the students. Damien, through interacting with his close colleagues, felt somewhat justified in feeling that others were responsible for his challenging circumstances.

Stakeholders within the school context who are intending to support first-year teachers may benefit from understanding the influence of attribution on the development of dispositions and attitudes of learners. Mentors, leaders and colleagues, if able to identify the potential effects of first-year teachers’ explanations for and interpretations of their teaching, could use this as a focus for discussion. However, mentoring has already been identified as an area of concern, where inadequate training and support are provided to mentors (Ambrosetti, 2014; Beutel, 2009; Beutel et al., 2017; Liu, 2014). Mentors need far more effective support and training to develop their understanding of how attributional behaviours might impact the development of positive attitudes towards professional learning.

This study draws attention to the importance of teachers’ awareness of the impact of their own attributional behaviours on their ability to stay motivated as learners as they progress through the first year. This requires that the first-year teacher go beyond technical reflection that other studies have shown to be most likely among our newest teachers (Poom-Valickis & Mathews, 2013; Ryken & Hamel, 2016; Shoffner, 2011) to reflecting on the impact of their practice (that is, their interpretation of their experiences) on their own learning as professionals. This depth of reflective practice is not required by the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers at the Graduate to
Proficient level (Ryan & Bourke, 2013); however, this study points to the importance of first-year teachers reflecting on both the impact of their practice on their students and the impact of their thinking on their own professional growth and wellbeing so they may be in a stronger position to personally disrupt those habitual practices that hinder the development of their learner identities, and their resilience in the profession more broadly.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I provide the following four statements that respond to the research question:

*How do first-year teachers’ responses to their professional experiences influence the development of their professional learner identities?*

First, some first-year teachers experience a disconnect between their envisaged identities as professional learners and their ability to enact these identities as they progress through their first year of teaching. Second, how first-year teachers respond to their teaching experiences significantly influences their perceptions of professional learning as a necessary, purposeful and manageable part of their work. Third, the first-year teachers best positioned to maintain positive attitudes about, and motivation for, professional learning are those who are able to identify the complex interplay of influences on their teaching experiences. By doing so, the effects of negative attributions on their sense of professional agency and self-efficacy are moderated. Finally, first-year teachers are best able to develop attributional behaviours that facilitate positive attitudes to professional learning when they can engage in deliberate, critical and collaborative reflective practice with colleagues.

In the final chapter, I consider the contributions made by this study to research, theory and the teaching profession. I also discuss implications for future policy, practice and research.
Chapter 8 Conclusion

Introduction

This mixed methods study aimed to generate deeper understandings of the ways beginning teachers develop their professional learner identities in their first year of teaching. In addressing this aim, I responded to the following research question:

*How do first-year teachers’ responses to their experiences influence the development of their professional learner identities?*

In addressing this research question, my study considered the ways in which first-year teachers construct their own meanings about their work and how these meanings help to shape their sense of identity as learners.

Framed by attribution theory (Weiner, 1985, 1986), this study specifically investigated the influence of first-year teachers’ attributional behaviours (that is, how they attributed causality for the outcomes of their teaching experiences) on their attitudes to professional learning as they progressed through the year. I conducted this research with first-year teachers from a diverse range of schools from the independent sector across the state of Queensland, Australia, using both an online survey and semi-structured interviews.

There are four main sections to this final chapter. First, I briefly review the structure of this thesis and highlight key concepts from each chapter. Next, I provide a response to the research question for this study. Following this, I outline the contributions of this thesis and consider the implications for future policy and practice. Finally, I offer suggestions for further research.
A review of the thesis

This thesis has consisted of eight chapters. In Chapter 1, I positioned the research within the teaching lives of beginning teachers. I discussed the particular constraints and conditions that face teachers as they enter the profession, such as high rates of casualised employment, out-of-field teaching and a level of work intensification that can make them vulnerable to burnout and, potentially, departure from the profession. I also highlighted teachers’ inconsistent access to high-quality professional learning as an ongoing dilemma in a number of school contexts. Furthermore, I contended that standardisation in the teaching profession, as documented both globally and in Australia, has led to a focus on professional learning as a matter of compliance in many quarters (Hardy, 2018a). I raised the argument that teachers need to develop their orientations as professional learners, or their sense of learner identity, whereby they consider engagement with professional learning as more than a requirement of the job and instead as an appropriate and empowering response to their teaching experiences.

In Chapter 2, I reviewed the research literature pertaining to key concepts that underpin this study: the experiences of beginning teachers, their professional learning and their professional identity-construction. From this review, I concluded that a vast amount of literature about beginning teachers and their professional learning is focused on the benefits of participation for beginning teachers and the constraints on them participating in and experiencing the kinds of collaborative support advocated as critical for their successful transition into and progress in the profession. While contextual and personal factors are identified as significant to teacher identity construction, there is less research to explain how beginning teachers specifically develop and maintain meaningful learner orientations and a sense of professional learner identity in the first-year of teaching. Moreover, there is limited research about how first-year teachers may be assisted to sustain their sense of identity as learners across different kinds of professional learner settings. This limitation in the literature was identified as the focus of this research.
In Chapter 3, I explained and justified the theoretical framework for this study, which is underpinned by the key principles of Weiner’s attribution theory. I argued that attribution theory provides a means of conceptualising the ways in which the first-year teachers’ personal interpretations and subjective understandings of their experiences impact the ways in which they feel they are able to enact their work as professional learners. I made connections between attribution theory and the key concepts reviewed in the previous chapter. In particular, I argued that attribution theory acknowledges the interplay between the individual and social context, important in this study of first-year teachers working within schools where performative and standardised regimes may seem, in some ways, to place blame for perceived issues in teaching quality on individual teachers (Singh et al., 2015). Understanding the extent to which first-year teachers feel that they are personally accountable for what takes place in their classrooms, and the degree to which they feel they have the capacity to influence what occurs, is important to understanding their work as teachers and learners.

In Chapter 4, I explained and justified the selected methodology for this study. Through the use of a mixed methods design, I was able to investigate the content of multiple participants’ attributions of causality (that is, how they attributed in particular situations), then go further and investigate the subsequent impact of their attributions on their teaching lives in order to address the research question for this study. The use of a mixed methodology extended the traditionally quantitative research designs used previously in research framed by attribution theory and provided a means of making sense of participants’ experiences, which are inherently socially complex and contextual. The use of a hybrid approach to analysis (using both inductive and deductive coding) allowed for examination of the theoretical concepts of attribution underpinning the study while equally valuing the importance of new understandings emerging from participants’ personal accounts of their teaching.
In Chapters 5 and 6, I presented the key findings generated through the administration of the online survey tool, adapted for this study from the pre-existing CDSII data instrument (McAuley et al., 1992), and semi-structured interviews conducted with first-year teachers. These chapters highlighted the positive impact of first-year teachers’ understanding of the impact of teaching as a collective pursuit on their sense of self-efficacy, responsibility, agency and optimism for the future. In these chapters, I drew attention to how the current focus on teacher accountability and performance may inhibit the creation of a culture of collective responsibility for student learning, given the significant performative pressure placed on teachers to be somewhat counter-intuitive to the way first-year teachers best maintain their commitment to their work as learners.

