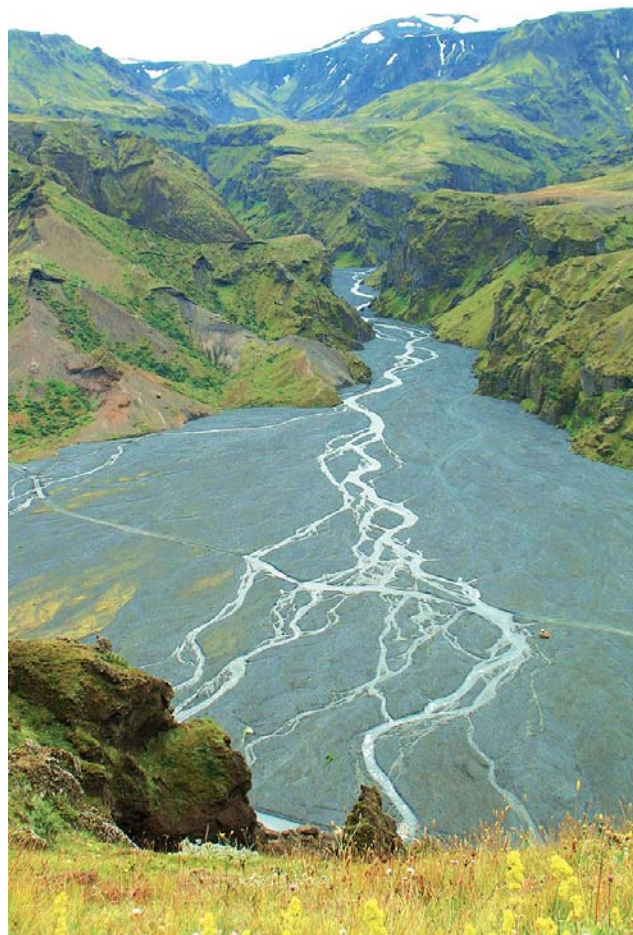Katja Vähäsantanen

Vocational Teachers' Professional Agency in the Stream of Change

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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

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Cover picture by Katja Vähäsantanen.

I'm dreaming about water again. In my dream the water is on me and inside me and around me, and it streams, foams, makes a pattering sound, and I've heard that dreaming about water foretells a change, and whenever I dream about water I think: damn it, do I have to change again. Will it never end?

– Erlend Loe, *Fakta om Finland* –

ABSTRACT

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This doctoral thesis reports on a study on vocational teachers' professional agency amid changing work practices. Agency is understood to be manifested when subjects influence work-related matters, make choices and decisions at work, and act accordingly. In this study, professional agency was addressed through three complementary lenses, which encompass (1) influence on one's work, (2) involvement with educational reform, and (3) the negotiation of professional identity. From these perspectives, the study aimed to elaborate the manifestations and resources of professional agency, and to clarify the temporal nature of the phenomenon. In addition, the study sought to understand the significance of professional agency at the individual and social level. The data consisted of open-ended narrative interviews with 16 vocational teachers in 2006, and re-interviews with 14 of them in 2007. The data was analysed via narrative analysis, thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis.

As a theoretical conclusion, the study argues that professional agency should be conceptualized as a phenomenon which is multidimensional and mainly individually varied, temporally imbued, and both socially and individually resourced. The findings further shed light on the meaningfulness of professional agency, notably for teachers' working, organizational commitment, satisfaction, and well-being at work. It was also shown that strong social suggestions can be effective in initiating large-scale social transformations, but also, that subjects' agency emerges as an essential element in reshaping social practices and professional identities. Thus, there is a need for a subject-centred socio-cultural approach in investigations of workplace learning in terms of individual and social transformation. This approach would emphasize the role of professional agency, and examine the interplay of subject and social context for workplace learning. In terms of agency-centred coupling practices, the study offers practical suggestions for the successful management of educational organizations by taking the perspectives of both individual teachers and organizations into account.

Keywords: agency, educational change, longitudinal research, narrative approach, professional identity, professional agency, socio-cultural theory, vocational teacher, vocational education and training, workplace learning

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In many ways my PhD journey has been comparable to my dearest hobby, cross-country skiing. As in every skiing season, this journey began full of enthusiasm and curiosity. And since then, the ski tracks of academia have taken me into various adventures. The journey has been uphill and downhill; but what I remember most about my journey are the joyful and inspiring moments with incredible people. The end of this journey – this thesis – fades in comparison with these moments. I am deeply grateful to the people with whom it has been possible to share the journey.

First of all, I express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Anneli Eteläpelto. Anneli – throughout the journey, you offered me all possible professional agency; I was able to create my own understanding of the matters under investigation, and to find my own pathway in the academic world. At the same time, you acted as a supportive and patient mirror of my thoughts and ideas. The most significant thing, however, has been Anneli's caring attitude, and her infinite faith in me as a researcher. I also feel privileged that Professor Stephen Billett has acted as my supervisor. His writing and his theoretical thinking have inspired much my work. Stephen, I have also learned much about academic writing and publishing, with you and from you.

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Both skiing and researching can be lonely endeavours, but I have been privileged to have around me lovely, intelligent and supportive people within the Profid and Proagent research projects. The shared journey has included playing football, theatre-going, singing karaoke, sunbathing, enjoying a seaside climate, and staying in certain hotels that offered unexpected "wildlife" experiences. My deepest gratitude for all of this and for rewarding collaboration goes to my closest colleagues, Anneli Eteläpelto, Päivi Hökkä, Anne Virtanen, Susanna Paloniemi, Salme Mahlakaarto, Sanna Herranen, Kaija Collin and Jaana Saarinen. I am especially grateful to Anne and Päivi for becoming my friends, and for sharing life with its ups and downs. Together with Päivi, it has also been possible to arrive at an understanding of professional agency, identity and leadership. Hopefully, this journey, full of sunshine and creative insights, will continue over many skiing seasons ahead. It is also my pleasure to give warm thanks to Professor Helena Rasku-Puttonen and Professor Karen Littleton for their rewarding collaboration.

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LIST OF ORIGINAL PAPERS

The study is based on the following original publications, which are referred to as "Articles" in the text and numbered with the Roman numerals I–V:

Article I   Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., Eteläpelto, A., Rasku-Puttonen, H. & Littleton, K. 2008. Teachers' professional identity negotiations in two different work organisations. Vocations and Learning: Studies in Vocational and Professional Education 1 (2), 131–148.

Article II   Vähäsantanen, K., Saarinen, J. & Eteläpelto, A. 2009. Between school and working life: Vocational teachers' agency in boundary-crossing settings. International Journal of Educational Research 48 (6), 395–404.

Article III   Vähäsantanen, K. & Eteläpelto, A. 2009. Vocational teachers in the face of a major educational reform: Individual ways of negotiating professional identities. Journal of Education and Work 22 (1), 15–33.

Article IV   Vähäsantanen, K. & Billett, S. 2008. Negotiating professional identity: Vocational teachers' personal strategies in a reform context. In S. Billett, C. Harteis & A. Eteläpelto (Eds.) Emerging perspectives of workplace learning. Rotterdam: Sense, 35–49.

Article V   Vähäsantanen, K. & Eteläpelto, A. 2011. Vocational teachers' pathways in the course of a curriculum reform. Journal of Curriculum Studies 43 (3), 291–312.

The study as a whole has been reported in five jointly authored articles (Articles I–V). Article I was produced collectively by the first and second author, but the Introduction, Theory and Discussion sections were mainly the responsibility of the first author. The other authors commented on the work done and offered suggestions throughout the writing process. The other articles (Articles II–V) were substantially the work of the first author. The co-authors mainly commented on the work of the first author and offered suggestions throughout the writing process.

The articles are reprinted by kind permission of the publishers. Copies of the articles are attached to this thesis.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Starting points for understanding and examining agency

> Being human is in many ways flowing, I think. Being born means you start drifting with the flow. The flow starts at your birth and ends at your death. The flow can only be controlled to a limited extent. I think that everything flows, willy-nilly and you can try to resist, as I do, but there's always that stream that takes you with it, and there's no limit to how often you can be swept along in the same stream, and the flow continues no matter how much you struggle against it, and when you are drifting in a river, you have to wear a wetsuit and shoes that protect your feet, because the current can be strong…

This extract from Erlend Loe's book *Fakta om Finland* (2001, 50) contains reflections on becoming a human being and being a human in relation to the world. These "becoming" and "being" are closely related to the control one can exert over one's existence in the world, one's actions, and one's entire life. Questions of this kind are closely related to the concept of *agency*, as are all questions relating to how persons can influence their social environment and circumstances. Over years, even centuries, questions connected with agency have been discussed not merely in literature, but also in many scientific disciplines including philosophy, psychology, social sciences, anthropology, and, recently, also in education. At a general level, notions of flowing and drifting, and merely reacting to and passively repeating given practices, can be seen as describing weak agency, or a state of having no real agency at all (see Hodkinson et al. 2008a; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2011). In contrast, agency includes the notion that a person is active, exercising at least some degree of control over one's personal and professional life (Biesta & Tedder 2007; Coldron & Smith 1999). This can also include resistance and fighting back (Fenwick 2006; Rainio 2008).

In education, agency often refers to subjects' decisions, choices and actions; hence the concept of agency includes notions of power and the exertion of influence (Billett 2008; Eteläpelto & Saarinen 2006; Fenwick & Somerville 2006;

Gordon 2005). Agency is also demonstrated in ways of taking stances and positions, and of engaging with social world and work practices (Billett 2006a; Coldron & Smith 1999; Vongalis-Macrow 2007). All in all, it is meaningful to regard agency as existing only when the individual has the power to act, affect matters, make decisions and choices, and achieve something (Eteläpelto, Heiskanen & Collin 2011). A discussion of agency also employs the concept of a *sense of agency*. This concept refers to subjects' conceptions of their own opportunities to influence and make and implement decisions, plus the constraints and resources related to doing so (Gordon 2005; see also Bandura 1997).

Agency should be discussed and examined by addressing its purposeful focus, i.e. the purpose for which agency is exercised (Eteläpelto et al. 2011). Agency can be understood as addressing both the individual subject and the social context. This means that agency is held to be directed, for example, at one's work and actions, careers, life situations, relationships, and identities (Hitlin & Elder 2007a; Hodkinson et al. 2008a; Lasky 2005), at social, institutional, and material circumstances in workplaces (Billett & Somerville 2004; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi 2013; Isopahkala-Bouret 2010), or at educational practices and changes (Lasky 2005; Pyhältö, Pietarinen & Soini 2012). The aim of exercising agency is often understood as achieving a change in comparison with previous or prevailing matters (e.g. Eteläpelto et al. 2011; Giddens 1984) – meaning creating new work practices and transitions in careers or transforming professional identities and the course of activities. Although the term agency is mostly connected to making a change, agency can also be conceptualized as referring to the maintenance and reinforcement of a current state of affairs, such as subjects' personal and professional identities, social circumstances, or ways in which subjects view and understand their situation (Hodkinson et al. 2008a; Lasky 2005; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2010).

It can also be conceptualized as a question of *professional agency* when employees' activities and influence are directed at and focused on work-related phenomena and matters such as professional identity and work settings. There is increasingly frequent discussions about the meaning of professional agency and an urgent need to address the notions of agency if we seek to understand subjects' professional identity negotiations (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop 2004; Kirpal 2004; Lasky 2005), their working and engagement with work (Billett 2008, 2011; Isopahkala-Bouret 2010), their learning at work and transforming social practices (Billett 2011; Hodkinson, Biesta & James 2008b; Hökkä 2012).

Although the theoretical discussion surrounding agency has been extensive, perhaps surprisingly, there has not been much empirical research on agency within the field of education, and particularly not on professional agency. Consequently, more research around agency is needed, particularly in the contexts of working life and changing workplace practices, as is also suggested by Engeström (2012) and Eteläpelto et al. (2011). In particular, this study aims to contribute to the recent discussion on agency by examining and discussing the *professional agency of Finnish vocational teachers* amid changing

work practices. Finnish vocational teachers employed in initial vocational education and training (VET) work in what can be described as *a stream of change*. Continuous educational changes have affected the contents and implementation of their work, shaping the teachers' professional tasks and responsibilities in new ways. At the same time, the teachers have faced changes in the structure and management of their organizations.

With this kind of changing landscape as background, this study addresses vocational teachers' professional agency by generally asking whether teachers work and drift at the mercy of the stream of change as being subjugated by external demands, or whether they are able to be active actors in terms of influencing and making choices regarding work-related matters. That is, in this study, agency implies subjects' various actions that emerge at practical and cognitive levels rather than subjects' property or capability (see also Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2011; Ojala 2011). Therefore, this study not only addresses how teachers perceive their opportunities to exercise agency, but also investigates how professional agency is actualized and exercised through mental and practical activities – this kind of information is gained via teachers' stories produced in the interviews. More specifically, with the considerations about agency presented above, professional agency is understood and examined here from the following complementary perspectives:

o The first way of understanding agency is to see it to be manifested when a person can influence one's work. This includes (a) influencing and negotiating the objective contents and conditions of one's work, including educational reform practices, and (b) making choices and decisions about one's ways of working and acting accordingly.

o The second way of understanding agency is to see it to be manifested when a person makes choices and decisions about one's involvement with educational reform. This encompasses (a) taking a position towards the reform, and (b) engagement with the reform.

o The third way of understanding agency is to see it to be manifested when a person negotiates and influences one's professional identity. This encompasses (a) transforming and (b) sustaining one's professional identity.

By addressing professional agency through these three complementary lenses, this study seeks to understand how professional agency is manifested in a multifaceted way, and how it is resourced by individual and social resources. Analogously it elaborates the temporal nature of professional agency, and the significance of agency for individual teachers and for the transformation of social practices. Based on these kinds of considerations, the study also discusses the kinds of support – metaphorically speaking the use of "wetsuits" and "shoes" – teachers need for managing with changes in order to be able to maintain their well-being at work without becoming cynical and losing their

commitments – while the educational change is possible to achieve in educational organizations.

In the next subsection (1.2), I outline at a general level recent discussion and lines of research regarding teachers and their work amid educational changes. In doing so I seek to clarify some of the main lines along which research is necessary, and to outline more specifically why the selected three complementary agency-related perspectives are needed to examine vocational teachers amid changing work practices. Since the study focuses on vocational teachers in Finland, I then describe the transformations in education and governance within Finnish initial VET, and in educational organizations in Finland and beyond, also touching on recent challenges for research emerging from the educational transformations in question (Subsection 1.3). Thereafter, I set out the structure of this thesis (Subsection 1.4).

1.2 Driving forces to address teachers' agency amid changes

In the last two or three decades, internationally, teachers have been confronted with a continuous stream of changes. Research on educational change and policy implementation has, however, shown that actual change in educational practices is extremely difficult to accomplish (Fullan 2001, 2006; Hargreaves 2008; Sugrue 2008). This kind of situation has raised the discussion on the reasons behind stability in educational practices (e.g. Rust 2006). Generally, the success in bringing new ideas into education is largely seen to depend on teachers' skills, will and motivation to promote innovations and to adopt and process the ideas in their daily work (Pyhältö et al. 2012; van den Berg 2002). In pursuance of seeing teachers in crucial positions, as mediators between policy and practice (Brain, Reid & Comerford Boyes 2006), the stability of educational practices has also been ascribed to teachers. Nothing changes because teachers are change-resistant, opposed to development and conventional.

Yet, to promote successful reforms, it is not helpful to see teachers in a negative light and dismiss them as recalcitrants. Instead, it is more essential to understand teachers' actions and experiences in terms of how they respond to educational changes and why they resist or support them, how they are able to influence reform and work practices, how they engage with changes and why they operate actively in the front line of changes or take a back seat in the course of change processes, and how they shape or maintain their work practices and professional identities in the course of educational changes. This kind of agency-focused examination could help one understand the processes of individual and educational change, and teachers' location amid them (e.g. Vongalis-Macrow 2007; Messmann & Mulder 2011).

