

Organizational Conditions for the Professional Development of Senior Teachers at Vocational Schools in Estonia

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Abstract

The paper presents results from the study implemented among senior teachers at vocational education in Estonia. The main objective of the phenomenographic survey is to analyse the professional development of senior teachers. The current paper concentrates on the organizational conditions as an important factor for the professional development of senior teachers at vocational schools in Estonia. This study forms one cycle of a mixed-method research for investigating organizational willingness and awareness to support senior teachers at work. However, hereby the results are presented as senior teachers' descriptions of organizational conditions which either support or hinder their professional development. The results are based on 22 semi-structured interviews which are implemented among Estonian teachers between the ages of 60 – 72 in vocational education. The study states that senior teachers (60+) are valuable source to fulfil the gap at labour market in case the environment where they work meets their requirements: autonomy, the estimation of expert knowledge and rather stable management policy.

Keywords: professional development, professionalism, profession, organizational conditions.

Introduction

The aging population in the European Union is increasing permanently. In the year 1960 the number of seniors formed 10,6% of the whole population, in 2005 it was 23% and in the year 2050 it could be according to the forecast of Eurostat form 27% (Eurostat, 2010) of the whole population. The situation in Estonia is the same: 15% of Estonian population is 65 or older. It is predicted that for the year 2030 the aging population could form ¼ of the whole Estonian population (Eesti statistika aastaraamat, 2010).

It is the same or even worse at schools, for there are more senior employees (teachers) than in any other sector. There were (total number of teachers in the year 2013 was 2200):

246 teachers from the age group 60 – 64; and

190 teachers from the age group 65 and older

at the Estonian vocational education according to the statistical information (EHIS, 2013).

Professor Kirkwood (Pincas, 2007) from Newcastle University states that soon there will be crisis at labour market if we have not enough young qualified labour force. This brings along one solution to recruit and train elderly work force. However, this recommendation requires changes in culture and especially paradigmatic change among managers: elderly workforce is not dependant on others (Pincas, 2007) but senior employees require different approaches. In order to keep senior teachers progressive and professionally developed employers should pay attention to their growth. It is noted that simulative environment is very important influencer on learning and development (Osorio, 2008; Coldwell & Simkins, 2001). As Pincas (2007) says work should become more flexible and more attractive. And the meaning of attractiveness among younger and older colleagues differs: the most important thing for elderly workforce is their own satisfaction and delight from work, while younger search possibilities for career perspectives (Simson, Thompson & Wilson, 2001; Pincas, 2007).

In order to create an environment where teachers are willing to learn within their whole career it is vital to know what influence teachers' wish to learn, and notice the factors that support learning (Wermke, 2011).

Relying on the above mentioned there has been risen the following research question:

How organizational factors (feedback, in-service training, managers' support, involvement, management policy) support senior teachers' professional development (on individual level)?

Resulting from the research question the main objective of the paper is to describe the organizational factors which either support or hinder teachers' wish and will to work at school and to develop professionally.

The main significance of the work are new challenges resulted from the aging society – places remained unfilled by younger teachers should be fulfilled with senior ones, more senior teachers at organizations change the age balance among staff, which in turn should bring along new understandings, attitudes and behavioural strategies.

Theoretical Background

There are not many studies which handle senior teachers' (starting from the age 60+) professional development. There has been written about senior teachers' motivation (Simson, Thompson & Wilson, 2001), about their learning which states that seniors do have problems with learning new things and especially learning computers (Choi). Many studies have been implemented in the field of geriatrics and gerontology.

However, many studies have been implemented on teachers' and especially on novice teachers' professional development (Eisenschmidt, Soobik, Poom-Valickis, Talts, Berliner, Krull, Hirsch, Kennedy, Hawkins, Lawless, Pellegrino, Murphy, Calway, Tamm, Lange, Burroughs-Lange, Pincas, Coldwell, Simkins).

Therefore, the general concept of the professional development for senior teachers follows the concept of professional development for teachers as a whole in this article and is based on the ideas of constructivism; whereas the knowledge is always connected with social background, supported by colleagues and important factors are the involvement into the community and team learning.