A full discussion of these findings was presented in Chapter 7, in which I positioned the findings from this study within current research literature and contemporary education agendas. I discussed the impact of the ways in which first-year teachers respond to their teaching experiences on their perceptions of professional learning as a necessary, purposeful and manageable part of their work. I argued that the first-year teachers best positioned to maintain positive attitudes about, and motivation for professional learning are those able to identify the complex interplay of influences on their teaching experiences. I also discussed the role of deliberate, critical and collaborative reflective practice with colleagues in arriving at these attributional behaviours. Throughout this chapter, I deliberated on how contemporary performativity requirements and accountabilities, standardisation, compliance and work intensification may all serve to impact the development and maintenance of positive learner identities among some first-year teachers. Importantly, I discussed potential opportunities to support first-year teachers to navigate their complex teaching contexts in ways that empower them to remain positive and motivated about their work as teacher-learners. In this way, the intended purpose of professional learning (that is, as a means of professional and personal growth) and the responsibility and agency of teachers to drive their learning in relevant and responsive ways may be achieved.
Response to the research question

In this section, I provide a response to the research question for this study:

*How do first-year teachers’ responses to their experiences influence the development of their professional learner identities?*

The broad response to the research question is that how first-year teachers respond to their teaching experiences strongly impacts their sense of personal responsibility for, and motivation to, proactively and purposefully engage with professional learning both in and beyond the school context. That is, first-year teachers’ attributional behaviours have a significant bearing on the development of their attitudes to professional learning.

In theoretical terms, individuals respond to their experiences by attributing causality for the outcomes of those experiences across Weiner’s (1985, 1986) dimensions of locus (source of responsibility), control (perceived influence) and stability (likelihood to continue into the future). Individuals’ attributions of causality across these dimensions act as a corollary for their subsequent thoughts, feelings and actions. This study has demonstrated that, in response to teaching experiences, first-year teachers seek to understand the cause/s for their teaching outcomes. They develop their perceptions of how they and others have contributed to their teaching (that is, attributing to both internal and external loci), the extent to which they feel that they and others have agency to influence a particular situation (personal and external control) and whether their teaching experiences are likely to change in the future (that is, the stability of outcomes). In these ways, their attitudes towards professional learning are constantly being shaped and reshaped.

This study demonstrated that balanced attributional behaviours (that is, a combination of positive and negative attribution styles) are most likely to lead to positive attitudes to professional learning. Balanced attributions best reflect the complex interplay of causal factors in the teaching context, with individuals perceiving responsibility and control over the events occurring in that
setting as shared, at different times, between themselves and others. They also believe the outcomes of their experiences to be, on occasions, open to change. This measured style of attributing causality moderates the potentially adverse effects of negative attribution styles, such as a lowered sense of self-efficacy and agency, on individuals following times of challenge. Moreover, balanced attributions can assist individuals to mitigate against feelings of complacency and limited motivation to take further action, which may arise after they have made positive attributions in times of success. Individuals are thereby able to remain focused on the fact that there will be other situations where taking individual action – that is, using personal agency – is a necessary way of responding. In this way, they are more likely to remain optimistic about teaching, staying open to accepting some responsibility for resolving the problems they may encounter.

This study also serves to show that habitual attributions of causality (that is, the tendency to use similar attributions of causality, such as attributions that are predominantly negative or predominantly positive) can undermine first-year teachers’ positive attitudes and constructive approaches to professional learning. Those who regularly attributed in negative ways were shown to develop increasingly low levels of self-esteem and a diminishing sense of personal agency in their everyday work, leading them to question how professional learning could be of benefit to them. They began devaluing professional learning to the point where they were quite dismissive of it as a meaningful part of their work. Interestingly, those who consistently attributed in positive ways were also prone to losing their enthusiasm and motivation for professional learning – but for different reasons. Feeling optimistic about and in control of their work, these individuals tended to see such limited value in professional learning that they only participated when required to do so. They were inclined to conclude that, when things were going so well, professional learning was unnecessary and rather superfluous.

In consideration of this response to the research question, I share the following observations. First, as the year progresses, some first-year teachers experience a dissonance or tension between
their envisaged identities as professional learners and the ways in which they engage in professional learning. As novices to teaching, they anticipate that they will think and act as professional learners as a means of developing their expertise and effectiveness in the classroom. They are excited and enthusiastic to commence their first job as fully qualified teachers and keen to take on this aspect of their work. However, not all first-year teachers are able to live out the characteristics of these envisaged professional learner identities in practice, even in contexts where they seemingly have ample access to professional learning.

Second, first-year teachers who develop the kind of self-regulation and commitment that come from a positive attitude towards professional learning can find ways to put into practice who they aspire to be as learners across a range of contexts. They are motivated to participate actively in professional learning initiatives and activities provided by their school and, if they believe they need more or different types of provision, seek out additional resources and tap into other sources of learning beyond their immediate context. They proactively look for ways to overcome perceived barriers to accessing professional learning and take ownership of their learning.

Third, this research underscores the importance of first-year teachers upholding positive attitudes to professional learning in the belief that it will be of value to them, both now and into the future. This can be counterpointed with the notion of teacher participation in professional learning as a compliance measure of teacher and school accountability to accreditation and registration authorities. In relation to the latter, this study adds to the body of research advising caution in applying high-stakes accountability measures to evaluate teachers’ participation in professional learning. Not only can such measures encroach on teachers’ commitment to enhancing their learning; they can also erode the inherent value that teachers may place on their ongoing learning into the future.

Fourth, first-year teachers who intentionally and purposefully reflect on their practice with others are ostensibly those who are best able to consider the wide range of influences on their
teaching when they attribute causality. They do not, however, always feel that this kind of reflection is either practicable or advisable. Workloads that may, at times, seem almost unmanageable can leave first-year teachers feeling that they have limited time available to commit to this kind of reflective practice. Moreover, their concerns about the way others might judge their teaching performance can sometimes act as a deterrent to reflecting collaboratively with colleagues. Their perceptions of certain aspects of their teaching contexts may therefore impact negatively on the value they place on reflective practice, leading them to feel discouraged about seeking guidance and alternative points of view from their colleagues.