So far, we have had a discussion on teachers in comprehensive schools and their work in educational reform contexts. Recent studies have addressed teacher identity (Day 2008; Lasky 2005; van Veen & Sleegers 2009; van Veen, Sleegers & van de Ven 2005), teachers' positions towards reforms (Drake &

Sherin 2006; van Veen & Sleegers 2006), teachers' role in implementation and mediation of change (Ballet & Kelchtermans 2008; Brain et al. 2006), and their experiences and emotions in a reform context (Hargreaves 2005; Schmidt & Datnow 2005). Despite these diverse examinations, we have only a limited understanding of vocational teachers in reform contexts and also of the longitudinal processes of teachers taking positions towards, engaging with and negotiating identities in relation to educational reforms during their different stages. As many studies on teachers and their work in reform contexts have been cross-sectional, a longitudinal examination is needed regarding these matters and change processes (Sugrue 2008). Additionally, it has never been more necessary than at the recent time of continuous changes to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' spaces for coping with changes (Zembylas & Barker 2007), and to develop practical tools for supporting teachers. The current need is also based on the fact that reforms among teachers often lead to experiences of dissatisfaction with work, exhausted enthusiasm and eroded commitments (Lasky 2005; Troman & Woods 2000; van Veen & Sleegers 2009).

At the same time as seeing teachers' role as important in implementing innovations, it seems to be the reality worldwide that more and more reforms are implemented on a top-down basis (see Day 2002; Reio 2005; van Veen & Sleegers 2009). This was also the case in the vocational institution in this study. The current top-down trend related to educational changes means that teachers must implement something that is created, designated and organized by external agencies without their own active involvement in the changes' design or organization (Buck 2005; Lasky 2005; Pyhältö et al. 2012; van den Berg 2002). In this kind of situation, teachers cannot affect the reform context, and their opinions and feelings are frequently ignored or marginalized in implementing mandated educational changes. All this occurs even if there is ample evidence of the positive meaning of subjects' sense of ownership and active role in the change processes (Billett & Somerville 2004; Buck 2005; Zembylas & Barker 2007). However, it seems to be vital to ask whether top-down management is the answer to transforming the educational landscape more effectively, since the efforts to develop have not been very successful during the decades when teachers have had much agency at work (e.g. Orton & Weick 1990).

Overall, the driving forces of this study are embedded in current needs to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the complexity of change processes and teachers amid changes, in particular through longitudinal research. As this study seeks to address vocational teachers' professional agency in the changing context of Finnish initial VET, next a brief introduction is provided to the transformations which occur in vocational education and in governance of vocational education and, generally, educational systems.

1.3   Context for examining professional agency

The transformation of the system of Finnish initial vocational education and training (VET) (*upper secondary education, students mainly aged 16 to 19*) created the general contextual background for this study. As in many other countries (see Grollmann & Rauner 2007), the Finnish system of initial VET has been in a state of widespread, on-going development. The Finnish system has traditionally been school-based. This means that vocational competencies and knowledge have been taught mainly to students by teachers within the vocational institutions. Motives behind the recent transformations are mainly related to interests in developing educational practices and students' competencies in response to labour market needs, improving the professional competencies of the population, serving economic interests, and developing working life (The Vocational Education Act 630/1998[1]; see also Filander 2007; Isopahkala-Bouret 2010).

The system of initial VET was extensively transformed at the national level at the turn of the millennium. The particular aim was to break down the traditional separation between schools and workplaces, and to develop vocational studies (Filander 2007; Virtanen, Tynjälä & Stenström 2008). The initial vocational qualifications were reformed between 1999 and 2001. Since 2001, vocational institutions have provided three-year study programmes in all fields leading to vocational qualifications (120 credits). The qualifications include at least six months (20 credits) of students' compulsory workplace learning, also called on-the-job learning (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012[2]). This means systematically organized, supervised and assessed learning in authentic work environments outside the schools. During the workplace learning period, students seek to learn some of the practical vocational skills in accordance with the curriculum (see also Virtanen & Tynjälä 2008). Overall, initial VET is now conducted much less in the vocational schools and more in the workplaces than previously. These workplaces are both in the private and the public sector, and have a varying number of employees. At the local level, many transformations have also been undertaken, mainly to further develop a system for students' workplace learning. In the vocational institution that was the location for this study, the educational reform influencing the curriculum was introduced in 2006 with an aim to increase the amount of students' workplace learning from the national minimum to 40-60 credits.

As a result of the transformations in initial VET, the work of Finnish vocational teachers has changed. The amount of traditional teaching and educating by teachers in the schools has decreased. Instead, vocational teachers now have new work tasks and an increased workload in particular related to matters such as organising, guiding and evaluating students' workplace learning; finding workplaces for the students and co-operating with the

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[1]   See http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1998/19980630
[2]   See http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/ammatillinen_koulutus/?lang=en

workplaces; guiding, training, and supporting those employees who will act as workplace trainers during students' workplace learning; and informing employees on the reformed vocational education system (see also Filander 2007; Isopahkala-Bouret 2010; Majuri & Eerola 2007). This change in work roles means that teachers are challenged to increasingly cross the boundaries between educational institutions and working life. In their movement back and forth on the boundaries, vocational teachers can be described as boundary-crossers (cf. Wenger 1998).

Particularly in working life research and learning sciences, boundary-crossing refers to persons' activities and interactions across different sites, such as work communities, organizations and professional cultures, or certain domains of expertise (e.g. Akkerman & Bakker 2011; Tuomi-Gröhn & Engeström 2003; Wenger 1998). In this thesis, boundary-crossing refers simply to the fact that teachers need to cross organizational and professional boundaries in their work when their work is increasingly moving outside school. Episodes and situations relating to the boundary-crossing, i.e. boundary-counters, are understood here to be conversations with employees and visits to workplaces that are in particular related to students' workplace learning.

So far, we do not have much empirical understanding of vocational teachers and their work on the boundaries between educational and working-life institutions. In particular there are few accounts from the viewpoint of how teachers make work-related choices and what kinds of resources and constraints are related to this kind of exercise of agency. This kind of knowledge is especially important in order to support teachers in their work as boundary-crossers, and to see challenges and opportunities from the perspectives of the development of education and working life. There is also a wide-ranging need for this kind of boundary-crossing research, since the work of many other professionals also increasingly involves the forms of cooperation and the breakdown of traditional professional boundaries both inside and between work organizations (Billett 2006a; Edwards 2005; Kirpal 2004). Some scholars have examined and discussed boundary-crossing within and between work organizations and communities from the viewpoints of individual and organizational learning (Fuller & Unwin 2004; Wenger 1998). However, we know relatively little about how individuals exercise their agency and become competent actors when they work on the boundaries of work settings.

In the world of education, transformations in management have taken place recently, which also influence teachers' work conditions. One clear global trend has been the movement towards neo-liberal economic policies (with a focus on decentralisation, output, competition and strong leadership), and accountability (with a focus on recentralisation, centrally imposed standards and quality criteria) (Lindblad & Goodson 2010; Moos 2009). Therefore, ideas such as managerialist, strategy-oriented control and management, maximal profitability and effectiveness, and strict systems of monitoring, reporting and evaluating are the reality in educational systems and organizations (Helgøy,

Homme & Gewirtz 2007; Moos 2005; Vanhalakka-Ruoho 2006). Under this kind of circumstances, the work of teachers is increasingly monitored and controlled through external evaluations and regulations. This is a trend that runs counter to the traditional high level of teachers' independence in deciding the contents and conditions of their work and pedagogy and their development without external control (Hargreaves 2000; Menter 2009; Osborn 2006). At the same time, when teachers' relationships with the administration have tightened, teachers and their professional groups are also obligated to co-operate closely with each other through tight linkages (Meyer 2002; Moos 2009). All in all, the educational organizations which operate according to the above-mentioned principles can be called tightly coupled organizations (e.g. Meyer 2002). At the other end of the scale are traditional, loosely coupled organizations (Orton & Weick 1990; Weick 1976).

Although the adaptation of new management and accountability principles can be seen as a global trend in educational systems, there are national differences in their implementation (Goodson & Lindblad 2010; Helgøy et al. 2007). As compared to many other countries, in Finland the changes have been smaller in comprehensive schools where teachers still have strong influence and control over their own work (Goodson & Lindblad 2010; Hargreaves & Shirley 2009; Sahlberg 2011). In the context of Finnish vocational education and training, the external control over teachers' work, however, seems to have increased through management by results and strong external instruction in polytechnics (vocationally oriented higher education). At the same time, bureaucracy and hierarchy have entered organizations. All this means the decrease of vocational teachers' opportunities to influence in higher education, although they still have relatively a lot of independence at work (Marttila 2010; Savonmäki 2007). In the context of Finnish initial VET, we can also see some similar features concerning teachers' agency at work. So far, Filander (2007, 2008) has offered a critical viewpoint on a trend of assurance, management by results, and market orientation in initial VET, and has argued that new development lines and a managerialist management culture narrow vocational teachers' independence. However, we do not have much empirical knowledge of the changes in management principles of vocational institutions, and what this means from the perspectives of teachers and the quality of education. In addition, although the new management principles have been widely adopted in educational organizations, it seems that we do not yet have a great deal of empirical evidence of what this implies for teachers and their work in the international context of education (see some expectations, e.g. Lindblad & Goodson 2010). That is, we have rather limited empirical evidence of teachers' views and experiences of how they can practise their professional identities and develop at work, how they commit to educational organizations, and what their well-being is like in the context of changing educational organizations.

1.4   The structure of this thesis

As noted, this doctoral thesis reports on a study conducted on vocational teachers' professional agency amid changing work practices. The thesis consists of five empirical articles and this summary, which reviews and discusses the theoretical outlines, methodological groundings and the findings of the study reported in the empirical articles. As the main concept, professional agency is at the centre of this summary, since it is an overarching concept related to all the empirical sub-studies and their findings. Influence on one's work, involvement with the reform, and the negotiation of professional identity – which were under examination in the sub-studies – can be placed under the main concept, professional agency. The purpose of the summary is not simply to put together the empirical findings of the sub-studies, but provide a wider perspective for the phenomena under investigation and develop theoretical notions about professional agency.

After this Introduction section, Section 2 describes the main theoretical principles and grounds of agency in a socio-cultural approach, social sciences and post-structural notions. The purpose is to introduce how diverse and also contradictory views of agency emerging from these different traditions inform this study. After presenting the general theoretical elaborations regarding agency, Section 3 moves on to present the recent discussion and empirical studies related to professional agency at changing work from the research areas of teacherhood and workplace learning. This section describes the processes of negotiating professional identities and involvement with reforms. Afterwards, Section 4 presents the research task and the overarching research questions addressed in this study, and Section 5 introduces the methodological approaches.

The study consists of five empirical sub-studies reported in the articles, which each provides a particular perspective on professional agency. Section 6 presents the main findings of these sub-studies. In Section 7, the main findings of the sub-studies are summarized and discussed, according to the overarching research questions, with previous empirical studies and discussion. Finally, in Section 8, based on the findings, I contribute to the conceptualization of professional agency and the notions of workplace learning within the socio-cultural theory. I also offer practical conclusions concerning how to manage educational organizations and educational change, and how to support teachers in managing with changing work. In the eighth section, I also present my methodological and ethical evaluations of this study, and suggestions for future research.

2   THEORETICAL OUTLINES ON AGENCY

When agency is conceptualized and discussed, attention is particularly directed towards the subject, the social context and their relationship (Eteläpelto et al. 2011, 2013). Different theoretical frameworks regarding agency offer various viewpoints on these matters. In its extreme forms, agency is seen as subjects' freedom to act based on individual desires regardless of social context, or agency is almost refused when subjects' actions are seen as subjugated by social circumstances and power relations (Hökkä, Vähäsantanen & Saarinen 2010a). In particular, the humanist tradition emphasizes that people are entirely autonomous beings in a social context with an unquestioned and inherent agency (see Billett 2006b; Mansfield 2000). This is also quite a typical view in recent discussion about neoliberal people with free choices (see Eteläpelto et al. 2011; Ojala 2011). On the contrary, some approaches, such as the structuralistic and early Foucauldian perspective, offer a quite subjugated view of self by emphasizing the structure and structural factors over people (Foucault 1979; see also Ahearn 2001; Mansfield 2000). In this section, I introduce three theoretical debates, including the socio-cultural approach (Subsection 2.1), social sciences (Subsection 2.2) and post-structural notions (Subsection 2.3), which are located between these extreme forms. I will briefly review how they approach agency differently. I conclude this section with a presentation of how professional agency could be examined by taking into account the fruitful, but also contradictory, viewpoints emerging from various approaches. At the same time, I consider what kinds of theoretical perspectives are still needed around agency (Subsection 2.4).

2.1 Socio-cultural approach: Developing and socially mediated agency

In education, the emergent discussion on agency has taken place within the framework of the socio-cultural approach. Notably, the recent discussion of

agency is fastened on and emerged from the Vygotskian view of human development. Development is understood as a process of becoming a subject capable of acting, which occurs on two planes — first at the social level, and then at the individual level (Vygotsky 1978). Thus, human development is primarily seen as an outcome of socio-cultural development through the use of collectively created cultural tools and symbols. Following in Vygotsky's footsteps, the meaning of social context and tools in all human action is further argued. This implies that what individuals believe and how they think and act are always shaped by cultural, historical and social settings that are reflected in mediational artefacts and tools such as language, literature, media, numeracy systems and technology (e.g. Wertsch, Tulviste & Hagstrom 1993). In teachers' work, such mediational artefacts can be seen to include, for example, policy mandates and curriculum guidelines (Lasky 2005).

A socio-cultural approach to agency necessitates examining individual action in such a way that priority is given to the social context and cultural tools that shape the development of human beliefs, values and ways of acting (Wertsch 1991). In recent discussion and research, agency is indeed not seen to be isolated to the individual. On the contrary, agency is conceptualized as contextually and historically situated, interactional and embedded particularly in social networks and cultural context including its tools and practices (e.g. Edwards 2005; Holland et al. 2003; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2011; Rainio 2008). Although the socio-cultural context with different tools is meaningful for agency, through agency these tools can also be developed when people use them (Lasky 2005; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2010), and previous limitations can be broken down (Holland et al. 2003). Within the socio-cultural framework, agency has also been conceptualized as a process which emerges variously and develops over time (Edwards 2005; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2010, 2011; Rainio 2008, 2010). For example, from the recent socio-cultural literature Rainio (2008) has found that it is possible to identify at least three ways of understanding the development of agency in social practices: (a) through transforming the object of activity and through self-change, (b) through responsible and intentional membership, and (c) through resistance and transformation of the dominant power relations. The development of agency requires changes in traditional positions and in boundaries between people (Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2010, 2011).

Within the socio-cultural tradition, in particular in the area of learning, there is variation in how the strength of social context is conceptualized for human thinking, acting and learning. Some strands (e.g. activity theory, distributed cognition, situated cognition, communities of practice and cultural psychology) share a view of human action being situated within a particular context and being strongly mediated by language and other symbolic systems. In this case, for example, becoming a practitioner seems to be more a matter of taking on identities and roles which are pre-existent rather than individuals taking a proactive role in becoming a full participant in a social context. Recently, this kind of rendering has been criticised. Criticism has been levelled

at explanations of thinking, acting and learning that give priority to the social and deny or underplay the role of the active subject with a particular history and background (Billett 2006b; Brown 1997; Eteläpelto 2008; Hodkinson & Hodkinson 2004). It follows, therefore, that the role of agency and subjects' backgrounds should be better taken into account in empirical studies concerning, for example, learning and identities at work.

All in all, the socio-cultural framework nicely thematizes the meaning of socio-cultural context for subjects' acting and learning, and conceptualizes how agency is relational and embedded across social circumstances, tools and people. Moreover, the approach slightly discusses the developmental aspect of agency over time. Broadly, I commit to socio-cultural approaches with the definitions of understanding teachers' work as entangled with the web of socio-cultural practices, discourses and suggestions, such as curriculum guidelines, cultural norms and social resources (see also Hämäläinen & Vähäsantanen 2011; Hökkä et al. 2010a). However, the socio-cultural tradition does not adequately address and specify the individual resources and temporal elements that can be related to agency, thereby raising the need for novel empirical examination around agency. The next subsection describes how agency is understood in social sciences and how, in particular, temporal elements are taken into account.