Professional Development

It is not easy to define professional development. It depends on cultural and socio-economic environment and is entwined with teachers' private and professional life. It is also connected with school environment and school culture (Campbell, McNamara & Gilroy, 2004).

Historically professional development has been described as an accumulation of knowledge and skills. Later on the definition has been modified according to various stages that the teacher passes during his/ her professional development: novice, competent and expert stage (Alba & Sandberg, 2006). Good (Tartu Ülikool, 2007) defines professional development as teachers' pedagogical competence (teacher, organizer, counsellor), their ability to cooperate and ability to reflect their activities. Berliner, Baron (Tartu Ülikool, 2007) state that teachers' ability to debate and the capability to change their pedagogical convictions are the most important factors for professional development. Continuous professional development is the cognizant renewal of professional (expert) knowledge and the permanent improvement of teachers' competences within their career (Bailey, 2011; Murphy & Calway, 2008). Campbell (2004) says that professional development is the development of person's talent and inspiration. So, the professional development is very deeply connected with person's individual background: his/ her qualification and competences, his/ her characteristics and beliefs.

However, professional development is also influenced by the so-called pre-conditions, that one has been experienced in the past and which impact reaches to this day and it differs from different people (Coldwell & Simkins, 2011).

As Coldwell and Simkins (2011) pointed out, in connection with professional development there are always several factors to be considered:

1. Interference: the activities and methods used for supporting professional development.
2. Pre-conditions: individual conditions and characteristics that influence the above mentioned activities individually.
3. Changing factors: variables at school and in the environment that influence the interference.

All three factors help to understand why similar activities have different influence on different people.

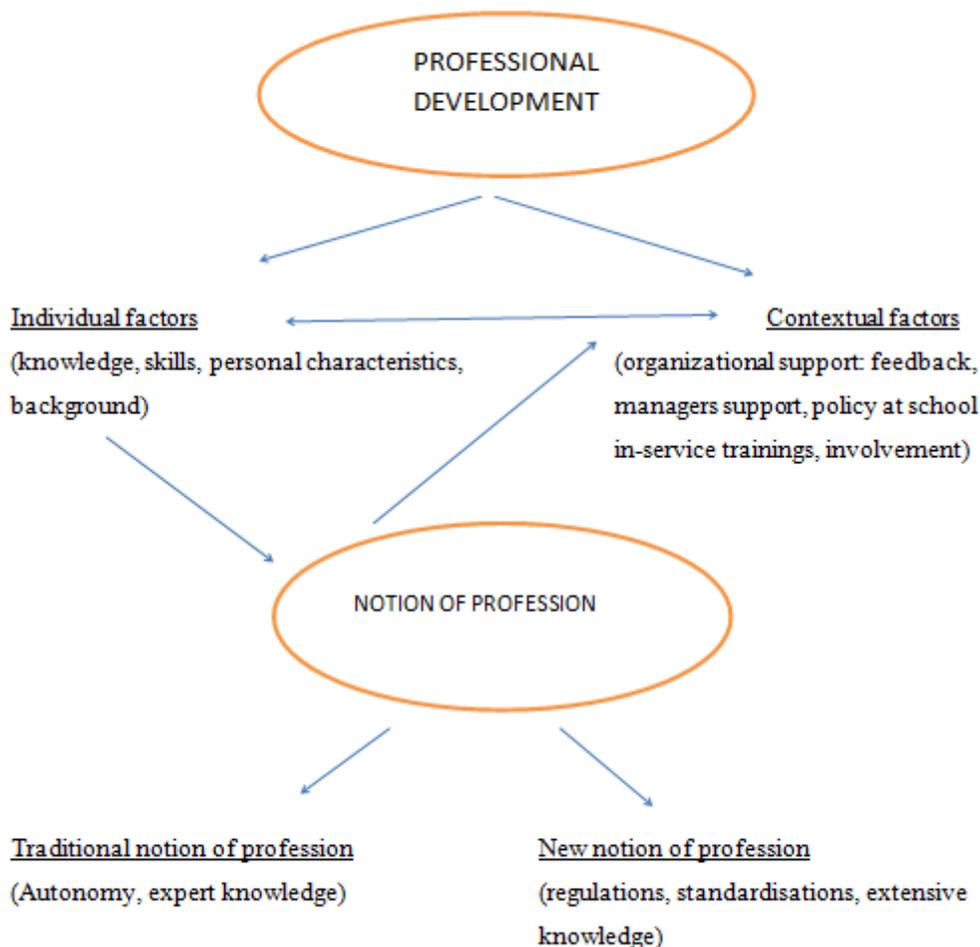
Moreover, Evans (2008) referred to two different trends in professional development: attitudinal and functional. Attitudinal development is a process for creating teachers work attitudes, and functional helps to improve their work effectiveness. The professional development should cover both trends.