Finally, timely and informed support aimed at disrupting unproductive attributional behaviours may assist those first-year teachers most at risk of developing negative attitudes to professional learning, by enabling them to consider their teaching experiences from different perspectives. In these circumstances, they may have the chance to shift to more balanced and measured interpretations of their teaching. Without assistance, first-year teachers who develop negative learning attitudes may continue to limit their access to sources of support, both in and outside the school. In essence, they can become trapped in a cycle of pessimism. Their professional growth, as well as their ability to remain resilient and cope with the ongoing challenges and demands of the teaching profession, may be impacted adversely. This situation places some teachers at potential risk of burnout and early departure from the profession.

Contributions and implications

This thesis has made a number of important contributions to the research literature, theory and the teaching profession. These contributions each have implications for both policy and practice. I address these contributions, and their implications, in this section.
**Contribution to empirical research**

This study has made an empirical contribution to the research literature, adding to current knowledge about the experiences of teachers in their first year of teaching and their identity work as teachers. Specifically, this thesis has extended the current research on professional learning, which has had a particular focus on the importance of professional learning for beginning teachers and the professional and personal impact of learning initiatives, to show how first-year teachers engage in identity work to develop sustainable, purposeful and positive attitudes to professional learning.

Framed by attribution theory, this study has provided an alternative and nuanced theoretical perspective on teachers’ sense of identity as professional learners and the development of their commitment to professional learning for the purpose of professional growth from the outset of their teaching careers. In short, the study positions attributions of causality as significant to both professional learning and the identity work of teachers.

To this end, this study adds further empirical weight to the growing concern reported in the literature that the current technicist and functional view of teaching in teacher standards, both in Australia and internationally, is in critical need of review and reframing. The positive influence of first-year teachers’ perceptions of collective responsibility for student learning seems potentially at odds with the current policy environment. Some researchers argue that accountability regimes, such as standardised testing of students, place significant levels of responsibility, or blame, on teachers where student outcomes are considered to be problematic (whether at a national, state or local level) (Singh et al., 2015; Stern, 2012). With this in mind, it is important to consider how the current focus on teacher accountability and performance may inhibit the creation of a culture of collective responsibility for student learning. The significant performative pressure placed on teachers through this process seems counter-intuitive to this study’s finding that first-year teachers best maintain their commitment to their work as learners. Teacher accountability, performativity and evaluation
of teachers based on standardised testing may put at risk some first-year teachers’ ability to arrive at attributions of causality that recognise such collective responsibility.

Building on other research, this study highlights the need for policy-makers to reconsider the way professional learning is currently represented in teacher standards (that is, as a performance task) to explicitly refer to the development of teacher attitudes, motivations and commitment to professional improvement and development. Moreover, the findings from this study further question the effectiveness of enforced accountabilities, such as the measurement of CPD hours, as a means of building teachers’ expertise. Clearly, beginning teachers are likely to comply with these external requirements. To a large extent, though, these accountabilities overlook the significant influence that teachers’ meaningful engagement in their own learning has on the development of their practice. Furthermore, schools need teacher performance and development policies that support them to maintain open and safe collegial environments where first-year teachers, and teachers in general, may feel more inclined to collaborate with colleagues in a process of shared reflection.

The implications for policy ensuing from this research are timely, given that on 20 November 2018, the House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training in Australia announced an inquiry into the status of the teaching profession (Parliament of Australia, 2018). The Committee plans to extend on the work from key reports that have already had a significant impact on education policy in Australia, such as Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (Department of Education and Training, 2018) and Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers (TEMAG, 2014) – both discussed previously in this thesis – to consider current constraints on achieving quality education. Areas of teachers’ work targeted for investigation include teacher retention rates, burnout among early career teachers and the provision of professional support. The contributions of this thesis further strengthen the importance of such an inquiry.
Contribution to theory

This thesis has also made important contributions to theory. The theoretical framework for this study, underpinned by the key principles of Weiner’s attribution theory, integrated other areas of attribution research, such as attribution styles and attributional processing, to create a comprehensive understanding of the process of attributing causality in complex teaching contexts. The framework made important connections to the work of other theorists, such as social learning theorists (e.g. Bandura, 1982, 1989) and reflection theorists (e.g. Kelchtermans, 2009) as a theory of learning. The latter connection in particular introduced the language and principles of attribution theory as a way of thinking and talking about the reflective process.

Furthermore, this study demonstrated how mixed methods can be a powerful methodology for research framed by attribution theory, which to date has been dominated by quantitative studies. The mixed approach to data collection and a hybridised data analysis method (drawing on both theoretically derived codes as well as those emerging through the analysis process) used for this research enabled a deep investigation of the significant relationship between individual interpretations of experience and complex contextual conditions. This methodology extended the focus of investigation beyond the measurement of individuals’ attributions of causality, which has tended to dominate this theoretical field.

Contribution to the profession

Finally, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the teaching profession through generating a deeper understanding of the ways in which first-year teachers construct meaning about their experiences. Important insights into the kinds of support that could assist teachers to feel positively about their work as teachers, as well as their engagement as professional learners, have been gained. As first-year teachers navigate the varied contexts in which they may work and the accountabilities that may serve to constrain them, mentors, leaders and teaching colleagues are in an ideal position
to support first-year teachers to respond to their teaching in ways that will help them to build and sustain positive professional learning attitudes as they progress through the year. Understanding the impact of teachers’ attributional behaviours on their development as professional learners could assist those school staff working with first-year teachers to identify those in their first year who may be at potential risk of withdrawing from professional learning throughout the year. In turn, they may be able to make decisions as to whether intervention (or disruption to these attributions of causality) could be beneficial. Models of mentoring (Kemmis et al., 2014; Langdon & Ward, 2015) and critical reflection could be expanded to focus specifically on supporting first-year teachers to bring to the forefront of their minds how they are feeling about professional learning and to attribute causality in ways that develop and sustain their positive professional learning attitudes. The data instruments developed as part of this study (survey and semi-structured interview schedule) have the potential to act as useful artefacts or tools to guide or facilitate collegial discussions and deepen critically reflective practices for this purpose.