2.2 Social sciences: Temporal agency between subject and structure

In social sciences, agency is considered a core concept in discussing the relationship between subject and structure (Archer 2000, 2003; Callinicos 1987; Emirbayer & Mische 1998; Giddens 1984; Hitlin & Elder 2007a, b). Traditionally, most scholars have agreed that human beings are first and foremost social agents dependent on structure and that agency cannot be divorced from structural factors, since agency is shared and constructed by these (see Eteläpelto et al. 2013; Rainio 2010). For example, Giddens (1984) – who understands action only as the emergence of agency if it is rational, intentional and consequential – sees people's actions being shaped in both constraining and enabling ways by social structure (see also King 2010). In this case, the individual can be seen as analytically inseparable from the structure.

Recently, Archer (2000) has offered her contribution to the discussion of the relation between the individual and structure within the *realist social theory*. One of her key arguments concerns the avoidance of what she calls "downwards" and "upwards" in social theorizing. Thus, she is against (i) over-socialised notions whereby persons are conceived as no more than society's being, as being discursively formed, and consequently having no real agency, and (ii) the notions that reduce society to the individual and deny any emergent powers at the societal or cultural levels (see also Glegg 2005). Archer has also challenged those using middle conflation (e.g. Giddens) who regard structure

and agency as analytically inseparable. On the contrary, Archer thinks that it is useful to recognize structure and agency as analytically separable but interdependent, because it makes it possible to analyse the interrelations between the two sides (see also King 2010). Thus, she argues for analytic duality that recognizes causal powers at both the level of the person and of society.

Archer (2003) sees internal conversation as essential in the process of mediation between structure and subject. Archer argues that our relations with the world include the natural, practical and social levels, which gives rise to different kinds of concerns in each order of reality: well-being in the natural, performative achievement (competencies and skills) in the practical, and self-worth (values and beliefs) in the social. Through internal conversation, we reflect upon, articulate and prioritise different concerns, utilizing our emotional commentaries related to the concerns. From this kind of internal conversation, personal identities emerge, and internal conversation has causal power over subjects' activities. In her study, Archer (2003) found that people differ from each other in terms of personal concerns and in the extent to which structural forces and individual powers influence their concerns and activities. This can also vary over time. These kinds of findings stimulate the examination of variations in subjects' agency between subjects and also over time in subjects' life course; and also take into account the emotional aspect in examining agency.

In social sciences, the temporal element is also taken into account in thematizing agency, particularly since Emirbayer and Mische (1998). For them, agency is a temporally embedded process of social engagement with the present, informed by past influences and habits, but also oriented toward the future. In terms of the future, they also conceptualize subjects' emotions, including the hopes, fears and desire for the future. Temporality of agency is also discussed concerning subjects' life courses and careers from the viewpoint of life course agency (Hitlin & Elder 2007a, b; Biesta & Tedder 2007). This kind of agency is realized through making choices at turning points in life, which are often manifested as transitions in life course and careers (Hitlin & Elder 2007a).

To sum up, in social sciences, agency is traditionally understood as being determined by the structure and social patterns. Recently, individual forces together with social aspects have also been highlighted, and Archer (2003) argues that there are differences between subjects in terms of exercising agency. In social sciences, the temporality of agency is also discussed. Next, I move to describing the perception of agency from the viewpoint of post-structuralism, which provides conceptual views to understand how a subject can gain an active position in social settings, and how agency is a situational and diverse phenomenon.

2.3 Post-structural notions: Situationally multiform agency

Within post-structural movement, the particular focus here is on theories on agency in feminist research on education. The main interest is in that kind of

rendering which does not position the subject in passive terms as an effect of discursive structures and power. This kind of understanding of subjects neglects the actual agency of individuals and is unable to explain the emergence of agency because of seeing discourses as deterministic in relation to subjects (see Clegg 2006; Eteläpelto et al. 2013; McNay 2003).

Within post-structuralism, feminist researchers see the subject as relational and intertwined with historical, socio-cultural, material and discursive conditions (Fenwick 2006; Fenwick & Somerville 2006; St. Pierre 2000). At the same time, the role and agency of subjects in a social context is emphasized; for example, in seeing subjects as active actors in social life (see also Billett 2006b; Devos 2005; McNay 2003). In particular, the concept of agency is seen as linked to becoming a subject and to the subject position. Subjects have a range of different subject positions – which include expectations and obligations, and provide possibilities for and limitations on being, acting and speaking – available to them in social practices, discourses and power relations, for example, within occupational disciplines and work organizations (Fenwick 2006; Phillips 2006; St. Pierre 2000). Subjects' agency is seen to lie in their capacity to recognize and choose tolerable and agentic subject positions through accepting and resisting the offered positions and discourses; they can also create new positions (Fenwick 2006; Fenwick & Somerville 2006; see also Billett 2006b). That is, despite offered positions invoked by work arrangements and discourses, in terms of agency subjects can disrupt limiting significations and find strategies and spaces for resistance and avoidance to processes of subjectivation in work (Fenwick & Somerville 2006).

In feminist discussion, agency is also seen as situational, dynamic and multidimensional. For example, according to Ojala (2011), agency is a question of something that is shaped and constituted in power relationships, is located in situations and moments, is fastened on the subject, and is tensional and processual in its forming (see also Fenwick 2006). In line with these views, Ylitapio-Mäntylä (2009) also emphasizes that the intensity and intentionality of agency differ in many ways depending on time, situation and location. At the same time, when the situational and momentary aspect of agency is highlighted, many scholars have also elaborated its different forms. For example, Ojala (2011) and Ojala et al. (2009) review how feminist research has revealed the insights of little, fragile, casual and ritual agency. The common idea behind all these forms of agency is that it is not always necessary to conceptualize agency, for example, in terms of making a difference in macrostructures or being Pippi Longstocking[3] with unconventional power over the world and other people.

The presented readings related to post-structuralism nicely emphasize that agency is constituted and exercised in social context and relations, and describe the situational and momentary nature and diversity of agency. In addition, they give some openings in conceptualizing the active role and agency

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[3]   Pippi Longstocking (in Finnish Peppi Pitkätossu) is a character in the books of Astrid Lindgren.

of subjects in social context by considering subjects' opportunities to gain an agentic position in social practices. However, the specific individual resources related to agency are not clearly defined, except that in the feminist approach there is much discussion on the relations between agency, gender and age (see e.g. Ojala 2011; Ojala et al. 2009).

2.4 Fruitful openings, limitations and challenges in agency theories

The socio-cultural approach, social sciences and post-structural notions offer different understandings of agency and different grounds for its examination. Agency has often been investigated in line with the views that emerged from one of these traditions. Although traditions separately illuminate various aspects of agency, they do not offer a sufficient starting point for understanding and studying its complexity in work contexts. Thus, building on and putting different and contradictory perspectives on agency in a dialogical relation, it is possible to formulate a more complementary view of agency. In this case, the following aspects should be taken into account when studying and theorizing professional agency at work: (i) the relatedness of agency to socio-cultural circumstances, (ii) the diversity of agency with various manifestations, and (iii) the temporal nature of agency. The notions of agency described in this section also raise a need to provide relevant understanding and conceptual tools to elaborate on the active role of the subject with an individual background in the processes of thinking, acting, learning, and negotiating identities.

Challenged by the fruitful views and the lack of empirical knowledge regarding professional agency, this study aims to reveal ways of manifesting agency, individual and social resources of agency, and the temporal nature of agency among vocational teachers amid changing work practices. In addition, the study seeks to provide an understanding of the significance of agency at the individual and social level. This study considers professional agency as a socially resourced individual phenomenon, which is manifested and actualized through subjects' mental and practical activity; not via collective efforts and activities. However, this does not imply that the importance of other people and social context for agency would be denied, although the focus is on the subjects of the activity and agency is examined from the subjects' viewpoint. This kind of subject-centred approach cannot be derived directly from the theoretical notions presented. However, it could offer new insights into the discussion which has emphasized much the importance and constraints of social settings for agency. So far, I have presented a more or less theoretical discussion on agency. In the next section, I move on to portray the previous empirical studies regarding the processes and practices in which professional agency can be seen as emerged and exercised in the context of changing work practices.

3 AGENTIC PRACTICES AT CHANGING WORK

In reform contexts, the opportunities for teachers' agency can be variable. Yet, and regardless, teachers can be active subjects in developing education – persons whose actions and opinions truly matter. Alternatively, they can see themselves as outsiders or passive objects whose actions are mainly regulated by external actions (e.g. Pyhältö et al. 2012). The nature of current educational reforms often seems to be top-down, as discussed previously. This means that teachers' active involvement is restricted in the design and organization of reforms. Although it is thus possible to suggest that their agency is inhibited, there might also be opportunities for teachers to exercise agency in reform contexts. Teachers' agency can be manifested through negotiating professional identities, taking positions towards and engaging with reforms (Beijaard et al. 2004; van Veen & Sleegers 2006; Vongalis-Macrow 2007). Related to these matters, in this section I first describe the recent theoretical notions and research findings on professional identity and its negotiations (Subsection 3.1). Next, I review the discussion and findings of involvement with work and reform practices in terms of (i) positioning and (ii) engaging (Subsection 3.2). The reviewed literature in this section mainly emerges from the research on teacherhood, but also on workplace learning. Finally, I summarize the research findings presented and the further need for research (Subsection 3.3).

3.1 Teachers' professional identity negotiations

In this subsection, I give a brief theoretical overview of the concept of teachers' professional identity[4] and how professional identity is understood here (3.1.1).

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4   The concept of professional identity is widely used in studies concerning teacher identity. Thus the concept of professional identity is also used here. In the area of workplace learning, it is more the concept of identity at work (e.g. Brown, Kirpal & Rauner 2007). These concepts are used here as synonymous because of their similar conceptualizations.

After this, I illustrate my understanding of professional identity negotiation (3.1.2). A concept of negotiation opens ways to move beyond the separation of individual and context (Smith 2008) which, in this case, enables an integrated understanding of identity construction between individual and social suggestions (e.g. with such suggestions taken to include socio-cultural practices and directions, and situational demands, constraints and opportunities; see Billett 2007). Professional identity negotiation can also be conceptualized as a learning process. In the area of workplace learning, learning is no more seen solely as a matter of acquiring knowledge, developing professional competency, or updating skills (e.g. Tynjälä 2008). Recent discussion and studies have emphasized that workplace learning also comprises the formation and transformation of workers' identities and social practices (e.g. Billett 2008; Billett & Somerville 2004; Eteläpelto 2008). Consistent with these conceptualizations, in this study, workplace learning is also understood as a dual process in which professional identity negotiations are accompanied by the remaking of social practices.

3.1.1 Professional identity: Who am I as a professional?

In recent years, research on teachers' professional identity has emerged as a remarkable research area. Generally, professional identity is defined as a constellation of teachers' perceptions with regard to how she or he views herself or himself as a teacher, or simply as teachers' sense of self (e.g. Beijaard et al. 2004; Kelchtermans 2005; Lasky 2005; van Veen & Sleegers 2009). Vice versa, professional identity can be seen as the answer to the question: "Who am I as a teacher at this moment?" (Beijaard et al. 2004).

In the recent studies of teacher identity, Little and Bartlett (2002) propose that the fundamental issues of teacher identity include how they think of themselves as teachers – what matters to them, how they define their intellectual and moral obligations, their beliefs about schools, teaching and students, and what they feel prepared to undertake. Indeed, the beliefs and opinions of teachers with regard to what constitutes "good teaching" illustrate their identity (van den Berg 2002). Other authors (e.g. Beijaard et al. 2004; Day, Elliot & Kington 2005; Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen 2006; Lasky 2005; Woods & Jeffrey 2002) also suggest that teacher identities are closely bound with professional values, beliefs, ideologies, interests, responsibilities and attitudes. Professional orientations are also a part of identity, generally giving the answers to the questions of how teachers view their work and what they consider important in their work (van Veen et al. 2001; van Veen & Sleegers 2006). Based on other studies, van Veen and Sleegers (2009) offer a complex and extensive review of professional identity. According to them, different elements of the professional identity of teachers seem to include their perceptions of their self-image (i.e. the manner in which the teacher sees herself or himself in general), job motivation (i.e. what motivates the person to become and remain a teacher), core responsibilities (i.e. what the teacher views as her or his essential tasks), self-esteem (i.e. the value the teacher attaches to her or his performances),

and beliefs about teaching (i.e. what good teaching is and what to teach), subject and subject pedagogy (i.e. the nature and content of the subject and how to teach the subject), and teaching as work (i.e. how to work as a professional and how to work in a school organization). Indeed, some authors also look at professional identity in terms of the professional knowledge teachers need to possess and act on: subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and didactical knowledge (e.g. Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt 2000; Krywacki 2009).

Added to the fact that professional identity is related to the conception of "Who I am at the moment", it is also related to teachers' history. Indeed, what teachers themselves find relevant and important in their professional work is based on their experiences in practice and their personal backgrounds (Day et al. 2006; Lamote & Engels 2010; Tickle 2000); and teachers' biographies and past (Coldron & Smith 1999; Knowles 1992). Added to the historical perspective, professional identity also includes teachers' future prospects: including the aspirations and notions of the kind of professional a person desires to be (Beijaard et al. 2004; Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen 2006; Kelchtermans 2009; Krywacki 2009).

Professional identity can be seen as a resource people use to explain, justify, define and make sense of themselves in relation to other people and to the contexts in which they operate (Coldron & Smith 1999; MacLure 1993). Teachers' identity strands are also at the core of the teaching profession in educational practices, since they determine the ways teachers act and teach, as well as their professional development (Beijaard et al. 2004; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe 1994; Vähäsantanen 2007). Teachers' identities are also arguably central to their motivation, efficacy, commitment and satisfaction (Canrinus et al. 2011; Day 2002; Day & Kington 2008). Despite its essential role, professional identity is not always fixed (Day 2002), but can be multifaceted and consist of several sub-identities that are more or less in harmony with one another (Beijaard et al. 2004; Coldron & Smith 1999; Day et al. 2006; MacLure 1993).

In this study, therefore, professional identity is understood as subjects' conceptions of themselves as professional actors, which are based on subjects' life-history and experience. Teachers' professional identity includes their professional interests and values, perceptions of meaningful responsibilities, beliefs concerning teaching and students' learning, and understanding of the goals and meaning of education. Professional identity also includes the orientations towards their profession, i.e. the perceptions of what is important and meaningful in their work. It also involves future orientations and desires. Next, I move on to describe precisely my understanding of professional identity negotiations, particularly in the reform context.

3.1.2 Professional identity negotiations in reform context

Teachers' professional identity construction is often studied and discussed in terms of becoming a teacher during pre-service teacher training (Krywacki 2009; Lamote & Engels 2010; Mansvelder-Longayroux 2006) and in the early stages of the teacher career (e.g. Flores & Day 2006; Kagan 1992). Teachers' identity

negotiation can also be studied in relation to others, including other teachers and students (e.g. Beijaard et al. 2004; Day & Kington 2008). The purpose of this study is, however, to understand the professional identity negotiations of experienced vocational teachers in the reform context when teachers face novel social expectations and suggestions on their work.

Educational changes, especially large-scale ones, are one of the most important situational factors influencing teacher identity construction and transformation (e.g. Day & Kington 2008; van Veen & Sleegers 2009). Recently, many scholars have, however, emphasized that identity construction is not simply a matter of adopting socially pre-existent and prescribed identities emerging from social suggestions. Instead, they have emphasized the meaning of agency in identity negotiations which take place in relation to workplace settings (Beijaard et al. 2004; Billett & Somerville 2004; Coldron & Smith 1999; Day et al. 2006; Kirpal 2004). Similarly, Brown (1997) suggests that an individual is a significant actor in the construction of her or his identity, which is also influenced by other people and work practices (see also FAME Consortium 2007). In line with these views, the starting point for an examination of identity negotiation here is to see professional identity negotiation as a process that occurs in relationships between the individual and the social, and which is shaped by, premised upon and mediated by agency.