In order to understand professional development, it is also important to understand how teacher himself/ herself interprets his/ her profession and professionalism in the changing society.

Professionalism is something that is constantly changing and that is constantly re-defined according to new expectations (Evans, 2008). **Professionalism** means the elaboration of the quality of service of the profession. Furthermore, professional development is a process where person's professionalism is elaborating and reaches from individual level to profession level (Evans, 2008). The cognition of **profession** of a senior teacher follows such keywords as expert knowledge, service and autonomy (Bailey, 2011). At the same time the status and prestige of the teacher's profession has decreased in the society (Müllera, Norrieb, Hernández & Goodson, 2010). The epoch of previous professionals where keywords were autonomy and self-direction is over (Goodson, 2007). Pearson (Bailey, 2011) asks whether the need for professional's increases or decreases and his answer is that resulting from IT revolution the need for professionals decreases in the society.

Relying on the above mentioned it can be said that professional development consists of very many different factors (motivation, ethics, skills, knowledge, qualification, beliefs, attitudes, hope, inspiration, talent, orientation, background, ...) and is individual and contextual. Therefore, as it is very individual and self-directing process, it could only be influenced by creating suitable and supportive environment (Õpetaja professionaalne areng).

In the present paper the **professional development** is described as a social construction that is an individual process (see Drawing 1) and is influenced by contextual factors, whereas the most controversial influencer is the changing essence of profession.



Drawing 1: the notion of professional development

Organizational conditions which influence teachers 'professional development

As said before teacher's professional development is very individual and self-directing process, that can be influenced by the creation of suitable and supportive environment (Tartu Ülikool, 2007; Wermke, 2011; Coldwell&Simkins, 2011). There has been presented many ideas of what this supportive environment should look like. Kennedy (2005) points out that the environment should be comparable so that teachers can draw a parallel with each other's success.

Steinert (2010) refers to co-operation between colleagues and participation of various projects in order to promote professional development. Hawkins (2010) says that risk taking improves professional development which can be promoted via changes. Kimberly (2007) argues that the task to use IT devices help to improve teacher's professional development. So, it is important to add already into the curricula that kind of tasks which requires the knowledge of IT.

There are many factors inside the organization that support or impede development. However, the most important ones are: management, professional community at school, technical resources, and training possibilities (Pedder & Opfe, 2011).

Laine (2000) points out factors that might prohibit co-learning and permanent professional development in organizations:

1. Organizations are deeply connected with new challenges/ changes all the time and they are more like „putting off the fire“, and not seeing the total picture. Therefore, decisions are fragmented and insufficient.
2. Various competitions between different organizations require permanent professional development, but often the strategies for that kind of professional development are short-term and mainly follow measurable criteria.
3. In many organizations learning takes place on reaction level to solve problems that already have risen. That kind of strategies hinders systematic improvement.

All this proves that the school culture and managers support are important for professional development. Organizations can support teachers' professional development by:

1. Giving them feedback about their success and improvement areas,
2. Providing teachers' involvement in order to allow team learning; and
3. Organizing teachers' in-service trainings in a stable environment (Baumruk, 2006; Dolphine, 2005; Guy, 2006; Hoover, 2005; Marshall, 2006). Therefore, relying on the above mentioned the present paper discusses the following factors which have been considered important: feedback, involvement, management policy, in-service trainings.

1. Feedback

One important strategy for professional development is feedback. Feedback is much recommended for self-evaluation and has a great influence on learning motivation (Huber, 2011; Hirsh, 2005). Feedback includes both colleagues and student's feedback.