Furthermore, there is potential for teacher educators to use the theoretical framework and tools developed for this study in their work to make explicit to pre-service teachers the kinds of opportunities, challenges and demands that they may face in their first year. These tools could act as resources for teacher educators to explore with pre-service teachers the kinds of responses to their teaching that can assist them to sustain their positive attitudes to professional learning and their optimism in the profession. Those pre-service teachers who understand how their own well-being and motivation are impacted by their responses will be better placed to nurture their personal commitment and drive as learners. It stands to reason, then, that the capacity of graduates to intentionally foster their positive attitudes as learners is critical to their ‘classroom readiness’ (TEMAG, 2014) for commencement and growth in the profession. In view of this, ITE programs may be able to be adapted to address this kind of readiness through both theoretical and practical components of pre-service teachers’ coursework.
Future research directions

I suggest the following areas as potential avenues for future research to extend and complement this study. First, research is required to track the influence of first-year teachers’ attributional behaviours on their attitudes to professional learning as they continue in their careers. Research investigating patterns of causal attributions on the professional learner identity development of beginning teachers in their second and third years of teaching would offer useful insights that would extend the work of the current study. Second, it would be beneficial to undertake research into how university teacher educators, and school leaders and teachers, can work together to support first-year teachers to value their work as learners. This research would build on the current literature that reports on school–university partnerships, in particular those aiming to enhance mentoring and induction programs for beginning teachers. Third, research focused on the kinds of strategies that support first-year teachers who may be at risk of withdrawal from professional learning would complement this study, and would also contribute to current research on the prevention of teacher burnout and early career teacher attrition. Fourth, studies focusing on specific cohorts of teachers, such as career changers, casual and relief teachers, and out-of-field teachers would be useful to gauge the applicability of these findings to other first-year teacher cohorts. Finally, the replication of this study in different contexts, including other education sectors in Queensland (that is, the state or Catholic education sectors), and schools interstate and internationally, would provide insight into the relevance of these findings in other settings.

Conclusion

Currently, professional learning is an area of teachers’ work characterised by conflicting discourse and approaches. On one hand it is argued that it is essential for standards and associated accountability measures to be in place to mandate and monitor teachers’ involvement in professional learning. On the other hand, it is contended that internal motivation is much more
important in ensuring teachers’ commitment to meaningful professional learning (Ball, 2016; Beauchamp et al., 2015; Biesta, 2013; Mockler, 2013). Proponents of the latter – including this researcher – have shown that initiatives designed to help teachers develop as learners will fall short of their intended goals unless they take account of attitudinal development. While the first approach continues to gain traction in professional learning design and delivery, there is still work to be done to understand how the latter might better be achieved. This study has contributed to this important area for investigation by illuminating the ways in which attributional behaviours can play an important role in the development of first-year teachers’ attitudes towards their roles as professional learners. First-year teachers will develop attitudes that range from those that may inhibit to those that may facilitate their willingness and motivation to engage in professional learning. Gaining a deeper understanding of the types of attitudinal and attributional behaviours that first-year teachers commonly develop in relation to their work in general, and to professional learning in particular, should assist those responsible for conceptualising and delivering professional learning innovations and initiatives.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Adapted CDSII online survey

Q1: The following survey will provide important information about your experiences as a first year teacher. It should take about 30 minutes to complete. Thank you very much for your participation and for taking the time to provide this important information. Your assistance and involvement is greatly appreciated. Please submit this survey by 14 August 2015. Return of this questionnaire via online survey completion and submission will be deemed as consent to participate in this survey.

Q2: Part One The following questions are general contextual questions and will not identify you or your school. In the following questions, please select the response that best describes your current teaching situation.

Q3: Are you in your first year of teaching?
Yes (1)
No (2)

If No is selected, then skip to end of survey

Q4: Which of the following responses best describes your current school’s geographic location?
Metropolitan (1)
Regional (2)
Remote (3)

Q5: Which of the following describes the size of your current school?
Small (0-199 students) (1)
Medium (200-599 students) (2)
Large (600+ students) (3)
Q6: Which of the following responses best describes your current employment as a teacher?

Full-time on contract (1)

Full-time permanent (2)

Casual teaching on supply/relief teaching (3)

Part-time on contract (4)

Part-time permanent (5)

Q7: What year levels do you mainly work in? (please select one)

Early Childhood K (1)

Junior School P–2 (2)

Primary School 3–6 (3)

Middle Years 7–10 (4)

Senior Secondary 11–12 (5)

Q8 Part 2: The following questions refer to successful experiences you have had during your first year of teaching. You will be asked to identify two experiences where the outcome was successful. You will then identify what you think was the cause for each of these successful events/experiences. You will then be asked to use a scale to provide further information about the cause you have identified.

Q9: Successful Experience 1 – Please describe one experience/event that was successful for you during this first year of teaching. Give as much detail as possible.

Q10: Who or what do you think CAUSED this experience/event to be successful? Give a brief explanation.
Q11: The items in the following table refer to the CAUSE for your performance (successful) as indicated above. Select the number position along the continuum that best represents your perceptions on each of the following scales. Is the cause you have identified something:
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 (1)</th>
<th>2 (2)</th>
<th>3 (3)</th>
<th>4 (4)</th>
<th>5 (5)</th>
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<th>7 (7)</th>
<th>8 (8)</th>
<th>9 (9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>That reflects an aspect of yourself:reflects an aspect of your context (1)</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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Q12: Successful Experience 2 – Please describe another experience/event that was successful for you during this first year of teaching. Give as much detail as possible.

Q13: Who or what do you think CAUSED this experience/event to be successful? Give a brief explanation.

Q14: The items in the following table refer to the CAUSE for your performance (successful) as indicated above. Select the number position along the continuum that best represents your perceptions on each of the following scales. Is the cause you have identified something:
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Q15: Part 3 – The following questions refer to UNSUCCESSFUL experiences you have had during your first year of teaching. You will be asked to identify two experiences where the outcome was unsuccessful. You will then identify what you think was the cause for each of these unsuccessful events/ experiences. You will then be asked to use a scale to provide further information about the cause you have identified.

Q16: UNSUCCESSFUL Experience 1 – Please describe an experience/event that was UNSUCCESSFUL for you during this first year of teaching. Give as much detail as possible.

Q17: Who or what do you think CAUSED this experience/event to be UNSUCCESSFUL? Give a brief explanation.

Q18: The items below refer to the CAUSE for your performance (UNSUCCESSFUL) as indicated above. Select the number position along the continuum that best represents your perceptions on each of the following scales. Is the cause you have identified something:
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<th>1 (1)</th>
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<th>4 (4)</th>
<th>5 (5)</th>
<th>6 (6)</th>
<th>7 (7)</th>
<th>8 (8)</th>
<th>9 (9)</th>
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<tr>
<td>That reflects an aspect of yourself: reflects an aspect of your context (1)</td>
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<td>Manageable by you: not manageable by you (2)</td>
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<td>Permanent: temporary (3)</td>
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<td>Over which others have control: over which others have no control (5)</td>
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<td>That is stable across time: that varies across time (7)</td>
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Q19: UNSUCCESSFUL Experience 2 – Please describe another experience/event that was UNSUCCESSFUL for you during this first year of teaching. Give as much detail as possible.

Q20: Who or what do you think CAUSED this experience/event to be UNSUCCESSFUL? Give a brief explanation.