At times of intense educational changes, it is often anticipated that teacher identities are dynamic and changeable – in contrast to the traditional view of identity as something stable (Beijaard et al. 2004; van Veen & Sleegers 2009; Watson 2006). There are also different notions aside from seeing professional identity either as instinctually stable or instinctually fragmented and continuously changing. Taking this kind of nuanced view, Day and Kington (2008) suggest that teacher identities can be more stable or less stable, more fragmented or less fragmented, at different times or during particular phases in one's career, according to the interaction of personal, professional and situated factors (also Day et al. 2006). Indeed, in the processes whereby identities are formed, there is always a tension between continuity and change over time (Brown 1997; FAME Consortium 2007). This kind of consideration leads to examining professional identity negotiations here as longitudinal processes, seeking an understanding of the continuities and changes involved in the course of reform. Although many studies have focused on teachers' identities in reform contexts, there is a lack of elaborated understanding of how identities are negotiated as longitudinal processes through times of rapid change.

In this study, professional identity negotiation in relation to the reform context is understood as follows. In reform contexts, teacher's existing identity (the present state of identity) faces socially designated identity which emerges from changing social suggestions pertaining to their work tasks and educational values (cf. Sfard & Prusak 2005). Professional identity negotiations are easiest for teachers whose existing professional identity is in closest accord with the socially expected identity. In that case, teachers can simply "embrace" the new expected identity and enjoy their work (Woods & Jeffrey 2002). They do not

need to change their identities; on the contrary, changes can lead to strengthening their actual identities.

Professional identity negotiations become more challenging when the existing identity conflicts with the expected identity. The gap between the ideal and the present state of teacher identity is at the heart of the professional identity negotiations, meaning that the gap between the present and the desired state of identity can be seen as the driving force for identity re-negotiations (cf. Sfard & Prusak 2005). In the situation in which "the gap" exists, agency may be exercised in such a way as to change the existing professional identity to correspond with expected identity (cf. Hodkinson et al. 2008a). This could occur in conjunction with new experiences, given that the construction of teachers' identity is also seen as a process of interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences taken from their practices (Beijaard et al. 2004; Kerby 1991). Van Veen and Lasky (2005) also argue that the ways teachers experience their changing work conditions can impact their perceptions of teaching, which further influence the transformation of their teacher identity. However, the process of changing identities can be a challenging and long-term process. Guskey (2002) suggests that significant changes in teachers' beliefs and attitudes are likely to take place only after they have perceived positive changes in students' learning outcomes. Similarly, Korthagen (2004) argues that teachers' behaviour is quite easily changeable, but that their identity is more resistant.

Another way of understanding what agency means in a reform context is to address how teachers try to maintain their existing professional identities and thus refuse to bridge the gap between their existing identity and their socially expected identity (Hodkinson et al. 2008a; Woods & Jeffrey 2002). A study by Lasky (2005) indicates that external expectations do not have a strong effect on shaping teachers' identity, and that one of the most powerful and enduring elements of teachers' agency is their unwillingness to change their identity. This finding suggests that external mediational systems may have a limited influence on shaping individuals' long-held notions of professionalism and their sense of identity. In fact, it seems that when teachers perceive a disjuncture between their identity and the direction of a reform, they become more certain of who they are as teachers, and they strengthen their existing identity (Lasky 2005). But what happens if teachers are not willing to change their identities to correspond with social expectations? So far it is suggested that the conflict between social expectations and individual desires can lead to friction in identity (Beijaard et al. 2004), and the threatened identity can diminish a teacher's motivation, well-being, commitment and work satisfaction (Day 2008; Day et al. 2006; Day & Kington 2008; Woods & Jeffrey 2002). In this kind of situation it would be essential for teachers to exercise agency in terms of changing social suggestions and influencing the contents of their work practices to work meaningfully and to be able to exercise their identities. However, we can ask if this is possible nowadays in educational organizations, since it seems that teachers' work is increasingly controlled.

It has generally been suggested that changes in education and working life make it difficult to find continuity in professional identity, or gain a sense of security. On the other hand, Billett and Pavlova (2005) found that changes can support the continuity and development of work-related goals, and provide the vehicle by which they could enact their preferences and practise fulfilling and personally rewarding work, and direct energies into projects that were closely associated with their identity and values. Thus, Billett and Pavlova infer that the consequences of changing work practices are not necessarily negative for individuals or for a sense of continuity in professional identities. More generally, they see a need for a more elaborated understanding of the relationship between changes in work and individuals' professional identities.

Overall, teachers' professional identity negotiations are understood and examined here as processes in which teachers have an active role in relation to social suggestions emerging from the reform context. That is, this negotiation process cannot be conceptualized without perspectives encompassing both social and personal (Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen 2006). In the reform context, from the perspective of teachers' professional agency, it is not only a question of negotiating professional identities, but also of how teachers decide to involve with the reforms. Involvement with the reforms refers here to taking positions towards (i.e. mental processes) and engaging with them (i.e. practical activities) (van Veen & Sleegers 2006; Vongalis-Macrow 2007). Different studies related to these issues are presented in the next subsection.

3.2 Teachers' involvement with changing work practices

Educational reforms with different suggestions and claims can create a basis for changing educational practices, but this does not always occur suddenly. Teachers are usually the professionals most involved in educational reforms, and how they perceive, position themselves towards and engage with reforms are critical from the viewpoint of their successful implementation (van Veen & Sleegers 2009; Vongalis-Macrow 2007). In other words, the exercise of their agency is meaningful for how educational practices can be transformed (see also Billett 2006a; Hodkinson et al. 2008b). In this subsection, I overview recent studies which illustrate teachers' positions and responses towards educational reforms and grounds for them (3.2.1), and the ways of and grounds for engaging with (changing) work practices (3.2.2).

3.2.1 The positions and responses towards reforms

Recent studies have shown that each teacher likely responds individually to reforms, and teachers can also react very differently to the same reform (Osborn 2006; Sloan 2006; van Veen & Sleegers 2006). Some teachers embrace and endorse reform efforts by being approving, whereas others resist and question such efforts by being reluctant (e.g. Hargreaves 2005; Moore et al. 2002).

So far, it has been found that teachers interpret and take positions in relation to reforms by using their personal interpretative frameworks (Ballet & Kelchtermans 2008; Schmidt & Datnow 2005). In particular, recent studies have highlighted the ways in which teachers' professional identities and orientations make it possible to understand their varied responses to reforms (Day 2002; Day et al. 2006; Drake & Sherin 2006; Little & Bartlett 2002; Sloan 2006; van Veen & Sleegers 2006). This means, on the one hand, that teachers who experience correspondence between their existing professional orientations and identities and a reform (i.e. their professional identity is in balance with reform suggestions) react positively to the reform. On the other hand, teachers who experience conflict between their existing identity and social suggestions in a reform context (i.e. professional identity is threatened by the reform) react negatively. All in all, it is possible to say that teacher identity emerges as a key factor in understanding teachers' willingness and unwillingness to embrace change. However, teachers' identities are often neglected and non-valued in planning and organising changes (Day 2002).

Furthermore, teachers' competencies are in the centre when they face educational reforms. On the one hand, if reforms challenge teachers' professional competencies, they can provoke intensive reactions (including a doubt of own competencies) and resistance (Goodson, Moore & Hargreaves 2006; van den Berg 2002). On the other hand, teachers might welcome changes, seeing that they offer a wealth of opportunities for professional growth and learning (Ballet & Kelchtermans 2008; Little & Bartlett 2002). Teachers' responses can also be related to their views of the reform in terms of its benefits for themselves and their pupils (Ballet & Kelchtermans 2008; Schmidt & Datnow 2005), teachers' beliefs about the matter they teach (Spillane, Reiser & Reimer 2002), and gender (Hubbard & Datnow 2000; Peachter 2003). Indeed, teachers seem to be particularly resistant to reforms that do not match their current professional identities, the reality of their everyday experiences, or the perceived needs of teachers and students (Schmidt & Datnow 2005; van Veen & Sleegers 2009).

In addition, Ballet and Kelchtermans (2008) suggest that if teachers themselves cannot decide how innovations are to be implemented, discontent and resistance will increase. Similarly, teachers' emotions vary depending on the extent to which teachers feel powerful or powerless in reform efforts (Schmidt & Datnow 2005). Teachers' prior experiences also affect how they make sense of reforms and take positions in relation to them (Peachter 2003). Teachers often approve reforms that fit with their prior experiences, and they can resist reforms because they miss what is familiar to them (Drake & Sherin 2006; Goodson et al. 2006; Spillane et al. 2002). Hargreaves (2005) also found that the willingness of teachers to accept educational reforms decreases with age and with teaching experience (see also Lasky 2005).

In reform contexts, teachers' emotions are also at stake. A variety of emotions can emerge, ranging from positive feelings of happiness, hope, enthusiasm, satisfaction and confidence, to negative feelings of shock, fear,

anger, anxiety, frustration, unhappiness, anxiety and uncertainty (Hargreaves 2005; Lasky 2005; Schmidt & Datnow 2005; van den Berg 2002; van Veen & Sleegers 2006; Woods & Jeffrey 2002). On the one hand, these kinds of emotions can emerge when teachers make sense of reforms, for example, based on their sense of professional identity and competencies. On the other hand, emotions can influence teachers' responses and positions towards reforms. In order to understand the change processes and teachers' positions amid them, it is thus essential to address not only what teachers think about the reforms but also how they feel about the reforms (van Veen & Sleegers 2006).

Although there are many studies on teachers' responses towards reforms and grounds for them, there have not been many longitudinal studies that encompass the continuities and discontinuities in teachers' responses and positions during reforms, and the emotions experienced. An exception is the study of van Veen and Sleegers (2009), which used longitudinal data from one teacher. Their study showed how the teacher's professional orientation at first was congruent with the current reform and sense of agency reinforced, with feelings of enthusiasm, but also how enthusiasm declined when the local conditions of reform created conflicts and overwork. All this negatively affected the teacher's professional identity and reduced her agency. Accordingly, van Veen and Sleegers suggest that the way in which teachers evaluate and feel reforms is the result of a dynamic interplay between aspects of their professional identity and a variety of situational demands.

The study of van Veen et al. (2005) also illustrates how an enthusiastic teacher came to feel many negative feelings (e.g. anxiety, anger, guilt and shame) during the reform because of problems with work tasks, a lack of time and a lack of support from his subject colleagues, school management and government. The case shows that the teacher had many personal, moral and social concerns at stake in reform context. This case also illustrates the meaning of the lack of external resources at work for teachers' emotions and reactions. As a result, the teacher's identity was jeopardised (van Veen et al. 2005). Regardless of these few case studies, there is still a need for empirical evidence of changes and continuities in teachers' cognitive and emotional positions during the reforms. This evidence might help to support teachers in dealing with reforms, for example, in terms of cultivating the initial resistance into approving and enthusiasm, and enhancing initial enthusiasm and activity towards change without fatigue and anxiety during reforms. However, it is not only a question of what teachers think and feel about changing work practices, but also of how they actually carry out their new tasks and participate in reformed work practices. These matters can be conceptualized in terms of teachers' engagement with changing work practices.

3.2.2 The engagements with work and reforms

In the framework of workplace learning, scholars have suggested that despite goal-directed activities and interactions being shaped by social norms and expectations, individuals exercise their agency in determining how they engage

in (changing) work practice (Billett 2006a, 2008; FAME Consortium 2007). Individuals may be selective in their readings of a particular suggestion and possibly avoid, distribute, appropriate, ignore or rebuff it (Billett 2007). Individuals' engagement can thus be more or less intense and complete (FAME Consortium 2007), or masterly (superficially engaged), appropriating (willingly engaged) and resistant (Wertsch 1998). It can also be more or less long-term or short-term as well as active or adaptive (Kirpal, Brown & Dif 2007). Agency in terms of deciding about engagement with work can also vary among persons and over time (Billett 2006a; Kirpal et al. 2007). In particular amid changes, much of workers' engagement with work practices could be best characterised as individuals' intentionality towards "being themselves" (Billett 2006a, 2008). Vice versa, if "being themselves" is not possible, the exercise of agentic action might lead individuals to dis-identify with the social practice. This is illustrated in the work of Hodges (1998), which shows that when faced with practices that were contrary to subject's values and beliefs, a person elected to dis-identify and withdraw from that practice.

Within educational reform contexts, each teacher actively copes with calls for change in his or her own way based on their individual decisions and choices (Ballet & Kelchtermans 2008; Osborn 2006). Teachers' engagement can vary from adjustment to rejection (Day 2002; Lasky 2005; Osborn 2006; Schmidt & Datnow 2005) or from reform adaptation to reform policy generator (Day et al. 2005). According to Brain et al. (2006), there are different types of teacher mediation to educational policy and practice, including conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion. Indeed, individual teachers can have different strategies to meet the new demands in changing work practices – they can adapt, subvert, ignore or adopt the reforms. Similarly, Ryan (2004) concludes that teachers tend to either resist implementing the curriculum, or, at the very least, adapt and shape the curriculum according to realities of their work contexts and the students they teach. Ballet and Kelchtermans (2008) suggest that teachers do not simply adopt or passively undergo calls for change, but deal with changes in creative ways: some new ideas and practices are adopted and filtered, whereas others are refused or modified if they do not fit personal beliefs (see also Lasky 2005). This proposition illustrates the aim of finding a balance between organizational factors and personal aspects in the reform context. Day et al. (2005) also suggest that when teachers are able to see the relationship between their values and the strategic directions of their school, they are more likely to become highly engaged with those directions – both emotionally and intellectually. This is captured in their study of teachers who reported giving their ''all'' to their work and feelings of ''depth'' of commitment to what they do when this kind of balanced relation exists.

Lasky (2005) has found that if teachers experience a conflict between their professional goals and a new curriculum and a sense of agency, they can question if they can stay in the profession and leave the work. In reform contexts, teachers' experiences and disappointments can indeed weaken their commitment to teaching and work. The disappointments might be rooted, for

example, in (i) a sense of betrayal when promised resources fail to materialise or abruptly disappear; (ii) frustration with shifting levels of endorsement or support from school leaders, (iii) dismay over conflicts with colleagues and/or a failure of support from colleagues, (iv) emotional and physical exhaustion associated with extra and unfamiliar responsibilities, (v) disagreement over the interpretation of broadly defined reform goals, and (vi) tensions over the balance between teacher autonomy and institutional demands (Little & Bartlett 2002). Consistent with these findings, Day et al. (2005) found that the factors that most sustained teachers' commitment included (i) sharing with and giving support to colleagues, (ii) positive feedback from colleagues, (iii) shared educational values within the organization, and (iv) better professional development opportunities. Conversely, the factors that most diminished teachers' commitment included (i) the imposition of time-related innovations together with the steep learning curves involved, (ii) department initiatives that increased bureaucratic tasks, (iii) cuts in resources, and (iv) a reduction in classroom autonomy and sense of agency. Indeed, negative and positive factors affecting teachers' commitment are related to professional, situational and personal factors (Day 2008).

Although some teachers are losing their passion and commitment in the reform context and are also leaving the profession, i.e. disengaging from the work due to reforms (Lasky 2005; Troman & Woods 2000), the reality is that most teachers contently, albeit sometimes grudgingly, put into practice whatever was imposed upon them, or adapt and at least survive with a changed educational context (Day 2008; Moore et al. 2002). Adaptations have been found to include at least downshifting (involved reducing workloads) and self-actualisation (Troman & Woods 2000). Working amid changes in particular with a huge workload and small resources is not an easy job for teachers (van Veen & Sleegers 2009). There is some discussion on the advantages of social and emotional support in teachers' effort to cope with change (Geijsel & Meijers 2005; Zembylas & Barker 2007). However, in order to support teachers amid changes, we need a better understanding of teachers' engagements in the course of changes and the various resources which might be related to teachers' managing with reforms in the course of change processes.