One strategy to give feedback is during development interviews. Discussions between teachers and managers at development interviews should reveal improvement areas (Hirsh, 2005). In order to develop professionally it is important to notice and accept one's improvement areas. However, this means that there should always be somebody who is responsible for helping to prepare and implement the improvement plan (Kennedy, 2005). It is recommended that feedback should be documented in order to see the changes in behaviour and knowledge (Sherman, Dlott, Bamford, McGivern & Cohn, 2003).

Moreover, the basis for self-regulation relies on feedback (Tartu Ülikool, 2007; Hawkins, 2010). This helps to understand teachers' work objectives, the working process, resources needed. And again, all this should be under discussion at development interviews (Tartu Ülikool, 2007). Also, acknowledgement is important in connection with professional development (Kennedy, 2005).

2. Involvement

Another important approach for professional development is team learning – learning together with other teachers. This of course does not take into consideration individuality, but it helps to create one common language and facilitates communication (Kennedy, 2005). Therefore, teachers' involvement into different activities supports professional development. Organizational positive action provides teachers involvement into different functions and activities which are connected with self- development and learning. Moreover, topics discussed at meetings should be connected with teachers' needs. Advanced employers support teamwork between teachers (Steinert, Macdonald, Boillat, Elizov, Meterissian, Razack, Ouellet & McLeod, 2010). Involvement should follow teachers' peculiarities, not every method suit to every teacher.

So, in order to support professional development, the involvement should meet teachers' peculiarities and should be connected with innovative technological devices (Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007).

Also, participation in different projects/ workgroups and cooperation between colleagues is very important (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi & Gallagher, 2007). Co-operation and networking are central in professional development; they give possibility to reflect one's activities in situative learning (Huber, 2011). Also, Hawkins (2010) refers to co-operation as one important influencer for professional development. In co-operation teachers share new trends, innovations, create common language.

3. Management policy

Involvement is closely connected with organization's management policy, especially the management of changes: as said before by Hawkins (2010) risk taking should promote professional development. However, people are not fond of changes. They do not want that something around them transmutes. If something changes, they are dragged out from their safe environment and this causes fear. When people are afraid of something they cannot think adequately, and they do everything to restore previous condition (Spiers, 2006).

The main reason why people are against changes is fear caused by the disappearance of safety (Graham & Bennet, 1998). Terrifying situations make people passive (De Geus, 1999). Also, Knowles (1998) states, that the existence of safety is one important precondition for persons' development. So, this requires stable and secure environment where people will feel safe.

However, the whole world is chaotic, and uncertainty is great. Every new day brings along new changes. (De Geus, 1999; Drucker, 2003; Marcum, Smith & Khalsa, 2005; Spiers, 2006). And if changes appear it is important that managers involve and inform people about new changes, showing both negative and positive aspects. Individual supportive conversations between manager and employee help to reduce fear (Collins, 1997; Graham & Bennet, 1998). Also training and self-development plans should help to overcome fear connected with changes (Graham & Bennet, 1998). All this can be fixed in stable and agreed management policies.

4. In-service trainings

The basis for teachers' permanent professional development is learning both at different trainings as well as individual reading and self-development (Õpetaja kutse, 2007). Trainings are very important part in professional development (Huber, 2011). It has been found that person's cognitive development is also connected with learning and the older the person is the more his/ her cognitive development is dependent on participating different schoolings (Wight, Aneshensel & Seeman, 2002).

Seniors learn better when learning is active, and the result is foreseen; when learning involves analyses of various situations and it strongly relies on previous experiences. The time and rhythm of learning differs between younger and older people. The older the person is the more time it takes to learn something new, and the work process should be very calm, and stable. Moreover, Osorio (2008) says that the task should create interest among senior person and he/ she should not feel any pressure. Elderly learners prefer more discussions and colloquial learning and they are not very fond of lectures (Pincas, 2007). Also, Campbell (2004) says that active learning (group works etc) enables professional development. The most important in teaching senior persons is not to prepare qualified workforce for labour market, but to retain his/ her interest towards the work and his/ her adaptability.