Q21: The items below refer to the CAUSE of your performance (UNSUCCESSFUL) as indicated above. Select the number position along the continuum that best represents your perceptions on each of the following scales. Is the cause you have identified something:
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Appendix B: The Causal Dimension Scale II (CDSII)

Instructions: Think about the reason or reasons you have written above. The items below concern your impressions or opinions of this cause or causes of your performance. Circle one number for each of the following questions.

Is this cause(s) something:

1. That reflects an aspect of yourself 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 reflects an aspect of the situation
2. Manageable by you 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 not manageable by you
3. Permanent 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 temporary
4. You can regulate 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 you cannot regulate
5. Over which others have control 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 over which others have no control
6. Outside of you 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 outside of you
7. Stable over time 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 variable over time
8. Under the power of other people 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 not under the power of other people
9. Something about you 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 something about others
10. Over which you have power 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 over which you have no power
11. Unchangeable 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 changeable
12. Other people can regulate 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 other people cannot regulate

*******

Scoring: The total scores for each dimension are obtained by summing the items, as follows: 1, 6, 9 = locus of causality; 5, 8, 12 = external control; 3, 7, 11 = stability; 2, 4, 10 = personal control.

Appendix C: Survey email to principals

Dear [Principal’s name]

As part of my Doctoral studies through Deakin University, I am conducting a research study aiming to develop an understanding of how best to support beginning teachers to develop as professional learners. For this phase of the study, first-year teachers will be asked to participate in an online survey.

As educational leaders, we are all committed to understanding how best to support our beginning teachers to not only remain in the teaching profession, but build capacity through an understanding of the significance of professional learning as a responsibility of quality teachers. As you have beginning teachers in their first year of teaching on staff, as identified in our earlier phone call, I am hoping to include these teachers in the study if they wish to participate.

Please find attached a Plain Language Statement which outlines the study for the first-year teachers, and what participation involves. You may also wish to read this document for your own information.

As discussed by phone, it would be greatly appreciated if you could forward this email with the attachment on to your first-year teachers as soon as possible for their consideration. Beginning teachers, volunteering to participate, are asked to submit the study survey by 14 August 2015.

Thank you very much for your assistance and support.

Kind Regards

Ellen Larsen

Student ID: 214275993

PhD E900
Appendix D: Plain Language Statement for online survey

TO: Beginning Teachers (in their first year of teaching) in Independent Schools in Queensland

Plain Language Statement

Date: 10 July 2015

Full Project Title: The Influence of Attribution Style on Beginning Teachers’ Professional Learning Decisions

Principal Researcher: Associate Professor Jeanne Allen

Student Researcher: Ellen Larsen (M Ed)

Associate Researcher(s): Dr Josephine Lang

Dear Beginning Teacher,

You have received this Information Sheet following my contact with your school principal to ascertain where first year teachers are currently teaching across the Independent Sector in Queensland. Your school principal has been asked to disseminate this information to you regarding a significant study being conducted with beginning teachers in their first year of teaching. The following Plain Language Statement will provide you with information about the study and what participation involves.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to develop a deep understanding of how beginning teachers develop as professional learners. This understanding is important to assist first-year teachers to effectively manage the challenges of transitioning from pre-service to professional teacher, and meet the expectations of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011).

Participation

This Plain Language Statement pertains to the first phase of this research study. You are only being asked to consider participating in this first phase, though an opportunity to participate in Phase 2 may be available to you if you wish to do so in 2016. Participation in Phase 1 does not in any way obligate you to engage in Phase 2.
This phase involves the completion of an online survey called the Causal Dimension Scale II. This survey asks you to identify four real-life teaching experiences from your first year of teaching. You will then be asked to describe each experience using a set of criteria which requires a numerical response. This survey can be found at the following link:

https://au1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bpuWA6AiBxL2eWh

The survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Participating first year teachers are asked to submit the survey by 14 August 2015. The survey is submitted anonymously online.

Risks and potential benefits

This online survey is submitted without participants’ names and therefore you will not be identified. This also means that other school staff will not know of your participation/non-participation in this study.

Participation in this study provides participants with the opportunity to:

- Contribute to this important area of educational research to better understand how to support beginning teachers like yourself
- Engage in a self-reflective process as a professional learning opportunity

Participation in this study will assist the teaching community through:

- The provision of authentic and important data for this research study that could contribute to significant findings and the development of pivotal future directions in the development of support processes for beginning teachers
- Supporting educational research as a significant process for ongoing educational improvement

Privacy and confidentiality

The survey is accessed and submitted online without providing your own name or the name of your school. At the beginning of the survey, you will be asked to provide a general geographical descriptor (metropolitan, regional, remote) and indication of school size. You will also be asked to confirm that you are within your first year of teaching.

Identification of an individual teacher or school will not be possible from this information. Across the Independent Sector, we have a large number of schools that fit into all combinations of categories.

Data from the submitted surveys will be aggregated for analysis and will not be treated as individual data sets.

You are under no obligation to submit a survey, and non-participation will have no negative consequences for you or your school. Submission of the survey will be deemed as voluntary consent.
Publication

It is anticipated that the findings from this research study will be published as both:

- The first phase of a PhD thesis to be submitted to Deakin University
- paper(s) to be presented at a Research Conference and/or contribution to publication output such as a journal article

Participants are welcome to obtain a final report by contacting Ellen Larsen at [email]

Monitoring of research

This research, as part of a Doctoral research study, will be monitored and supervised by Deakin University. This research has received approval from the Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG) at Deakin University.

Data storage

Data will be sent via email (digital data) and registered post (hard copies) to be stored in the office of the Chief Investigator, Associate Professor Jeanne Allen, at Deakin University. Digital data will be kept on a secure server at Deakin University accessible only from the Principal Supervisor’s computer requiring a password for access. Hard copies will be stored in a secure cabinet in the Principal Supervisor’s office. Data will be destroyed five years after publication of this study. Paper copy data will be securely shredded. Electronic data on computer files will be deleted from the computer’s hard drive and the trash emptied.

Funding for the research

This research study involves no other parties, or external funding sources.