3.3   Summary of previous findings and needs for research

Recent discussion has emphasized that the focus and direction of teachers' and workers' professional agency are essential for the process of remaking educational practices and negotiating professional identities at work (e.g. Beijaard et al. 2004; Billett 2008; Hodkinson et al. 2008a). Thus, in order to understand the processes of remaking educational practices and negotiating professional identities, the relevant questions to be asked are how subjects influence and make choices concerning their professional identities and positions towards and engagements with changes, and what shapes their ways

to practise their professional agency. So far, many studies have addressed, as separate phenomena, subjects' professional identity negotiations, self-positioning or engagement in relation to reforms *in a particular situation* of reforms. However, more attention could be paid to examining all these kinds of processes in the course of a particular change.

Recognizing all this, this study seeks to examine how teachers negotiate their professional identities and involvement with the educational reform, plus how they are able to influence their work and reform practices through the educational reform. By doing this, the study aims to contribute to the discussion around agency presented in Section 2, and the discussion of agentic practices in the context of educational change overviewed in this section. So far, in particular embodied aspects (Archer 2003) seem to be neglected when, for example, teachers' professional identity negotiations and engagements with changes are examined. However, this kind of knowledge might help to support teachers in the stream of changes. The study also aims to offer so far missing information about vocational teachers and their experiences and work in the context of an educational reform which requires them to move more away from educational institutions to workplaces where the students' workplace periods take place.

4 RESEARCH TASK AND OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Overall, the practical inquiry reported and discussed consists of five empirical sub-studies (Articles I–V). The research task and overarching research questions seek to discuss the findings of the sub-studies at a general level. The research task of the study is to elaborate and understand *vocational teachers' professional agency amid changing work practices*. Therefore, the study addresses the following overarching research questions:

1. How is professional agency manifested?
2. What kinds of individual and social resources are intertwined with professional agency?
3. What kinds of temporal elements are related to professional agency?
4. What is the significance of professional agency for individual teachers and the transformation of social practices?

The research questions are investigated through three complementary lenses, emerging from theoretically informed understanding and definition of professional agency, comprising: (1) influence on one's work, (2) involvement with educational reform, and (3) the negotiation of professional identity.

All the empirical sub-studies seek to answer each overarching research question presented above, but they have different main perspectives on those questions (see Figure 1, pp. 40). The sub-studies contribute and discuss the overarching research questions as follows. In particular, Articles I and II focus on how vocational teachers are able to influence their work. *Article I* examines how teachers are able to practise professional agency in terms of influencing the contents and conditions of their work and the educational reform, and negotiating their professional identities. While Article I addresses vocational teachers' agency within an educational organization, *Article II* turns the focus onto their professional agency in terms of influencing the ways of working in boundary-crossing settings between the school and working life. Continuing with the perspective of teachers' professional agency, Articles III and IV deal

with vocational teachers' choices and decisions regarding their involvement with the educational reform at its initial stages. *Article III* examines teachers' self-positioning in relation to the reform. *Article IV* explores teachers' strategies for engaging with the reform. *Article V* focuses on vocational teachers' agency in the processes of negotiating professional identities and taking positions towards the reform within a longitudinal process in the course of the educational reform. It also discusses how teachers are able to influence their work through the reform.

The manifestations of

The individual and social resources relating to

professional agency

-influencing one's work
(Articles I–III, V)
-involvement with educational reform
(Articles III–V)
-negotiating professional identity
(Articles I, V)

The significance of

The temporal nature of
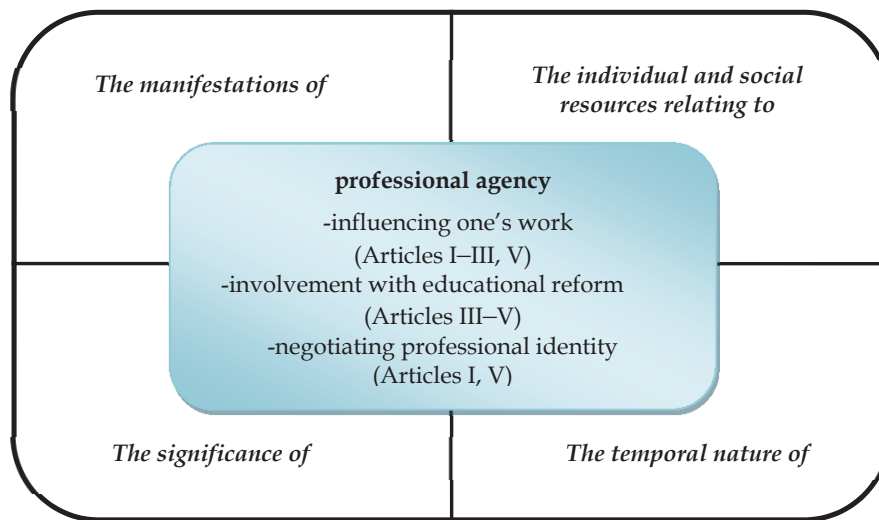
FIGURE 1   The correspondence between the research questions and articles

5 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

In this section, I describe my methodological choices and practices, and epistemological and ontological commitments beyond them, which are grounded notably in narrative inquiry (Riessman 2008; Spector-Mersel 2010). This section starts with a description of the interview study design (Subsection 5.1). In the following subsections, I portray the methodological practices concerning authentic interview situations (Subsection 5.2), and outline my understanding of knowledge, its construction and its relation to reality mainly based on social constructionist views (Subsection 5.3). Afterwards, I describe the general analytical principles and approaches used here (Subsection 5.4), and the specific analysis procedures conducted in the sub-studies (Subsection 5.5). The last subsection (5.6) overviews the methodological implementation of the sub-studies (see Table 1, pp. 64), and introduces the reporting of the original findings.

5.1 The interview study design

The main data for the study was gathered via repeated open-ended narrative interviews of vocational teachers. Next, I introduce the research context and participants, and the methodological and practical choices and activities related to the data gathering.

5.1.1 The research context and participants

The data gathering took place in a single Finnish vocational institution. In this organization the teachers had recently confronted various educational reforms, imposed by both national and local levels of administration. The most recent educational reform was introduced in the spring of 2006, the aim of which was to increase the amount of students' workplace learning from the national minimum of 20 credits (out of 120 credits; half a year). As a consequence of the reform, vocational qualifications included 40–60 credits of workplace learning

(i.e. more than twice as many as before the reform). The revised qualifications were introduced within particular study programmes, and they were implemented in the autumn of 2006, alongside existing qualifications.

As a consequence of the reform, teachers must work more outside the school and co-operate with the workplaces. Because the students were required to do more learning in the workplace itself, teachers had, in particular, an increased and transformed workload related to informing workplace personnel about the goals and practices of the reform, organising, guiding and evaluating students' workplace learning periods, and finding workplaces for the students. In addition, teachers' work tasks included the guiding and training of workplace trainers, i.e. those workers who support and guide students within the workplaces during their workplace learning so that they will learn the vocational skills and knowledge related to the goals set for these periods; workers do all this besides their own duties without financial compensation (also see Virtanen & Tynjälä 2008).

In the course of an educational reform, 16 vocational teachers were interviewed in 2006, and 14 of these teachers were re-interviewed in 2007. Teachers (ten men and six women) were aged 31–57 years, with teaching experience ranging from 4 to 30 years, when the data collection started. They taught in different study programmes belonging to various fields of initial VET that had been incorporated within the reform. These included, for example, technology, communications and transport, and social services, health and sports. The legally qualified teachers in Finnish upper secondary vocational education who teach vocational subjects have been required to have a master's level degree (or lower where it does not exist) in the field in which they teach, pedagogical studies (60 credits), and a minimum of three years of work experience in the field (Teaching Qualifications Act 986/1998 [5]). Before conducting the study, I did not have any connections with the vocational institution in question, and the teachers who participated in this study were also unfamiliar to me. The vocational institution where the teachers worked was not located in Jyväskylä. To conduct this study with the participants in the reform context described, a narrative approach and a longitudinal research strategy were adopted.

5.1.2   A narrative approach and longitudinal research strategy

The general methical framework of this study was narrativity. In narrative research, the empirical data typically consist of stories which can be oral discussions or written texts. The story is a result of telling and what we encounter as an empirical phenomenon (Elliott 2005; Hänninen 2004). This study focused on verbal stories produced in interviews, here also conceptualized as told narratives (Heikkinen 2010; Riessman 2008; Spector-Mersel 2010). Within the narrative framework, studies differ with regard to their ultimate focus of interest (Hänninen 2004), but many scholars share

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[5]   See http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/1998/19980986

similar views about the meaning of telling stories. At the general level, it is suggested that by telling, subjects can reveal, make sense of and impart meanings about themselves and their actions, experiences and feelings, events in their lives, and the social context (Bamberg 2003; Elliott 2005; Goodson et al. 2010; Riessman 2008).

More specifically, one key point of narrative inquiry is that identities are seen as expressed and constructed through a telling process (Bamberg 2003, 2004; Elliott 2005; Sfard & Prusak 2005). Similarly, Watson (2006) notes that telling stories is, in an important sense, "doing identity work". Furthermore, telling can be used to remember, describe and interpret participants' past experiences (Polkinghorne 1995; Riessman 2008), but it also provides orientations for the future (Hänninen 2004). The construction of narratives is particularly important for individuals within situations of change and transitions: it helps the subjects to gain a sense of coherence, continuity and stability of the self (Ellis & Bochner 2000) and find new meanings and future directions (Goodson et al. 2010). According to Sfard and Prusak (2005), telling makes people able to cope with new situations in terms of past experiences, and provides tools to plan the future. All in all, in the context of narrative research, it is possible to study the various matters in particular related to subjects' themselves and their lives in a temporal continuum of the past, the present and the future through their stories. At the same time, it creates a platform for subjects to describe, make sense and evaluate themselves and their lives. The interviews here were pursued to plan and conduct so that all this was possible for vocational teachers during the interviews.

Indeed, via telling in interviews, subjects can describe their experiences, opinions, decisions and actions (see also Kvale & Brinkmann 2009) and evaluate and give explanations and reasons for their choices, decisions and actions (e.g. Goodson et al. 2010). Ahearn (2001) emphasizes that in examining agency it is particularly important to gain information on subjects' reasons for their actions, while via observing it is possible to achieve knowledge of actual actions in authentic situations. In recent studies on agency, one has collected data both via interviews and/or observation (e.g. Archer 2003; Gordon 2005; Isopahkala-Bouret 2010; Ketelaar 2012; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2011; Ojala 2011; Rainio 2010). Correspondingly, the construction of teachers' professional identity is mainly investigated via interviewing (e.g. Sfard & Prusak 2005; Watson 2006; van Veen & Sleegers 2009).

This study adopted a longitudinal research strategy. This kind of approach makes it possible to examine what has happened to the research participants over a series of time points, and makes it possible to reveal processes – including changes and continuities – over time in phenomena examined at individual and social levels (Elliott 2005; Elliott, Holland & Thomson 2008). The longitudinal approach in terms of gathering repeated interview data with the same vocational teachers was adopted here in particular, since it made it possible to gain teachers' authentic experiences, views on and interpretations of the teacher's work, and reform during the

different stages of the reform process. In other words, teachers did not need to remember and recall their experiences and opinions from a distance. It was also necessary to adopt a longitudinal research strategy so that, for example, it was possible to examine the construction of professional identities as an on-going process. Furthermore repeated interviews enable researchers to build confidence and a trusting relationship with the interviewees (Elliott 2005). When a longitudinal approach is utilized, it is also possible to focus on various matters in different interviews. Elliott (2005) suggests that in the first interview it is possible to focus on the whole life history, and in repeated interviews on concrete aspects of present experiences and reflecting them. These kinds of ideas were applied in planning and implementing the data gathering.

5.1.3 Data gathering

The data gathering commenced in the spring of 2006. Before that, I familiarized myself with the research context and research topic. For example, at the end of 2005, I participated in the meeting concerning the forthcoming educational reform in the organization in question. Added to this, I secured written material about the reform and the organization. The actual data gathering started with the time when a planning manager introduced the reform to the teachers, who were at the forefront of its implementation. In that case, the planning manager also informed the teachers about my study through a letter (Appendix 1) and asked if they would want to participate in the study. That is, sampling was quite purposeful and not random (Myan 2009; Patton 2002), meaning that I asked the particular teachers to participate in the study instead of all the teachers from the organization. In this way, it was possible to interview the teachers who were mostly involved in the forthcoming reform and thus were representative participants.

After informing the teachers about my study, the planning manager delivered the names and the contact information of the voluntary teachers to me. The number of participants for the study was thus formed according to the teachers' willingness. So, the strategy of saturation was not used in the data collection of this study (Bowen 2008; Myan 2009). In addition to the fact that teachers participated voluntarily in the interviews, the rector of the institution also agreed to the interviews being conducted within the organization. After obtaining the teachers' contact information, I contacted them personally in order to arrange the dates for interviewing.

At the same time as making the practical arrangements for the interviews, I considered the possible topics for the interview discussion. This work was partly based on previous studies and literature in particular around vocational teachers, professional identity and educational reforms (e.g. Beijaard et al. 2004; Tiilikkala 2004; Vähäsantanen 2004). The topics for this study were considered and planned so that the teachers had an opportunity to tell about, sketch and reflect on the issues related to their past, present, and possible future. The relevant topics were collected in a loose, unstructured interview guide. However, I did not form the specific questions, which would have been posed

to all the interviewees in a similar form and order. The interview guide was made into a checklist and a script for interviewing rather than a document aiming to strictly guide the interview situations. Thus, the idea for the interviews was that the teachers would talk about the specific topics, but that the interaction would be casual, and that teachers would be free to tell about their own experiences and views related to the topics, and to create new openings for discussion. This implies that the interviews were planned to be more or less open-ended and narrative instead of structured (Patton 2002; Riessman 2008). Before the data gathering, I conducted a pre-interview with a vocational teacher. The aim was to test the functionality of the interview guide. Based on the pre-interview, minor modifications were made to the interview guide.

The first interviews with 16 vocational teachers took place in May 2006. At the time of the interviews, teachers had been informed about the reform, whose implementation occurred in the autumn semester of 2006, and they had also commenced tasks related to its implementation, e.g. informing workplace personnel about the goals of the reform and finding workplaces for students' workplace learning periods. The interviews were used to capture data on: (i) vocational teachers' professional development and career, (ii) the continuous educational reforms and the current educational reform focusing on the curriculum, (iii) their sense of their professional identity, and the nature of their work, (iv) their work community and organization, and (v) their hopes and expectations for the future (Appendix 2). The interviews also included drawing tasks in which the teachers were asked to draw their own position in the figures (see Appendix 3). Related to the first figure, I asked them to draw their position in their work organization and community, and then to tell more about this position. Related to the second figure, I asked the teachers to draw their position in the middle ground of education and working life. The drawing tasks were used to prompt and inspire the teachers' telling. The first interviews lasted from roughly 75 minutes to 125 minutes per person. The overall duration of all the interviews was 1 778 minutes; the average duration of interviews was about 1 hour and 51 minutes.

The second interviews took place in 2007. Eight teachers were interviewed in May, and six teachers in November. I did not re-interview two teachers, because we could not find an appropriate time for the interviews. These interviews addressed topics similar to those in the first interviews, but focused particularly on what had happened in the teachers' work since the previous interviews, plus their current perceptions of the reform and its various consequences, as well as the future of teachers (Appendix 4). The same drawing tasks used in the first interviews were also utilized in the second interviews (Appendix 3). In the second interviews, the interview guide again operated as a checklist and the script for interviewing. The second interviews varied in length from 35 minutes to 80 minutes. The overall duration of all the interviews was 862 minutes; the average duration of the interviews was about 1 hour 2 minutes. During the whole research process, all the teachers were interviewed

individually within their vocational institution, in its different meeting rooms. The teachers participated in the interviews during school hours.