Empirical Study

This article presents results of one part of the study based on mixed method research. The whole study uses sequential mixed design (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2011). Qualitative interviews with senior teachers follow quantitative questionnaires to school managers and the results of one part are the starting point for the second part, which means that the questions for managers are formed according to the results of the interviews. Klassen & Cresswell (2012) call this design as embedded one. However, this article describes the results of senior teachers' interviews and concentrates on organizational conditions.

Aim

One should first realize and study how senior teachers themselves describe and understand their professional development, what they themselves think what factors at school support their development and what are the obstacles there. Therefore, the study starts with qualitative interviews which are based on phenomenographic approach. The aim of phenomenography (Laherand, 2012) is to describe, analyse and understand people's experiences.

Phenomenography has been defined as a study which aim is to describe, understand and analyse the experience – it is a study that is based on empirical description. The present paper describes how senior teachers perceive their professional development in the organizational context.

Methods

The chosen method is semi-structured interviews with senior teachers. The questions follow the theoretical framework of professional development. Interview questions have been prepared according to the main components of the professional development taken from literature.

Sample

The sampling follows the ideas of purposive, sequential sampling. There are 184 over 65 years of old vocational teachers in Estonia. The purposive sampling is employed whereas all vocational schools are approached, and the senior teachers are asked for interviews. The criteria for sampling are:

1. Geographical position - to involve all districts of Estonia;
2. Vocational schools and higher educational institutions where vocational education is provided (in Estonia there are seven higher educational institutions where vocational education is also provided);
3. Men and women.

The sample includes 22 senior teachers. Senior teachers in this survey are 60 and older. The youngest is 60 and the oldest is 72 years old. There are 18 women and four men in the sample. All participants cover geographically different parts of Estonia. Five respondents are from higher educational institutions where vocational education is also provided and 17 are from vocational schools. By nationality 21 are Estonians and one is Russian.

Data collection and processing

Data are collected orally via semi structured interviews with senior teachers. Interviews are preceded with asking permission via email from school managers. In case permission is received (there has been only one refusal) contact with senior teacher is made. The contacts and names are received from the managers. Interview plan is sent to senior teachers. Also, agreement in time and date is made.

In general interviews take place at teacher's work place; only two interviews are implemented via Skype.

Interviews start with introduction and agreements in confidential rules. Each interview consists of the following parts:

1. General/ biographical information;
2. The meaning of work in one's life;
3. Organisational support: feedback, involvement, development interviews, quick changes, in-service trainings, teamwork;
4. Learning and self-development;
5. Reflection.

Interviews usually last 60 – 90 minutes. All interviews are recorded and later on transcribed by me. After transcriptions interviews are deleted on tape.

Data analysing

Data is analysed via descriptive content analyse. The data analysing starts with simple reading. The material is read several times, in this case different notions are selected and differentiated from each other. Later on these notions are categorised and named, mainly based on the different blocks of interviews: feedback, acknowledgement, management, work load, involvement, in-service trainings, and development interviews. The categories are subcategorised according to their influence on professional development: positive influence, negative influence and neutral. Analyse is continued by describing different categories and looking for connections between them. The main aim of the analyse is to find variations that are based on the relations between similarities and differences. In phenomenographic approach validity and reliability shows on what extent the categories correspond to the categories of the interview. For that some cites are added.

The ethics of the survey

There is no need to ask for the permission from the Bioethical committee, as the survey does not classify under human survey. However, questions connected with person's age might cause some kind of response.

So, this problem is tried to avoid by sending enough information in advance and permission is asked both from the manager and the respondent. All interviews are deleted after transcription. No names are presented in the results.

Results and Discussion

The results in the present paper deal with the factors in connection with organizational conditions in order to support senior teachers' professional development. The factors that are presented below are feedback and development interviews; involvement; management policy which covers organization strategies, management support; in-service trainings, and co-operation between colleagues. All results rely on the information received from senior teachers in Estonia. In addition, there has received information from interviews that has not been asked and these findings are classified under the heading "Other actors brought out by senior teachers".