For any further information, please do not hesitate to contact

Ellen Larsen (M Ed)

Email:

Associate Professor Jeanne Allen

Email:

Complaints

If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact:

The Manager, Ethics and Biosafety, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125, Telephone: 9251 7129, research-ethics@deakin.edu.au

Please quote project number HAE-15-074.
Appendix E: Survey email for first-year teachers

Dear Beginning Teachers,

Recently you received some information about a research study being conducted aiming to better understand the ways in which teachers in their first year develop an identity as a professional learner. To participate, first year teachers were asked to complete an online survey. Your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Research Study Title: The Influence of Attribution Style on Beginning Teachers’ Professional Learning Decisions

Ethics Reference: HAE-15-074

Your responses are valued and important, and will make a significant contribution to the development of support for first year teachers into the future. If you have not already participated, and would like to be part of this study, please follow this link to the online survey:

https://au1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bpuWA6AiBxL2eWh

Submissions close on 14 August 2015.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact:

PhD Student Researcher: Ellen Larsen

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Jeanne Allen

Kind Regards

Ellen Larsen

Student ID:

PhD E900
Appendix F: Reminder survey email for principals

Follow-up email to principals – Phase 1 Survey

Dear [Principal's Name]

Thank you so much for forwarding the relevant documentation to the first-year teachers on your staff as part of my research study aiming to develop an understanding of how best to support beginning teachers to develop as professional learners. Your assistance is greatly appreciated. For this part of the study, first year teachers are asked to participate in an online survey. Those beginning teachers wishing to participate will need to submit their response by 14 August 2015. This is in one week’s time.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could forward the attached email and Plain Language Statement onto your beginning teachers as a gentle reminder that the submission date is nearing.

Thank you once again for your support.

Kind Regards

Ellen Larsen

Student ID:

PhD E900
Appendix G: Reminder survey email for first-year teachers

Follow-up email to beginning teachers (attached)

Dear Beginning Teachers

Recently you received some information about a research study being conducted aiming to better understand the ways in which teachers in their first year of professional practice can be best supported. For this part of the study, first year teachers were asked if they would like to submit an online survey.

Your responses are valued and important. If you have not already participated, and would like to be part of this study, please follow this link to the online survey:

https://au1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bpuWA6AiBxL2eWh

Submissions close on 14 August 2015.

Kind Regards

Ellen Larsen

Student ID: 214275993

PhD E900
Appendix H: Final survey email with extension

Final email to principals – Phase 1 Survey

Dear [Principal's Name]

Thank you so much for forwarding the relevant documentation to the first-year teachers on your staff as part of my research study aiming to develop an understanding of how best to support beginning teachers to develop as professional learners. Your assistance is greatly appreciated. The submission date has been extended for an additional three days. Those beginning teachers wishing to participate will need to submit their response by 17 August 2015.

Thank you once again for your support.

Kind Regards

Ellen Larsen

Student ID: 214275993

PhD E900
Dear Beginning Teachers

Recently you received some information about a research study being conducted aiming to better understand the ways in which teachers in their first year of professional practice can be best supported. For this part of the study, first year teachers were asked if they would like to submit an online survey. The submission date has been extended for a further three days.

Your responses are valued and important. If you have not already participated, and would like to be part of this study, please follow this link to the online survey:
https://au1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bpuWA6AiBxL2eWh

Submissions close on 17 August 2015.

Kind Regards

Ellen Larsen

Student ID:

PhD E900
Appendix I: QUALTRICS statistical analysis

### Q14. The items below refer to the CAUSE for your performance (successful) as indicated above. Select the number position along the continuum that best represents your perceptions on each of the following scales. Is the cause you have identified something:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>That reflects an aspect of yourself reflects an aspect of your context</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Manageable by you, not manageable by you</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>7.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Permanent temporary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>6.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>You can control, you cannot control</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>6.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Over which others have control, which others have no control</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>5.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Within you, Outside of you that is stable across</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>6.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Time that varies across time</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>5.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Within the power of other people, not within the power of other people</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>About you, about others, over which you have power, over which you have power, over which you have no power</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>5.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Unchangeable, changeable</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>6.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Other people can control, others people cannot control</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>That represents an aspect of yourself reflects an aspect of your context</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>5.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Statistic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>That reflects an aspect of yourself reflects an aspect of your context</th>
<th>Manageable by you, not manageable by you</th>
<th>Permanent temporary</th>
<th>You can control, you cannot control</th>
<th>Over which others have control, over which others have no control</th>
<th>Within you, Outside of you</th>
<th>That is stable across, that varies across time</th>
<th>Within the power of other people, not within the power of other people</th>
<th>About you, about others, over which you have power, over which you have no power</th>
<th>Unchangeable, changeable</th>
<th>Other people can control, others people cannot control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Min Value</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max Value</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>6.72</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>6.61</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

260
Q23. The items below refer to the CAUSE for your performance (successful) as indicated above. Select the number position along the continuum that best represents your perceptions on each of the following scales. Is the cause you have identified something:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Unchargeable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Others have control over which others have no control</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>About you about others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>That is stable across time that varies across time</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Other people can control others</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>You cannot control</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>That reflects an aspect of yourself</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>That reflects an aspect of your context</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Within the power of other people</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Over which you have power over which you have no power</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Manageable by you not manageable by you</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>You can control you cannot control</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Statistic | That reflects an aspect of yourself reflects an aspect of your context | Manageable by you not manageable by you | Permanent temporary | You can control you cannot control | Over which others have control over which others have no control | Within you Outside of you | That is stable across time that varies across time | Within the power of other people | Within the power of other people | About others | Over which you have power over which you have no power | Unchargeable:changeable | Other people can control other people cannot control |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Min Value | 2                                                | 4                                        | 1                   | 1                               | 1                        | 1                          | 1                               | 1                             | 1                | 1                             | 1               | 1                             |
| Max Value | 9                                                | 9                                        | 9                   | 9                               | 9                        | 9                          | 9                               | 9                             | 9                | 9                             | 9               | 9                             |
| Mean      | 6.97                                             | 6.94                                     | 6.22                | 6.53                            | 6.05                     | 6.20                       | 5.52                            | 6.15                          | 4.94             | 6.52                          | 4.22            | 5.81                          |
| Variance  | 2.90                                             | 2.95                                     | 3.16                | 3.75                            | 3.65                     | 2.69                       | 4.71                            | 3.68                          | 4.24             | 3.16                          | 4.14            | 3.41                          |
| Standard Deviation | 1.70                               | 1.43                                     | 1.78                | 1.66                            | 1.76                     | 1.64                       | 2.17                            | 1.90                          | 2.06             | 1.78                          | 2.03            | 1.85                          |
| Total Responses | 54                                              | 54                                       | 54                  | 54                              | 54                       | 54                         | 54                              | 54                            | 54               | 54                            | 54              | 54                            |
Q18. The items below refer to the CAUSE for your performance (UNSUCCESSFUL) as indicated above. Select the number position along the continuum that best represents your perceptions on each of the following scales. Is the cause you have identified something:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>That reflects an aspect of your role</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Manageable by yourself, not manageable by you</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Permanent/Temporary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>You can control, you cannot control</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Over which others have control, over which others have no control</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Within your Outside of you</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>That is stable across time that varies across time</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Within the power of other people not within the power of other people</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>About you, about others</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Over which you have power over which you have no power</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>51</td>
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**Statistic**

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<th>That is stable across time that varies across time</th>
<th>Within the power of other people not within the power of other people</th>
<th>About you, about others</th>
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Q21. The items below refer to the CAUSE for your performance (UNSUCCESSFUL) as indicated above. Select the number position along the continuum that best represents your perceptions on each of the following scales. Is the cause you have identified something:

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</table>

263
Appendix J: Semi-structured interview schedule

**Introduction:** Thanks so much for meeting with me today and participating in this interview. As you know, this interview is part of a process of data collection around the way in which first-year teachers think about their experiences and their role as a professional learner in the first year of teaching. Do you have any questions before we begin?

i. How long have you been teaching?

ii. Have you undertaken any other professional or trade employment previous to a teaching career?

iii. In what capacity are you currently employed; that is, permanent, casual, full time, part time, contract …?

iv. From what university and university course did you graduate? When was this?

v. Other than this school, have you previously taught in any others?

vi. What year level/s have you taught?

vii. Overall, how would you sum up your first year of teaching so far?