5.2   The interactional stream of interviews

In the context of qualitative and narrative research, the research interview is recognized as an interactive and social practice between active research participants – the interviewees and interviewer (Fontana & Frey 2005; Holstein & Gubrium 2003; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Riessman 2008; Spector-Mersel 2010). The relationship between interviewer and interviewee is also increasingly conceptualized as a power relation (Kvale 2006; Tanggaard 2007). Since the research interview is a social and powered practice, the researchers need to be aware and reflect the role of interactional and power aspects in the production of interview knowledge (e.g. Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Next, I demonstrate the progress and interaction of the interviews conducted for this study, and the roles and activities of the research participants during the interviews. It is impossible to give a full picture of all these issues in all the interviews (For more methodological considerations about interviewing, see Vähäsantanen & Saarinen 2012). Therefore, I give a general view of the interview processes by focusing on the topics which I see as important from the viewpoint of interaction and constructing knowledge. I deal simultaneously with the interviews conducted in 2006 and 2007.

5.2.1   The openings for the interviews

The beginnings of the interviews in 2006. It has been suggested that interviewers have the power at the beginning of the interview. They set the stage for and initiate the interview, ask permission to record, re-explain the purpose of the interview, and give information about confidentiality (Kvale 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Rapley 2007). The initial period is also seen as a time when the interviewee and the researcher assess each other and begin to establish a degree of reciprocity and trust through informal discussion (Corbin & Morse 2003).

Similarly, at the start of the interviews conducted for this study, we greeted each other and typically started to talk about some general issues, such as the weather. Some teachers also started to talk about their work right away (including rush time at work and their current problems). After this kind of short discussions, I asked their permission to record the interviews and I introduced the aim of my study. I presented the planned common topics for interview discussion, but I also emphasized that the presented issues were only initial topics and that we could move ahead according to the situation. I further highlighted that I was interested in teachers' own individual experiences, views, stories and the issues which were important to them, and that there were no right and wrong answers to the questions. By doing this, I wanted to encourage

teachers to speak openly and freely about their experiences and opinions. In the beginning of the interviews, I also explained issues of confidentiality and anonymity concerning the data gathering, data storage and reporting the issues from data. For example, I told them that the interviews were only for my own use and that individual teachers would not be identifiable from the research reports. I also told them that I was an external actor in relation to the teachers' organization and that I would not share the interviews with its representatives. When I performed these research duties, the interviewees mainly listened, but also asked questions, for example, related to the completion date of my study. Some teachers also agreed with me that there were always individual opinions and no right answer to the topics presented.

At the initial period of the interviews, the atmosphere was mainly convivial and comfortable. Many teachers also said that it was nice to come and participate in the interviews. However, one interview was an exception. At its initial stage, the interviewee challenged my choice of work as a researcher because of my young age. He also criticised all researchers in terms of having no close connection to and understanding of the real world and practical work. He also instructed me on how to conduct my research (see also Vähäsantanen & Saarinen 2012). In a sense, this interviewee immediately broke with the traditional interview frame and roles by questioning the research work and the professional position of the researcher (Kvale 2006; Tanggaard 2007). I reacted to this criticism quite compassionately and tried to carry out the research duties described above.

After I had introduced the purpose of the study and initial topics for the discussion and talked about confidentiality, many teachers started to talk about some issues presented right away, or I posed starting questions, which were different in their form across the interviews, related to the teachers' careers, which was the first topic in the interview guide.

The beginnings of the interviews in 2007. At first, we talked about general issues related to life and teachers' work, and in some cases also about the last interviews. I also talked about issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and told the interviewees that the purpose of this interview was to discuss the teachers' work and what had happened to it after the first interview. For example, I said: *So the first interview took place in the spring of 2006. The purpose of these re-interviews is to ask about general thoughts and experiences and what has happened here over the year. You can just start with what has happened along the way and what your current feelings are.* After this kind of question or comment, the teachers started their telling. That is, as the interviewer, I set the stage for interviewing, but through posing the quite open and extensive opening question I gave the main power to the interviewees to decide where to start their telling and what to include in their telling (see Corbin & Morse 2003; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Vähäsantanen & Saarinen 2012). Next, I demonstrate what happened after the beginnings of the interviews by first addressing the roles and activities of the interviewer (5.2.2) and then those of the interviewees (5.2.3).

5.2.2   The interviewer as a prescriptive interlocutor

Related to the interview situations in 2006 and 2007, I understand my role as an interviewer as an interlocutor, who stimulated and encouraged vocational teachers' telling. In this role, the interview guides flexibly directed my actions and questions. Indeed, although I did not have predetermined questions which I would have asked in all the interviews in the same form and order, I posed open-ended questions related to my research interests, but also to interviewees' telling and answers during the interviews (see Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). The purpose of the questions was to encourage the teachers to discuss their conceptions and experiences and to give space to the teachers' telling instead of attaining specific and strictly formulated answers (Corbin & Morse 2003; Riessman 2008).

During the interviews, the questions posed and the discussion shared challenged the teachers to consider and reflect on, for example, themselves and their work. This is illustrated in the following quotation[6]:

> I believe that the teacher has an important role that lies between the educational world and working life. Actually, I hadn't noticed this before our discussion here.

Many teachers also said that participation in the interviews made it possible to think about and properly make sense of the current educational reform. Previously, they had not had such opportunities individually or collectively, mainly due to a lack of time (see also Article III). Here, I agree with scholars who argue that an interview is a place to reflect on and conceptualize one's work and situation from a new perspective, give meanings to events, to view one's position in a new way, and to gain a new understanding of the self (e.g. Holstein & Gubrium 2003; Riessman 2008). This is often possible when the interview participants do not share totally similar backgrounds and views. Ikonen and Ojala (2007) argue that when researchers are not experts in the topics studied, or when they do not share similar experiences with interviewees because of their age, they are allowed to ask unauthorised or naive questions. At the same time, a power relation can be divided: the interviewee can be an expert concerning the topic, and the interviewer can take a contrasting role, taking the position of a student. That is, it might be a positive aspect from the viewpoint of knowledge production that the interviewer and interviewees did not share similar individual and professional backgrounds in this study.

During the second interviews in 2007, I also utilized my knowledge of the topics of the first interviews at a general level when I posed questions. This means that I might say, for example, that I remember that many teachers criticised the organization during the last interviews, but how do you see the organization now? This kind of strategy is often seen to be related to active interviewing, which is a form of narrative interview (Holstein & Gubrium 1995).

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[6]   All the quotations presented in this summary are based on the verbatim transcriptions of interviews.

Apart from posing questions, I also asked clarifications, offered interpretative frames, encouraged interviewees' telling if they were unsure of the meaningfulness of the telling, presented comments, and reacted to the comments and offered positions by interviewees (see also Vähäsantanen & Saarinen 2012; Holstein & Gubrium 2003; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). For example, the next extract[7] (see also Article V) shows how I followed the answer of the interviewee and made the comment by using "his words" to encourage him to tell more about his feelings. The latter part of the extract illustrates how I analysed Jacob's situation and offered him an interpretive frame, which he accepted to demonstrate his reason to be adaptive in the reform situation:

> Katja: How does the future look to you, how do you see it?
>
> Jacob: I think I'll carry on working here. However, so many changes are taking place in the school world, and my own opportunities for influencing how they are implemented or revised amount to zero. In my view, in our teachers' room, teachers have taken the view that it doesn't matter what you do now, it can all be changed into something else tomorrow… So things are done this way now and you have no idea about the future. And in fact it's all the same what happens.
>
> Katja: So, your feeling is, it's all the same.
>
> Jacob: Yeah, I've now become hardened to that idea. So, now we do it in a certain way because it's useless to bang your head against a brick wall and try to say this isn't a good way and let's do something differently. Because it doesn't get you anywhere. So you learn to be quiet and to just get on with it.
>
> Katja: And then things go more easily.
>
> Jacob: Exactly!

That is, the activities of both the interviewee and interviewer, such as telling and offering an interpretive frame, can be seen here as essential in terms of constructing knowledge and interpretations during the interviews (see also Holstein & Gubrium 2003; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009).

During the interviews, the self-disclosure of the interviewer (Fontana & Frey 2005; Rapley 2007; Reinharz & Chase 2003) was also attended, meaning that I shared my experiences and backgrounds, and answered the questions asked by the interviewees. All this occurred in relation to the interviewees' telling and it was quite spontaneous. For example, the next extract demonstrates how I reasoned my question through sharing my background, which further encouraged the interviewee to tell more about the topic discussed:

> Katja: Overall, how did you end up in this vocational field? Have your interests been in this field all your life?
>
> Otto: Well, actually it's a little bit like that. I've always been that kind of outdoor person...
>
> Katja: I just asked because I've been a scout ever since I was a child.

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[7]   In the quotations, three dots (…) refer to the material omitted by the author.

> Otto: I haven't been interested in it that long. But let's say that even before I did my
> military service, all my activities and hobbies were connected with nature…

The extract also shows how the experiences and backgrounds of both interview parties became a part of the interview material through sharing and comparing them. However, sharing experiences was not an end in itself in the interviews, and not even always possible because of a lack of similar experiences, for example related to the teachers' experiences of burn-out. In this kind of telling situation, my task was to be more an emphatic listener.

During the interviews, the interviewees also asked many questions. These questions dealt with, for example, the system of students' workplace learning, the current curriculum reform, my age, and my doctoral study (see also Vähäsantanen & Saarinen 2012). That is, the questions asked by the interviewees were related to both the topic of the interview and to me as a person. I answered the questions, since I felt that it belonged to interactional exchange. All in all, it is suggested that the self-disclosure of the interviewer, for example, through sharing experiences and answering the questions, can prompt rapport and encourage respondents to be more forthcoming in what they say, and help to overcome power inequalities (Fontana & Frey 2005; Rapley 2007; Reinharz & Chase 2003).

At the end of the interviews in 2006 and 2007, I offered the interviewees the opportunity to talk about and comment on the issues they wanted through asking if they wanted to tell or add anything. Some teachers did not want to say anything else. For example, one teacher said that he did not want to add anything else and, in fact, that he had already talked more than he ever would have believed before the interview. This illustrates that the interview situations operated as a platform for rich telling. At the end, some teachers also asked about the study or commented on the interviews, for example, highlighting the meaning of the interview for teachers either at a general level or for themselves personally. In some cases, we also discussed current issues, for example, issues related to the upcoming holidays and ice-hockey.

All in all, my role as an interviewer differed across interviews and within the interviews; sometimes I was more of an active party who posed questions and shared experiences, and sometimes more of a listener. My role was largely related to the actions of the interviewees, which next are discussed.

5.2.3   The interviewees as active tellers and actors

Related to narrative interviews, Riessman (2008) suggests that creating possibilities for extended narration requires that researchers give up control and follow interviewees to topics which they wish to speak about. This is important if one really wants to get a fuller picture of the interviewee's life (Corbin & Morse 2003). Within the interviews conducted in 2006 and 2007, the main principle was openness in terms of leaving a lot of space for the teachers' telling related to the topic of the interviews and their own interests. Based on their interests, the teachers indeed raised new topics for discussion. For

example, almost all the teachers voluntarily talked about their experiences of burnout at work without direct questions. In unstructured interviews such as here, interviewees can really decide what and how much they reveal, or what topics are included in or excluded from their stories (Corbin & Morse 2003).

Indeed, telling one's story to others is always a motivated act (see also Goodson et al. 2010; Riessman 2008). People can have many different reasons for agreeing to be research subjects (Clark 2010; Corbin & Morse 2003), which can further influence their telling and the construction of knowledge in the research. Clark (2010) found that at the individual level, the supporting mechanism that motivates research engagement includes subjective, therapeutic and material interests. At the collective level, the corresponding mechanisms include representation, political empowerment, and informing "change". In this study, it became clear that some teachers had their own interests and intentions for their participation in the study and for telling. These interests were usually related to the fact that they wanted to talk about issues close to them or wanted to tell about the problems in teachers' work in order to gain improvements in teachers' work situation and to prevent the failure of the current reform. The latter motive is presented in the following quotation:

> The reform has its good sides, too. But I think that the bad sides need to be looked at first. If they are neglected, the whole reform could break down. There are really such a lot of problems that people should remember to consider.

The research was thus seen as a tool to influence the teachers' work conditions and the current reform context. Alternatively, one teacher experienced the interview as almost work counselling, since it was possible to talk about oneself and one's own work in the interview:

> Yeah, this is excellent work counselling. I'm sure that there are a lot of other teachers in my unit who would like to come and tell their complete life story. We've never had any development discussions, somebody asking about us and being interested in us. You're conducting development discussions with us and we'll be able to cope a lot better because of it.

Some other teachers also emphasized the important, almost therapeutic, meaning of discussion for themselves, although this was not an aim of the interviewing (cf. Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

Despite the teachers' own interests in telling, all the main topics included in the interview guides were also dealt with during all the interviews. However, there was variation related to the order in which they were dealt with and how much teachers talked about them. This also means that although the interview scripts were in a sense chronologically constructed – issues from the teachers' past towards the future hopes via the current work – the interviews did not progress in this order. Nor did the teachers produce one coherent life-course narrative with a temporal plot in the interviews (see Heikkinen 2010; Riessman 2008), but they told many stories related to various topics emerging from the interview script and their own purposes.

In the framework of narrativity, subjects' telling in interviews can be seen as descriptive or as evaluative. This means that telling can be understood as a process of sense-making regarding life, work-related incidents and oneself; but it can also involve analysing and evaluating life-events and their meanings, justifying the decisions made and making clear why life has gone in a particular way (Biesta et al. 2008; Elliott 2005; Goodson et al. 2010). In this study, the teachers' talk was descriptive, but also reflective and analytical. It further included arguing and presenting opinions, justifying and persuading. For example, the teachers described their professional careers with different events, but at the same time they explained and gave reasons for making particular decisions. Similarly, they did not only describe the goals and contents of a curriculum reform, but evaluated it and gave their opinions of it.

The essential part of a narrative interview is sharing experiences (Elliott 2005). It is required that interviewees must have the opportunity to describe their life and notions experimentally in their own words (Heikkinen 2010; Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2005). However, the interviews can mediate a different extent of experiences (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2005). In terms of sharing experiences, the interviews here were pretty rich and emotional, as the answer of Elisabeth to the question on the current work situation illustrates:

> For example at the moment, when there are two weeks left till the end of the semester, I feel that every single morning I'm so tired that I can hardly get out of bed... I feel completely drained. I'm really waiting for that morning when I won't need to go anywhere, when I can just sleep for a whole day. When there's nobody telling me I have to go somewhere.

During the interviews, the interviewees positioned the researcher in many ways. For example, one interviewee compared her work situation to my situation as a researcher when she told about challenges at her work. On the contrary, some male interviewees positioned the researcher as a young girl instead of the position of a researcher. Related to this position, one teacher also speculated and asked about the possibility of a date with the researcher. In these kinds of situations, I as a researcher reacted situationally more or less actively (see also Vähäsantanen & Saarinen 2012; Arendell 1997; Schwalbe & Wolkomir 2003). All in all, it seemed that during the interviews I was positioned as a researcher, but other, different kinds of positions were also offered to me. That is, interviewing is not only related to the traditional roles and practices of the interview. On the contrary, the interviewer and the interviewee bring themselves as persons to the interview situation (who they are as people – younger or older, women or men – and as professionals), which has significance in terms of what is told and how (see also Broom, Hand & Tovey 2009; Manderson, Bennett & Andajani-Sutjahjo 2006).

5.3 What is knowledge like and how is it related to reality?

In this section, I focus on the epistemological questions and ontological views regarding this study. As I described previously, both the interviewer and the interviewees had an influence on the contents and course of the interviews. However, their roles and activities varied within and between the interviews, and the interviews proceeded distinctively. My presence and various activities (such as posing the questions, sharing experiences, answering the questions) was an unavoidable and essential part of the interviews. Similarly, interviewees were active actors, for example, through determining what to tell, and how to act (e.g. asking questions and positioning the researcher). All in all, different activities related to formal roles, interview settings and interview parties as persons play a role in shaping what is constructed, and how the process entailing knowledge production unfolds (see Vähäsantanen & Saarinen 2012; Gubrium & Holstein 2002; Kvale & Brickmann 2009; Manderson et al. 2006).

