



The Impact of Neoliberal Educational Reforms on Teachers' Learning Experiences

*Kristi Mets, *Inge Timoštšuk, Aino Ugaste, Tallinn University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Estonia*

Estonian education system experienced a change of ideology as in all Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Adaptation with such dramatic changes require from teachers not only new knowledge acquisition but also learning in broader social context. As teachers' learning can be characterised as professional identity building (Timoštšuk, 2011), the social changes related learning experiences can be considered as significant for forming and transforming teachers' identity. Thus exploring the period of rapid political changes can light up more socially influenced areas of this kind of professional learning. The more specific aim of the study is to describe and understand teachers' learning experiences starting from neoliberal educational reform in Estonia.

In this study Etienne Wenger's learning as social participation theory (1998) is used in the study to explore teachers' learning during social reforms. A qualitative interview was chosen because it enables to find out the participants' experiences, perceptions and decisions in relations with their learning.

The sample was drawn on the principle that the teachers of Estonian school of general education who started their career in the years of 1990 - 1995 could participate.

All aspects of social learning (Wenger, 1998) present in teachers' interviews about their professional life and learning experiences. Some domains of social learning are more evident than others.

Most of all the influence of learning on doing came forward in the results and after that came the influence of belonging to the community. The other components, meanings and identity of social learning appeared in the results in a more modest way.

Really vast changes have occurred in the teachers' educational activity since the first years of their teacher's career.

Teachers emphasised the significance of learning in a community and belonging to the community.

For the teachers the growing and developing as a person was meaningful. The interviewees describe identity and role with their long-term professional activity and years of employment.

Conclusion

The results confirmed the situational character of the teachers' learning and teaching, which the interviewees sensed as constant adapting to changes and readiness to cope with changes. This results are in accordance with the earlier studies (cf. Kostogriz, 2007; Putnam & Borko, 2000).

At the same time the interviewees consider the readiness and coping with different changes as a strength of their teacher's work. All this confirms that the teacher's profession is context specific and when situations change the teachers are forced to change and develop professionally.

References

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