**This next set of questions will focus on professional learning and on your role as a professional learner.**

1. What kinds of support have you received during your induction to teaching in your first year?

2. What do you understand by the term “professional learner”?

3. What then does “professional learning” mean to you? What do you see as sources of professional learning?

4. Based on what you’ve just said, how does this compare with your experiences as a professional learner during this first year?

5. What do you feel has influenced the way you think about professional learning and your role as a professional learner?

6. Has the meaning of professional learning changed for you since university? If so, why do you think this is the case?

**The next few questions are about the experiences you have had since beginning your teaching career. Some of these may have resulted in successful outcomes, and some may**
have resulted in less successful outcomes than you would have hoped. Now, I’d like for us to talk about what you feel are the causes or reasons for these particular outcomes in your teaching. We will also discuss any impact from these causes on your professional learning decisions.

1. Can you tell me about an experience where you would say the outcome was successful?
2. What do you think was the reason/s for this successful outcome?
3. To what extent do you feel that you had control over [cause identified]?
4. Do you see that [cause identified] is something that will always be the case?
5. Is there anything that influences you to identify this as the reason for success?
6. How does, if at all, this/these reason/reasons for success influence your choice to engage with professional learning?
7. Can you now tell me about an experience where you would say the outcome was not as successful as you would have hoped?
8. What do you think was the reason for this less successful outcome?
9. To what extent did you feel that you had control over [cause identified]?
10. Do you see that [cause identified] is something that will always be the case?
11. Is there anything that influences you to identify this as the reason for a less successful outcome?
12. 18. Does/ do this/these reason/reasons for less success influence your choice to engage with professional learning?
13. 19. Are there times when the cause for a teaching outcome is hard to identify? How does this, if at all, impact your decision to seek professional learning as a result?
14. 20. What kinds of professional learning have you personally and intentionally sought during this first year of teaching? Why have you selected this professional learning? Was there professional learning that you decided you would not engage with? Why was this the case?

Conclusion: Thank you for your participation today. Do you have any questions or comments before we finish today?
Appendix K: Interview email to principals

Dear [Principal's name]

As part of my Doctoral studies through Deakin University, I am conducting a research study aiming to develop an understanding of how best to support beginning teachers to develop as professional learners. Phase 1 of this study was conducted in 2015. For this second phase, participating first-year teachers will be asked to participate in an interview. As educational leaders, we are all committed to understanding how best to support our beginning teachers to not only remain in the teaching profession, but build capacity through an understanding of the significance of professional learning as a responsibility of quality teachers. As you have beginning teachers in their first year of teaching on staff, as identified in our earlier phone call, I am hoping to include these teachers in the study if they wish to participate.

Please find attached a Consent Form and Plain Language Statement which outlines the study for the first-year teachers, and what participation involves. Please note that the interview outlined in the Plain Language Statement may occur at the school site either before or after school, or an alternate location can be organised with the beginning teacher if this is more suitable.

As discussed by phone, it would be greatly appreciated if you could forward this email with the attachment on to your first-year teachers as soon as possible for their consideration. Beginning teachers, volunteering to participate, are asked to provide written consent by 1 April 2016.

Thank you very much for your assistance and support.

Kind Regards

Ellen Larsen

Student ID:  
PhD E900
Appendix L: Plain Language Statement for interviews

Plain Language Statement

TO: Beginning teachers of independent schools in Queensland (in their first year of teaching)

Plain Language Statement
Date: 1 March 2016

Full Project Title: The Influence of Attribution Style on Beginning Teachers’ Professional Learning Decisions

Principal Researcher: Associate Professor Jeanne Allen
Student Researcher: Ellen Larsen (M Ed)
Associate Researcher(s): Dr Josephine Lang

Dear Beginning Teacher

You have received this Information Sheet following my contact with your school principal to ascertain where beginning teachers are currently teaching across the Independent Sector in Queensland. Your school principal has been asked to disseminate this information to you regarding a significant study being conducted with beginning teachers in their first year of teaching. The following Plain Language Statement will provide you with information about the study and what participation involves.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of how best to support beginning teachers to develop as professional learners. This support is important to assist first-year teachers to effectively manage the challenges of transitioning from pre-service to professional teacher, and meet the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011).

Participation

This Plain Language Statement pertains to the second phase of this research study. Phase 1 was conducted in 2015. Phase 2 involves participating in an interview about your experiences in your first year of teaching, and reflecting upon your successes and challenges.

This interview should take approximately one hour, and the time, date and location of this interview will be negotiated with you to suit the time you have available.
Participants volunteering to participate are asked to email the attached consent form to Ellen Larsen at [email] by 1 April 2016.

**Risks and potential benefits**

Participation in this study will require meeting with the researcher for the purpose of participating in an interview, which may come to the attention of other staff members. If this is a concern, however, interviews may be held away from the school site at a location convenient to the participant.

Participation in this study provides participants with the opportunity to:

- Contribute to this important area of educational research to better understand how to support beginning teachers like yourself
- Engage in a self-reflective process as a professional learning opportunity

Participation in this study will assist the teaching community through:

- The provision of authentic and important data for this research study that could contribute to significant findings and the development of pivotal future directions in the development of support processes for beginning teachers
- Supporting educational research as a significant process for ongoing educational improvement

**Privacy and confidentiality**

The interview will be audio-taped for the purpose of transcription. Following the interview, all identifying information will be removed or altered, including names, locations and any data that specifies a particular person or place. Data will not be presented as individual case studies, but as aggregated data. Any quotes used will have all identifiers removed/altered to protect the confidentiality and privacy of participants. Other school staff will not be notified of your participation/ non-participation in this study.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study, and non-participation will have no negative consequences for you or your school. A return of the attached consent form will indicate voluntary participation. Following receipt of a consent form, the researcher will contact the participant to organise a suitable interview date and time.
Participants are free to withdraw from the interview at any stage prior and during the interview without any penalty or negative consequence. Participants may request that interview data be removed from the study up to one week following the interview. Following this timeframe, de-identification of data will mean that this is not possible.