1. Feedback and development interviews

Feedback among senior teachers is important, but not all kind of feedback will support the professional development of a senior teacher. Most valuable is direct feedback which is concrete and includes also solutions for improvement. That kind of feedback should be given during development interviews. Although, senior teachers like the opportunity to talk with their managers and colleagues openly, they do not value development interviews. They consider these interviews as a waste of time. For them it is too bureaucratic, as they say – not everything should be documented.

Despite the above mentioned they also find some positive at development interviews. They think that it is good for self- reflection and one senior teacher refers to the development interview as a good thing for memorizing.

"These are useful because then you can look back and not in nostalgia but then you really write things down and this is absolutely necessary."

The interviews revealed that one possible reason for the rejection of development interviews is the procedure how interviews are implemented. In one school the interview was implemented between the director and the teacher, while usually the teachers do not meet the director very often. Or the questions are also one-sided, and the teacher has no possibility to talk about her/ his problems.

Moreover, the feedback given during development interviews is based on the results of questionnaires. Today all kind of questionnaires are wide spread, but these questionnaires are not appreciated by senior teachers. These official questionnaires which are created for benchmarking and are therefore homogeneous in all schools do not take into consideration the peculiarities of one school and therefore have no value. They only waste time, but on the other hand these questionnaires do not bring along any harm which however cannot be said about feedback which is given openly to everybody. Senior teachers think that feedback is personal, and it should not be spread among others even the positive aspects, because this might cause envy among colleagues. The most desperate experience of one school is that teachers receive only negative feedback. They consider this very depressive.

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between positive feedback and acknowledgement. Senior teachers highly appreciate students' acknowledgement. It can be either sincere clapping hands after lesson, or when already graduated student comes and says something positive about the "old days". This is something that really influences teacher's wish to continue working. Many teachers value also direct communication, when manager comes and simply says that something has been done well.

"It (acknowledgement) is not an aim itself, it is not so that I want that somebody praises me, but it somehow shows that I am on the right way. And of course, every person is vane in some way."

Official acknowledgement, all kind of issued thank-you letters, and official receptions are not important. However, acknowledgement is important and when you cannot get it, or you do not get it at all, then this can be classified as de-motivated factor. One senior teacher marks:

"It is rather annoying when approved procedure for acknowledgement does not give opportunity for every teacher to get acknowledgement. For example, one criterion is supervision of graduate theses, but if you work only at vocational education and you have no possibility to supervise students, then you will be automatically left out of the competition."

Feedback and acknowledgement are important, but in order to support teachers' professional development it should be sincere and concrete. As revealed from the interviews senior teachers appreciate students' feedback and open talks to their managers.

However, all kind of obligatory personnel tasks: development interviews, formal questionnaires have no influence on teachers' professional development. They need some good word, but competitions and benchmarking only hinder their wish to work at school.

2. Management policy

Most confusing and annoying factor at school for senior teachers are all kind of changes. They do not need changes but balance. New tasks connected with quality management and constant benchmarking is not valued by teachers. They consider themselves professionals who control their work, and therefore, additional controls, evaluations, assessments only waste their time.

The changes have brought along also the modification of the teaching profession. Senior teachers are confused, as for them the main task for teacher is teaching. Here is the most contradicting aspect in comparison with their younger colleagues: the modification of the notion of profession. Senior teachers follow the understanding of traditional notion of profession where autonomy, expert knowledge, and teaching as teachers' main responsibility are the most important criteria.

„They require from us things that are not connected with teachers' profession. I personally think that teachers' aim and task is to teach. “

“Me personally think that there has been made a little bit harm to teachers. They ask for tasks that I think are not connected with teachers' profession. Me personally think that teacher's main objective and task is to teach.”

There have been many reforms in curricula development recently and as one teacher says: *“The permanent changes of our curricula, has not brought along any important qualitative change in our profession.”*

All these changes also require new competences, for example how to formulate performance-based curricula, how to gather all kind of information. This is not understood by senior teachers. Moreover, all these changes bring along more work and, in this situation, it is not unusual when you have to do without planning something else. Teachers do not like when they have to do some work or fulfil some task which is not in their schedule, and they have not planned it.