Against this background, my epistemological assumptions can be seen to be related to social constructionism, which suggests that knowledge is understood as socially constructed and jointly negotiated in an interactional process which is embedded in a particular time, location and relationships (Burr 2004; Hänninen 2010; Riessman 2008). That is, I see a research interview rather as constructing and producing than receiving knowledge in the interaction (see Elliott 2005; Sparkes & Smith 2008). Thus, knowledge in this study is understood as social, conversational, and situational (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Riessman 2008; Spector-Mersel 2010).

Furthermore, the knowledge produced in interviews is often seen as partial, intentional and subjective (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Riessman 2008; Spector-Mersel 2010). I also understand that stories, the contents of interviews, are not true representations of life and its events as they really happened, or stories about oneself are not representations of "real, essential self" (see also Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen 2006; Sparkes & Smith 2008). This is an assumption of knowledge, since in interviews, for example, interviewees can simply forget something, illustrate their accounts with new details, or intentionally and individually select what is included in their accounts and what is omitted (Burr 2004; Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen 2006; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber 1998). Furthermore, telling is not only a process in which interviewees externalise pre-formed and existing stories (Holstein & Gubrium 2003; Hänninen 2010). Telling can also shape and deepen people's understanding of life and the world (e.g. Riessman 2008). As the example quotation (pp. 48) demonstrated, during the interview the teacher gained a new kind of understanding of a teachers' role between the school and working life.

Indeed, stories do not offer direct access to lived experience and the world, or do not mirror some independent object reality and transparent windows into subjects' identities (Bamberg 2003; Riessman 2008). Although I agree with these assumptions, I do not see that stories are totally coincidental and complete

fabrication or fiction. Instead, interviews have the contacting surface to a lived life, experienced events and interviewee's identity (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi 2005; Lieblich et al. 1998). In other words, interview material does not offer "the real picture" of interviewees and their lives, but it conveys understanding of these aspects. Thus, there is a mutual relationship between a told narrative and life (Spector-Mersel 2010). Similarly, Kelchtermans (2009) suggests that stories should be understood as constructed acts in a specific situation, and that their power lies in revealing the particular meaning the events had for narrators, not the truth they offer (see also Riessman 2008).

Today, it is widely argued, leaning to social constructionist assumptions, that language and its usage do not only describe reality, but in fact produce and create reality through telling and by giving meanings to reality (Gubrium & Holstein 2002; Heikkinen 2010; Spector-Mersel 2010). Ontologically all this means that subjects are seen as active actors and that there is not only one reality – we construct our own versions of reality between us in interaction and through telling (Burr 2004; Elliott 2005). Instead of talking about one reality and truth, it should be understood that there are differently constructed, interpreted, conceptualized and verbalised realities (Burr 2004; Heikkinen et al. 2005; Myan 2009; Patton 2002). Indeed, social reality is constructed, fluid and multifaceted (Spector-Mersel 2010). I commit to these kinds of social constructionist views, but at the same time I do not deny the existence of a material world, artefacts and psychical facts (see e.g. Burr 2004). In practice this means that I see that the events and matters discussed in the interviews, such as material artefacts in teachers' work and the organization with its structure, exist also without language and are not only produced in the interviews. However, teachers can understand and interpret these matters differently, and they can thus produce different accounts of them, at the same time constructing their reality. This means that an external, material world exists independently which is, however, inaccessible to researchers, and the only things we have access to are the various representations of the world (Burr 2004). Overall, through subjects' told experiences and interpretations, we can achieve information on the social context and social relations as well, for example those relating to agency, but this is not authentic knowledge to be derived without interpretations.

The ontological understanding, which does not reject the realist approach by recognizing that at least a part of the world and reality exist objectively without language, can be called *moderate social constructionism* (see Vehkakoski 2006). Respectively, Heikkinen et al. (2005) conceptualize as realistic constructionism the approach in which realistic ontology is combined with constructivist epistemology. In that case, it is suggested that there exists the reality which is independent from discourses and language, but people construct this reality and create theories, hypotheses and thoughts we can call "knowledge". All in all, as in this study, epistemological constructionism does not absolutely and comprehensively indicate the commitment to strong ontological constructionism which sees reality only as discursively constructed (see also Myan 2009).

5.4   Analysis principles and approaches

In this section, I describe the general principles and choices concerning my data analysis (5.4.1). Then I introduce the analytical approaches which I applied in this study. The interview data were analysed mainly via narrative analysis (5.4.2), together with thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis (5.4.3). Finally, I describe the precise analytical choices and procedures related to the sub-studies (5.4.4).

5.4.1   General analytical principles

In a qualitative paradigm, such as in narrative research, an analysis aims to elaborate and interpret a phenomenon under examination through the collected data (Riessman 2008; Spector-Mersel 2010). In this study, the data consisted of altogether thirty interviews. All the interviews were audio-recorded and afterwards transcribed literally as a written protocol. The total length of the verbatim transcript data was 617 pages (Times New Roman 12, single-spaced marginal 2,5). The transcription process is an integral part of qualitative research practice (Nikander 2008), and it is also a part of the analytical process (Elliott 2005; Riessman 2008).

The transcription process includes many choices, for example, related to the nature and level of detail chosen in the transcriptions (Nikander 2008). Transcribing practices can be understood as ranging from those that attempt to describe every detail of the verbal and non-verbal interaction to those that aim to preserve only the words that were spoken (Elliott 2005; Riessman 2008). In this study, the transcripts included talk word for word; some non-word elements, such as laughs and silences, were mentioned in the transcriptions without exact, calculated durations. However, the transcripts did not include, the tone of voice, voice intonation and body language or backchannel noises and coughs. The "full, detailed transcripts" with all the non-verbal communication and paralinguistic aspects (see more Hammersley 2010; King & Horrocks 2010; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Nikander 2008) were not made here, due to the aim of the study and the nature of the analysis. In research that focuses on the content of interviews, as in this study, this kind of approach to transcription may well be appropriate (Elliott 2005).

Getting to know the research data and making analytical considerations – a kind of preliminary analysis – already started during the data gathering and transcription processes. For example, I pondered analytical lenses for primary analysis, made intuitive remarks and notions about the similarities and differences between the vocational teachers with respect to different matters discussed in the interviews, and also made some theoretical notions about the matters emerging from the data. The interpretations of the interviews during the data gathering and transcription were written in a note book; it includes 45 pages (Times New Roman 12, single-spaced marginal 2,5).

In the primary analysis, abductive thinking (Myan 2009; Patton 2002) was used. I did not collect or analyse the data in line with testing hypotheses and theories, but theoretical conceptions and theories helped me to understand and conceptualize the data. This means that analysis was data-driven and theoretically informed. During the primary analysis, the various qualitative approaches were used to analyse the interviews in order to answer the specific research questions of the sub-studies (Table 1, pp. 64). The analytical procedures of the sub-studies occurred separately, but temporally partly as overlapped with each other. I conducted the data analysis related to the interviews with vocational teachers in all sub-studies, but there was discussion about the interpretations among the other researchers during the analysis and reporting processes. Next, I will describe more precisely my analytical approaches and tools in terms of (i) narrative analysis and (ii) thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis from the viewpoint of how they are understood and used here.

5.4.2 Narrative analysis

The manner in which the interviews are interpreted is a crucial part of narrative methodology. Despite the differences among the various narrative methods, narrative analysis is mainly based on a holistic, case-centred strategy (Hänninen 2010; Spector-Mersel 2010), as also in this study. As Riessman (2008) notes, treating narrative accounts as whole units rather than fragmenting them into categories is probably the most fundamental distinction between narrative analysis and other forms of qualitative research (see also Braun & Clarke 2006). While useful for making general statements across many subjects, category-centred approaches eliminate the sequential and structural features that are hallmarks of narrative. Honouring individual agency and intention is difficult when cases are pooled to make statements (Riessman 2008). A holistic approach is also needed if we want to understand the phenomenon under examination over time; for example, its changes, continuities and trajectories (Elliott et al. 2008). Narrative analysis can have regard for the form and structure of a story, on the one hand, and plot and content of a story, on the other hand. Sometimes their combination is also utilized for gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon examined (Elliott 2005; Lieblich et al. 1998; Spector-Mersel 2010). In this study, from a holistic perspective, the data items (i.e. an individual interview and/or two interviews from one person) were analysed by focusing mainly on the contents of interviews, but sometimes also forms. During the narrative analysis, the comparison between data items (i.e. similarities and differences between them) also took place.

Indeed, narrative analysis focuses on the stories told during an interview. However, stories are not always coherent, chronologically and temporally progressing, but through the analytical process a coherent and temporal narrative may be constructed from many data elements spread throughout an interview (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). This construction process refers to chronologically and sequentially organising, integrating and synthesising

events, actions and happenings into a temporally organized, coherent unity (Polkinghorne 1995; Hyvärinen 2008; Lieblich et al. 1998; Riessman 2008). It is a plot which configures events into one meaningful whole with a beginning, a middle and an end. According to Elliott (2005), endings are critical for narratives because it is the ending that determines the meanings of the actions and events within the narrative. Although narrative refers to temporal ordering, plot also has a moral perspective, making causal connections and links where motives and consequences become condensed into a particular reading of events (Polkinghorne 1995; see also Biesta et al. 2008; Hänninen 2010). The construction of narratives can occur through synthesising the elements from an interview and/or interviews told by a person (e.g. Heikkinen 2010). However, the analysis may also include a reconstruction of the many tales told by the different subjects into a typical narrative (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Mishler 1995). Both kinds of procedures took place here. In this study, the data was analysed mainly via narrative approaches, but thematic and content analysis were also utilized. These non-holistic analysis approaches are described next.

5.4.3 Thematic and content analysis

Thematic analysis. Through its theoretical freedom, the thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data (Braun & Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within research data across data items. The concept of a theme is often used in a common-sense way to refer to patterns in data that reveal something interesting regarding the research topic at hand. King and Horrocks (2010, 150) define theme more precisely as follows: "Themes are recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question." The researcher always plays an active role in identifying themes inductively or deductively (which are two primary ways to identify themes), selecting which are the interests and reporting them to readers (Braun & Clarke 2006).

Generally, in thematic analysis, the aim is to look at patterns of themes across the full data set, highlighting what interviewees have in common as well as how they differ (King & Horrocks 2010). Therefore, the purpose of analysis is not only to produce a list of themes, but also to organize those themes in a way that reflects how they are conceptualized to relate to each other. This is almost certain to include some degree of hierarchical relationship, in which main themes encompass sub-themes (Braun & Clarke 2006; King & Horrocks 2010). These are general ideas and principles regarding thematic analysis, but these scholars describe the precise processes of analysis a bit differently. King and Horrocks (2010) describe the process of thematic analysis as including three main stages which are descriptive coding, interpretive coding and overarching themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) have described inductive thematic analysis similarly, but more diversely. In their description, thematic analysis includes six stages. These stages are (i) familiarising yourself with your data, (ii) generating

initial codes, (iii) searching for themes, (iv) reviewing themes, (v) defining and naming themes, and (vi) producing the report. Although it is possible to define the different stages of thematic analysis, in reality conducting an analysis does not progress in a purely sequential manner. There is often the need to cycle back and rethink the previous steps (Braun & Clarke 2006; King & Horrocks 2010). In this study, thematic analysis was mainly conducted in accordance with the principles described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Content analysis. Content analysis is a widely used qualitative research technique to analyse text data in order to describe the phenomenon broadly. That is, it aims to capture core consistencies, contents and meanings of data, and provide a systematic description of the manifested content of data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007; Hsieh & Shannon 2005; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Patton 2002). When using content analysis, the aim is to build a model to describe the phenomenon in a conceptual form. Content analysis can be inductive or deductive (Hsieh & Shannon 2005; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009). From these options, it was inductive content analysis that was applied in this study. In the case of inductive content analysis, the process of analysis includes (i) open coding, (ii) creating categories, and (iii) abstraction (Hsieh & Shannon 2005; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009). This means that at first the data is reduced and coded. Researchers read the data word by word to derive codes by highlighting the exact parts from the text that appear to capture key expressions, thoughts and concepts related to the research questions. Secondly, codes are sorted into sub-categories that present similar meanings based on how different codes are related and linked; the categories are also named (Hsieh & Shannon 2005; Patton 2002). That is, categorising refers to creating meaningful categories into which the units of analysis can be placed (Cohen et al. 2007). Depending on the relationships between categories, researchers can combine or organize the larger number of subcategories into a smaller number of main categories. Finally, abstraction refers to the creation of theoretical concepts regarding the phenomenon. At this stage, the empirical material and findings can be discussed and compared with previous findings and theories (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009).

To sum up, whereas narrative analysis here refers to the fact that analysis occurs holistically within data items, qualitative thematic and content analysis means here that data items are analysed cross-based, and the aim is to search for certain themes, elements, categories, conceptions and patterns across all the data items, and to list the differences and similarities between items (Braun & Clarke 2006). Each analysis approach provides a different way of knowing a phenomenon and leads to unique insights, but they can be combined to gain a more detailed understanding (Riessman 2008).

5.5 Analytical procedures of the sub-studies

In this subsection, I demonstrate how analyses were conducted in the five sub-studies by utilizing various approaches. Narrative analysis approach was mainly utilized to analyse the data (Articles II, III, V). Furthermore, thematic analysis was applied mainly in the first and fourth sub-studies. Qualitative content analysis was utilized together with thematic analysis in the first sub-study and together with narrative analysis in the third sub-study. Next, I describe analytical procedures of all the sub-studies, which are also presented in Table 1 (pp. 64).

The first sub-study (Article I) addressed teachers' agency and professional identities within two different organizations, and it was conducted in collaboration with Päivi Hökkä. Therefore, added to the interviews with sixteen vocational teachers gathered in 2006, the interview data with eight teacher educators was utilized. The interviewed teacher educators varied in age, subject matter and length of work history in a teacher education department (For further information on the participants and the interviews, see Hökkä 2012). We each analysed our own authentic data sets separately due to ethical reasons, but through the analysis process we jointly made the analytical decisions.

The data was analysed in accordance with data-driven qualitative approaches, applying content analysis and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006; Patton 2002). In the initial phase of the analysis, relating to the first research question, we separately read the interviews many times (in my case the interviews with vocational teachers) in order to familiarize ourselves with the data and sketch preliminary impressions of the data. Simultaneously, we made notes, initially coded the data and identified at a general level how teachers described their own work organization's social suggestions, and how these were related to their agency. Thus, we gained a complementary understanding of the nature of the organizations based on teachers' experiences and thoughts. Then, we discussed together and compared teachers' accounts of their work organizations. Through comparison, we noticed that the teachers from the two organizations described their organizations in two different ways in terms of how the management produced different degrees of social suggestion on teachers' work and agency. A more specific comparative process involved more discussion among the researchers, re-reading the interviews and finding similarities and differences in the teachers' accounts. This collaborative process included searching themes, discussing, reviewing and naming the themes. Through thematic analysis, we identified the most specific elements and aspects which illustrated the social suggestions of the work organizations. We grouped these aspects, placing them on three hierarchical levels: work organization, professional community, and individual. Finally, we defined the nature of the specific aspects existing in both organizations. It should be remembered that the findings are based on the teachers' interviews. Thus, the

descriptions of the organizations should not be understood as objective descriptions of reality within workplaces.

In the second phase, regarding the second research question, we analysed what the teachers said was important to them in their work, including the tasks that were meaningful for them. From the accounts given, we inductively identified the common elements, features and perceptions related to the research question, and compared differences and similarities between them. Finally, we constructed four orientations towards the profession, which differed from each other, and conceptualized these categories. At the final stage of the analysis, we explored how the teachers' different orientations towards their profession were related to the social suggestions of their work organizations.

The second sub-study (Article II) used the interviews with the sixteen vocational teachers conducted in 2006. It sought to understand teachers' agency in boundary-crossing settings, including those visits to workplaces that were related in particular to students' workplace learning. At the centre of the narrative analysis (Lieblich et al. 1998; Riessman 2008) were told episodes and situations from the teachers' boundary-crossing settings. At the start of the analysis, each interview was carefully read several times. The accounts of the boundary-crossing settings emerged across interviews, and were intertwined with other topics. Because of this, we identified and holistically extracted those parts of the interviews in which teachers described themselves, their work-related activities and the ways of working in boundary-crossing settings, including the interpretations they gave for their decisions and actions. After this data extraction, we summarized each interview (i.e. we created short illustrative accounts from all the original interviews) for further analysis.