**Publication**

It is anticipated that that this research study will be published as

- The second phase of a PhD thesis to be submitted to Deakin University
- A paper to be presented at a Research Conference
- Peer reviewed journal articles, both nationally and internationally

Participants are welcome to contact me to obtain a final report.

**Monitoring of research**

This research, as part of a Doctoral research study, will be monitored and supervised by Deakin University. This research has received approval from the Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG) at Deakin University.

**Funding for the research**

This research study involves no other parties, or external funding sources.

**Complaints**

If you have any complaints about any aspect of the project, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact:

The Manager, Ethics and Biosafety, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125, Telephone: 9251 7129, research-ethics@deakin.edu.au

Please quote project number HAE-15-074.

For any further information, please do not hesitate to contact

Ellen Larsen

Email:
Appendix M: Interview consent form

Consent form

TO: Beginning Teachers in Independent Schools in Queensland
(in first year of teaching)

Consent Form

Date: 1 March 2016

Full Project Title: The Influence of Attribution Style on Beginning Teachers’
professional Learning Decisions

Reference Number:

I have read and I understand the attached Plain Language Statement.

I freely agree to participate in this project according to the conditions in the Plain Language
Statement.

I have been given a copy of the Plain Language Statement and Consent Form to keep.

The researcher has agreed not to reveal my identity and personal details, including where
information about this project is published, or presented in any public form.

I voluntarily consent to

- Participating in an interview of approximately one hour’s duration with the
  researcher at an agreed time and place

- This interview being audio taped for transcription

Participant’s Name (printed)
.................................................................Signature
.................................................................Date

School: ..................................... Email: ..............................Phone: ............................

Please return by email to Ellen Larsen at [email] by 31 March 2016
**Appendix N: Sample coding frame**

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### Appendix O: Sample connecting codes matrix

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<tr>
<td><strong>Shared</strong></td>
<td>They are a very interesting bunch of kids. There are a lot of kids in that class who don’t care and it shows that they don’t care a lot, and that affects the whole class … and students can only do what the students can do- and to a point that will dictate what results they get. On the same token, I could have pushed them along in a better way. N As a teacher in the classroom, I set the tone and to a large extent, I should be the one who is determining what happens in the classroom. But at the end of the day, you can’t control everything, so I focus on what can I do differently. I think about what part did I have to play and how can I change. N</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Self</strong></td>
<td>It gets overwhelming because you feel you need everything, and there is no time to do that. How can you fix it all? L I am struggling to even reflect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>They are very big on professional learning here. They give you a mentor and they give you a budget to go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>what good would professional learning have done for me? It wasn’t going to change the way the leaders worked. It wasn’t going to make them ease up or understand that I should not be teaching science. It wasn’t going to get the parents to leave me alone. D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to professional learning, and they have regular professional learning at the school about a whole range of things. I am an obedient first-year (smile). M</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

on it. Like I can’t even think straight and so I think that is why I haven’t been able to reflect on what is going on. I don’t tend to think about it … it is very stressful … you can’t really switch off … sometimes I think you just dig and dig and it can actually make it worse. It makes you feel incompetent. L

I haven’t really needed any professional learning so far as there haven’t really been any issues. I haven’t really even reflected that much – I just haven’t needed to. M
Appendix P: Ethics approval

Memorandum

To: Dr Jeanne Allen

Cc: Mrs Ellen Larsen

From: Faculty of Arts & Education Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG)

Date: 10 June, 2015

Subject: HAE-15-074

The Influence of Attribution Style on Beginning Teachers’ Professional Learning Decisions

Please quote this project number in all future communications.

The application for this project has been considered by the Faculty HEAG under the terms of Deakin University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (DUHREC).

Approval has been given for Mrs Ellen Larsen, under the supervision of Dr Jeanne Allen, to undertake this project from 19/06/2015 to 19/06/2019.

The approval given by the Faculty HEAG is given only for the project and for the period as stated in the approval. It is your responsibility to contact the Faculty HEAG immediately should any of the following occur:

- Serious or unexpected adverse effects on the participants
- Any proposed changes in the protocol, including extensions of time.
- Any events which might affect the continuing ethical acceptability of the project.
- The project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
- Modifications are requested by other HREC/s.

In addition you will be required to report on the progress of your project at least once every year and at the conclusion of the project. Failure to report as required will result in suspension of your approval to proceed with the project.

The Faculty HEAG and/or DUHREC may need to audit this project as part of the requirements for monitoring set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Kylie Kouloukoudis
HEAG Secretariat
Faculty of Arts and Education
Appendix Q: Ethical considerations summary

**Ethical considerations in Phase 1**

The recruitment process for participants included the provision of a Plain Language Statement to enable first-year teachers to determine the worthiness of the project for themselves. I did not approach first-year teachers directly. Information was forwarded to potential participants by the principal after which there was no further involvement of the principal. The Plain Language Statement outlined explicitly what participation in the study involved and a link to the survey. Participation in the online survey was completely voluntary. Consent was determined by the submission of a survey via the link provided. Survey responses were anonymous and data were aggregated for analysis and reporting. Quotations included in the reporting of survey findings were referred to by an allocated survey number, such as ‘Participant 3’, and any identifiers were removed.

**Ethical considerations in Phase 2**

A Plain Language Statement disclosing all details of participation, risk and voluntary consent (including withdrawal of consent and termination of the interview) in Phase 2 was provided to first-year teachers via their school principals. I made no direct contact with these teachers until I had received their signed consent to participate in an interview. I then contacted each participant using the email address provided by them and the best setting and time for their interview was negotiated. At the point of the interview, participants were again reminded that participation was voluntary and that they were able to cease or leave the interview at any time. I sought verbal consent, in addition to earlier written consent, that I was able to audio-record the interview. All participants confirmed their consent.

De-identification of data occurred at the point of transcription and participants had the opportunity to check for de-identification in transcripts provided to them after their interview.
The following changes were made throughout interview transcripts to protect the anonymity and the confidentiality of the participants:

- Participant names were removed from the transcript and replaced by pseudonyms.
- Other names, such as the names of the staff at the school, were removed from the transcript. In most cases replacing the name with the role of the staff member was sufficient to maintain meaning. As an example, ‘[the principal]’ could replace the specific name of the principal. Where this was not possible, I allocated a pseudonym. School names were replaced with ‘[the school]’.
- As previously outlined, I used composite narratives in the reporting of these interview data thus reducing the identifiability of participants.
- Data were stored both in hard copy (in a locked cabinet) and electronic form with password protection as outlined in ethics approval documents.