“My workload in recent years has not only been dependent on what has been planned in advance, but as we have had these kinds of situations where you have to plunge yourself into war - then these are that kind of places which have infringe the rhythm that I have been used to.”

And of course, loose discipline is very strictly pointed out by all 22 senior teachers. On one hand students have changed, their self-esteem has risen but on the other hand also young teachers/ colleagues take work differently.

„There has always been and always will be a routine in connection with teaching, but young teachers somehow want to put it away to take everything as a game, but it is not so “.

And as for students – they do not respect teachers anymore; they call teachers using their first name and are often rude in communicating with teachers.

“I used to love teaching, but today I sometimes feel insecure, because our students have very high self-esteem.”

In general, senior teachers are satisfied with their relationship with managers. Usually quite a lot of freedom is given to them, and they are not bothered with too many unexpected tasks. They work in polite society: managers do not bother senior teachers and senior teachers do not criticize them.

“Management – we are on neutral basis with the management – they do not interfere into my work, they do not dare to interfere and me neither.” “No one has ever teased or hurt me, really never, but sometimes I think that some things are bushwa that I have to do.”

Teachers also appreciate the possibility to continue working in the organization. Relying on the answers from teachers both managers and other colleagues are very friendly, and the age gap is not felt by senior teachers. Senior teachers appreciate different out-of-curricula activities and they take part in these activities. They speak well of the openness of the organization.

“I can enter every room to ask something I will get an answer – this is what I like the most.”

To sum up, the most confusing for senior teachers are all kind of changes, especially changes in the notion of the profession. Teachers understand the need for change, but they appreciate and value stable plans and not totally losing connection with the past. So, if they could follow the ideas of the notion of traditional profession, they will be happy to continue working at school for many years.

3. Involvement

Senior teachers have reduced their participation in various groups and projects. They take part in the work of one or two groups which are mainly connected with their expertise. The main reason is that they have no energy and interest for that.

„ *I deliberately withdraw myself I have three grandchildren and I have to spare some time with them as well.* “
The reason why they still participate at various groups is that they want to keep up-to-date with new ideas and constant changes. They see this as one possibility to get information.

“You know, this is not an alternative, but it is the possibility to keep myself up-to-date with new things.”

Projects especially those that are connected with foreign mobilities are not valued by teachers and no one among 22 teachers was involved in any international project.

They think that participating in different work groups is enough to keep in touch with new concepts.

Involvement to senior teachers is something else than simply participating in groups. They feel involved already working at school. However, quite new and inconvenient is the decreasing teamwork among teachers. In recent years teachers were more together and then they had more time to discuss and solve problems, but now as teachers have different work schedules they meet very seldom, which is not good.

Involvement is one positive factor to support teacher's professional development, but it is not necessary to ask senior teachers to attend all kind of groups and projects. One group that deals with the subject they teach is enough. Involvement for senior teachers means that they can talk freely to managers and they have good cooperation with other teachers.

4. Participation in in-service trainings

Senior teachers are quite active in participating in various in-service courses. However, they do not rush into all kind of trainings; they prefer courses that are connected with their work. On one hand managers do not hinder senior teachers' participation at trainings. If they have chosen some course, managers support it and pay for it. But on the other hand, senior teachers do not attend too many courses. They value time and if the course does not meet their requirements, they are rather critical. They prefer courses where they can learn something new, where they can hear new information, new trends. Also important is the possibility for meeting colleagues from other schools and to...

“...rejoice that problems at schools are the same”.

Men are more critical towards courses and take less part in courses than women.

“As I have worked so hard on myself, and I have worked at school over fifty years, implemented various experiments, then tell me who is the person in Estonia who can teach ME something new.”

However, all senior teachers are very selective on methods and content of the trainings. They complain about trainers who are very theoretical and know nothing about practical life. Also, they do not favour organisational in-service trainings that are for the whole organization and usually deals with quality matters. This also stresses the difference between traditional and new notion of profession, whereas senior teachers cannot see the meaning of other learning matters than their speciality. As for methods senior teachers are not very fond of group works. As mentioned before they prefer lectures full of new information.

As for group works one teacher explained: *“And so it is: we will meet in the morning, then we will be divided into groups, the first group will deal with that topic and the other ... and then after some time we will meet again, and it is very self-flowing. I would prefer listening to a clever person.”*

Therefore, in order to support teachers' professional development managers should let teachers to choose trainings themselves. Moreover, working seniors value time and they prefer lectures and discussion and not group works.

5. Co-operation between colleagues

Co-operation between colleagues is very good at every school. To the question if they remember that anybody has learnt something from them, all respondents remembered something, mainly connected with their occupation, but also senior teachers are valued highly because of their historical memory.

“I do not know if they learn anything, but sometimes they still ask, you older colleague, I have positioned myself as an older colleague, and so they tease me, and ask: you older colleague what do you think about it.”

And to the question if they have studied something from younger teachers all remembered that they had learnt something, mainly it is connected with IT issues and computers.

However, the attitude towards work is different between younger colleagues and senior teachers. All senior teachers consider work as a way of life, while talking about their younger colleagues, senior teachers complain about the younger teachers' shallow attitude towards work.

6. Other factors brought out by senior teachers

In additions to the interview questions there were brought out some items by senior teachers that they consider important. All Estonian senior teachers are good at information technology, some have prepared e-learning objects and computers are their everyday working tool. Also, one very remarkable characteristic is their positive and humorous attitude toward life. All teachers take good care of their health and they consider that one obstacle for working can be their health. Although they prefer working for retirement, they do not want to work full time and half of the respondents prefer doing something else: placement supervision, mentoring younger colleagues.

Conclusion

The results revealed quite clearly that senior teachers while treated in a proper way can be a valuable resource for schools. They are open minded and ready to learn new things. All senior teachers managed quite well with computers, some have even prepared e-learning objects which they use at their lessons. This finding is valuable, because so far, the literature I have read has proved otherwise. But this can be explained by the need to use computers – much information (also grades) are computer based, and the study information system has been existed already for many years at schools. Senior teachers are used to this kind of procedures and are not afraid of it. So, this can be classified as one positive example resulted from the changes in the society.

However, changes in the society cause trouble. Most of all it is connected with the traditional understanding of teachers' professions, where senior teachers talking about profession follows three main factors: autonomy, expert knowledge and service. Whereas autonomy is decreasing due to the changes in the society and mainly in connection with different quality criteria. Also, the notion of expert knowledge has been modified. Senior teachers believe in teaching as the most important process at school for teachers, which requires permanent learning in the respective field. And all kind of supplementary tasks only waste their time. Here is the main gap between senior teachers and their younger colleagues - senior teachers' ideology sees teaching as the main process which is stable and relies on teachers' competence (inc ethics). Teacher knows which is good for a student, because she is a professional.

They do not complain about age gap between younger colleagues and managers and even if they refer to some weak points, they explain these problems in some humorous way. It seems that humour is very important for them. Although it was not asked directly in each interview there excelled humorous approach towards problems.

To sum up it can be said that senior teachers are willing to develop professionally in order to continue their work at school if managers are able to create respective environment for them. And this environment differs in some case with the environment meant to younger teachers. To compare the professional development of senior teachers and their younger colleagues it can be said that in general the organizational conditions necessary for younger ones should also be there for senior teachers, but the approaches should be different: not so official and career oriented.

Summery

The results indicate that senior teachers in Estonian vocational schools are active and motivated and in suitable environment they would like to continue their work even after their retirement period. After the age of 65 they prefer working part time. They are more interested in placement coordination and not so much in teaching.

They value autonomy and co-operation between different expert groups (teachers' associations). One of the most annoying things for them are quick changes in the society: new rules, standards etc. implemented by officials and are not often understood by them. On one hand they do not trust new trends, but on the other hand it is rather complicated for them to understand new concepts and to cope with new technologies. However, they all manage quite well with computers. They respect managers (usually much younger than they are), but they have no confidence in managers abilities. And they are worried about their health. Senior teachers, when not pressed by new changes can be a valuable resource at schools for quite a long time.

Limitations

The survey presents the results of the interviews with senior teachers at vocational education. The teachers involved at the interviews are those who willingly agreed to it. Therefore, they might be more positive and happier with their work in comparison with those who refuse to give interviews.

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