After compiling the summaries, we re-read each of them as a whole, seeking answers to the research questions. At this stage, we preliminarily outlined the forms of exercising agency and identified the resources and constraints that were related to teachers' exercise of agency. This holistic reading and analysing of the contents made it possible to analyse the possible variations in the exercise of agency in relation to the different episodes *within* individual accounts. Previously, Billett (2006a) has suggested that there can be variation in subjects' agency over time and situations. In the next stage of the analysis, we searched for differences and similarities concerning the teachers' agency *between* individual accounts. As a result, we identified five different main forms of exercising agency, representing variations across the interviewed teachers. These forms were named to describe the nature of agency. In addition, we elaborated the main resources and constraints that might be related to each form of exercising agency. We also summarized and categorised the resources and constrains related to all five forms of exercising agency. The identified agency categories represented the variation of data comprehensively, since all the interviewed teachers could be placed in one of the five categories. In addition, in each category we could place more than one teacher. However, even within one category there was no individual teacher who was totally identical to another teacher.

The third sub-study (Article III) utilized the vocational teachers' interviews gathered in 2006 in order to examine teachers' orientations towards the educational reform and the groundings for them. The data was analysed in accordance with data-driven qualitative content analysis (Patton 2002) and narrative analysis approaches (Polkinghorne 1995; Riessman 2002). The analysis included four phases. In the first phase of the analysis, each written protocol was read several times in order to discover the subject's characterisation of the reform. The reading was as a narrative: the interviews were read holistically. The aim was to identify the most meaningful contents of the data, such as a general description of the reform and the teacher's views of the reform. These descriptions were extracted from the primary interviews, and then compressed into briefer descriptions for further analysis.

After reading and compressing the teachers' accounts, the second stage of the analysis started by systematically coding, highlighting and mapping the teachers' opinions, thoughts and perceptions of the reform. A holistic analysis was applied, since it made it possible to concentrate on the similarities and differences within the individual accounts, and thus also to reveal the possible contradictory views and thoughts of the reform within each teacher's interview. Overall, three different general orientations towards the reform were identified across the different interviews. The descriptions of these orientations were created with typical conceptions and perceptions to illustrate orientations.

Thereafter, the third phase of the analysis involved an elaboration of the individual backgrounds and the social affordances that might be related to the teachers' different orientations. First, the contents of interviews were coded within each interview, and then the typical individual and social features were mapped related to each individual orientation towards the reform. Finally, all the individual and social aspects were mapped, categorised and conceptualized. The fourth phase of the analysis included the creation of narratives related to both the research questions. Within the similar orientation, the teachers' described reasons for their orientations showed a degree of variation, and therefore we were able to arrive at six narratives (two narratives related to each orientation) in order to comprehensively illustrate the teachers' orientations towards the reform with various resources. The narratives were constructed using parts of certain teachers' accounts that showed features in common.

The fourth sub-study (Article IV) sought to identify the personal strategies the vocational teachers adopted in engaging with the reform. This was done by using the interviews of the 16 vocational teachers gathered in 2006. Mainly thematic analysis was applied. The analyses comprised the identification of themes and a categorisation of the data around those themes. The first step was to read the written protocol in order to obtain an overall sense of the interview data, with a particular focus on identifying the various kinds of strategies teachers adopted in order to adapt to the changing work practices. After reading the interviews carefully and systematically, we coded the contents of the data in terms of relating to the aim of the study. All potential themes, patterns and elements were highlighted and identified. They included views of

the current reform and on-going educational changes, orientations towards the work, and their values and commitments at work. Then the data was re-read against these themes. From the similarities and differences in the teachers' accounts, five distinct personal strategies were identified as being adopted. The strategies were named according to their contents. Furthermore, we were interested in teachers' reasons for particular strategies. We thus identified the teachers' concerns in the reform context which were related to their engagement. These concerns were listed related to each strategy and across all strategies. We were only interested in those kinds of concerns that teachers described verbally in the interviews, not objective factors such as age if teachers did not talk about their age being a reason for a particular strategy.

The analysis was data-driven, meaning that the aim of the analysis was not, for example, to test some theories and hypothesis. Instead, the strategies were delineated through empirical data, rather than to be premised on theoretical assumptions. However, the study's theoretical orientation was applied to describe and conceptualize the findings. The accounts of the teachers' personal strategies that were reported were constructions, i.e. the strategies do not relate to individual teachers' accounts on a strict one-to-one basis. Nevertheless, it was found that each teacher tended, broadly speaking, to identify with a particular strategy.

The fifth sub-study (Article V) investigated the vocational teachers' longitudinal pathways in the course of educational reform by focusing on their professional identity negotiations and self-positioning at two different points in time. The sub-study used the data obtained by interviewing 14 vocational teachers twice in 2006 and 2007, i.e. 28 interviews in total. Thus, we excluded the interviews with teachers who did not take part in 2007. By using holistic-content and holistic-form modes of reading (Gergen & Gergen 1986; Lieblich et al. 1998), we analysed how the vocational teachers positioned themselves and presented their professional identity in relation to the reform at its different stages. We were concerned with whether there were changes in teachers' positions and identities or whether they remained similar. In connection with this, we also analysed the kinds of factors which, as depicted by the teachers, were associated with transformations and continuities.

For the purposes of the analysis, the two interviews with each teacher were first read as a whole, moving from case to case. This was done in order to get a holistic picture of the bases and processes of teachers' self-positioning and professional identity negotiations in relation to the reform at two different points in time. The focus was on the most meaningful contents of each interview (in terms of the research questions), and on the storylines of the interviews. Through this narrative reading, it became clear that the teachers had different pathways through the reform. Through a comparison of the continuities and transformations in self-positioning and in the professional identities manifested between the teachers, and through an examination of the factors that seemed to be involved, we chose five teachers' cases to demonstrate the diversity of teachers' pathways in the course of the reform for main analysis.

The main criterion for selecting five teachers was, first of all, that all three initial orientations (resistant, inconsistent, and approving orientations) towards the reform were represented among the teachers selected (Article III). In addition, we wanted to present variation involving both transformations and continuities in teachers' positions and in their professional identities in relation to the reform. All the teachers' cases were in some respects unique; hence we cannot claim that the interviews chosen are in every way representative of the material as a whole. Nevertheless, the contents and patterns identified in the selected cases did emerge, to a greater or lesser degree, in most of the interviews.

Following the selection, the interviews were re-read and the data from the two interviews with the teacher in question was extracted (in terms of the research questions). At this stage, a single core narrative was created for each of the five teachers in such a way that each narrative formed a coherent unity, progressing chronologically. The five identified narratives were then named according to their contents in terms of the pathway. This process can be compared to Polkinghorne's (1995) description of the process of narrative analysis, where the aim is to develop a narrative with a plot, i.e. synthesise the data elements into a coherent developmental account, with diachronic descriptions of events.

5.6   Overview of the methodological implementation

Table 1 (pp. 64) provides an overview of the methodological implementation of each sub-study, whose findings were reported in the original publications. When I reported the original findings, I used interview quotations. Quotations brought immediacy and transparency to the phenomena under study by allowing the audience access to inspect the data on which the analysis is based, and assess the "validity" of the analysis and my interpretations, statements and arguments (see Hammersley 2010; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). In some sub-studies (Article V) the interviewer's questions and comments were added in quotations. This is important when knowledge is understood as produced between subjects in interview situations (Hammersley 2010). However, mostly they were not included, since I needed to keep the quotations short due to the maximum lengths of publications.

TABLE 1   Research questions and methodological implementation of the sub-studies

The focus of sub-study	Research questions	Data and participants	Data analysis
I *Agency and professional identities within the educational organization*	(1) How do teachers perceive the social suggestions of their work organizations, and how are these related to their agency? (2) How do teachers describe their orientations towards the profession, and how are these related to the various social suggestions of their work organizations?	Interviews with 16 vocational teachers and with eight educators gathered in 2005–2006.	Qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis
II *Agency in boundary-crossing settings between school and working life*	(1) What forms of agency do vocational teachers exercise in the course of their work in boundary-crossing settings? (2) What are the main resources and constraints related to the different forms of agency exercised by vocational teachers in boundary-crossing settings?	Interviews with 16 vocational teachers conducted in 2006.	Narrative analysis
III *Orientations towards the reform at its initial stage*	(1) How do vocational teachers perceive and describe their orientations towards a major curriculum reform at its initial stage? (2) How are vocational teachers' orientations towards the reform related to their individual backgrounds and social affordances?	Interviews with 16 vocational teachers gathered in 2006.	Qualitative content analysis and narrative analysis
IV *Engagements within the reform at its initial stage*	(1) What kinds of personal strategies that the teachers adopted in engaging with the reform can be identified? (2) What kinds of the teachers' individual concerns were related to these strategies?	Interviews with 16 vocational teachers conducted 2006.	Thematic analysis
V *Professional identities and positions in relation to the reform through its different stages*	(1) What kinds of continuities and transformations can be identified in vocational teachers' positions and professional identities in relation to a curriculum reform, as the reform process unfolds? (2) How do vocational teachers describe the grounds for the continuities and transformations that occur in their positions and professional identities in the reform context?	Repeated interviews with 14 teachers collected in 2006 and 2007.	Narrative analysis

6 THE FINDINGS OF THE EMPIRICAL SUB-STUDIES

Vocational teachers' professional agency amid changing work practices was explored through five empirical sub-studies. The findings of each sub-study were reported comprehensively in the original publications (see Articles I–V). Next, I portray the overview of the main findings of each sub-study.

6.1 Agency and professional identities within the tight management culture of educational organization (Article I)

Through a comparative research frame, the first sub-study aimed to examine how different organizational settings created constraints and possibilities for teachers to practise their agency and orientations towards their profession, and further to commit themselves to the educational organization. This was done by utilizing data from two educational organizations, involving a vocational institution and a university department of teacher education. The organizations differed from each other in terms of the type of management culture they practised and the consequent strength of social suggestion placed on teachers' work. Thus, the organizations could be identified as a tightly coupled organization (presenting vocational institution), and a loosely coupled organization (presenting teacher education department) (see e.g. Meyer 2002; Weick 1976). Here, I report the findings concerning vocational teachers and vocational institution. The findings are divided into two sections: (i) teachers' accounts of their agency in relation to the social suggestions of their educational organization, and (ii) teachers' orientations towards their profession, and the relationships of the orientations to the social suggestions of the educational organization.

Teachers' accounts of their agency in relation to the social suggestions of their educational organization. Connected to the work-organizational level accounts, vocational teachers reported a sense of weak professional agency concerning their work and reform practices. The teachers described their organization as hierarchical, controlling and restrictive. According to the teachers, their work

was increasingly controlled through administrative suggestions and regulations. The teachers explained that many of the important decisions concerning education, resources, the curriculum and the contents of teachers' work were made by the organization's administration. The organization was also described as dynamic, which organized constant changes in education and organization. The teachers reported that they felt powerless without any extensive opportunities to influence the conditions and contents of changes. For example, the current educational reform was seen as having been planned and organized mainly by the administration. In this kind of situation, the teachers wished for more opportunities to participate in decision making in order to influence their work and reform. They also hoped for better explanations for continuous transformations – this information would have supported their commitment to changes. The teachers also reported that at the community level the professional groups (consisting of teachers who taught within the same study programme) had no strong sense of having the power to affect broader organizational decisions, but were able to negotiate some concrete issues that had arisen. At the individual level, they did appear to have a certain sense of strong agency related to the ways of teaching and working. However, some teachers had also faced some control in terms of deciding how to work.

Teachers' orientations towards their profession, and the relationships of the orientations to the social suggestions of the educational organization. On the basis of all the interviews, we identified four types of orientations towards the profession: (i) an *educational* orientation, (ii) a *subject-matter* orientation, (iii) a *network* orientation, and (iv) a *research and development* orientation. Our further analysis revealed that the organization both constrained and opened up opportunities for vocational teachers to pursue their orientations, depending on their nature. The network-oriented teachers and the research and development-oriented teachers did find opportunities to practise their orientations towards the profession. They were mainly satisfied at work, but they wished for more time, resources and authority in order to carry out their duties successfully. On the contrary, the educational and subject-matter oriented teachers argued that they were not able to practise their orientations, or at least not as much as before, since their orientations were in conflict with social suggestions and external directions that impacted on their work. As a result, their professional identities were threatened and they were fairly dissatisfied at work. Therefore, many teachers did not feel a strong commitment to the organization, and they made it clear that their commitment would be further weakened if their job descriptions continued to undergo change. Furthermore, some teachers emphasized that working amid continuous changes is exhausting, and they wished for stability. Without this, they would increasingly lose their organizational commitment.

To sum up, the vocational institution as a tightly coupled organization created quite a few constraints on teachers to practise their agency and professional orientations, but created many changes in educational and organizational practices through the tight management culture. In contrast,

teachers from the other educational organization (a teacher education department) reported unlimited opportunities for their agency and professional orientations within existing loosely coupled management culture. However, this kind of organization seemed to prevent organizational changes, although it supported teachers' strong commitment to the organization. Overall, this sub-study showed that teachers are likely to be less committed to their educational organization when they do not have enough agency and opportunities to practise their professional orientations, and when major changes are imposed on their working practices from outside. A lack of opportunities to practise professional agency and orientations also seemed to decrease teachers' work satisfaction. However, the findings also revealed that weak individual agency within a tight management culture can create a basis for social development.

Notably, this sub-study gave a general description of the organizational opportunities and constrains on vocational teachers' professional agency in terms of influencing their work within educational organization. To complete the findings of this sub-study, the next sub-study (Article II) moves to depict elaborated information of teachers' agency in work settings outside their own educational organization.

6.2 Various ways of working in boundary-crossing settings between school and working life (Article II)

The second sub-study investigated the forms and resources of agency among vocational teachers with reference to boundary-crossing between school and working life. Agency was understood to be manifested as decisions and choices on their ways of working, and as work-related activities based on them. The findings revealed the following five forms of exercising agency: (i) restricted agency, (ii) extensive agency, (iii) multifaceted balancing agency, (iv) situationally diverse agency and (v) relationally emergent agency. These forms were individually intertwined with the teachers' sense of their professional self (i.e. teachers' perceptions of their professional interests, professional competencies and work experiences). Agency was also linked to teachers' awareness of their relationships with workplace personnel, and their views of the professional tasks determined by the school. Next, I briefly introduce these five forms of exercising agency one by one, plus the resources related to them.

The teachers who exercised *restricted agency* acted in a humble, passive and uncritical way while carrying out their professional responsibilities in boundary-crossing settings. This means that they did not advise the workplace personnel's ways of working and did not intervene in the practices taught to students by employees, even if they might be unsuitable. The teachers' activities were mainly guided by their awareness of their unequal relationship with the employees and their interest in avoiding conflicts with them, and to some degree, by a sense of a lack of highly specialized professional competencies

within the vocational field. In case of restricted agency, the teachers did not create any conflicts, but such an approach created constraints in performing their professional tasks adequately. The teachers also wished for more hours and support for the tasks concerning students' workplace learning.

In the case of *extensive agency*, when the teachers worked outside the school, they were active participants in collaboration with the workplace personnel and in guiding the students at workplaces without any attempts to be humble. The teachers decided on their activities according to their professional interests, and on that basis, acted actively as teachers in a way they saw meaningful. In addition, their good professional competencies within the vocational field supported their working. The teachers were aware of employees' opinions concerning the teachers and the students. However, this awareness did not constrain the teachers and they ignored any supposed inequalities between teachers and employees. In case of extensive agency, the teachers were able to perform their professional duties, and also developed the practices of the workplaces.

Those teachers who exercised *multifaceted balancing agency* took an active and collaborative role, because they wanted to find a fit between their professional intentions and the employees' needs. The teachers were enthusiastic in practising their professional interests, and therefore they also spent much time voluntarily co-operating with the employees. By such means, they could show that they were ordinary people and professionally competent within the vocational field. At the same time, their purpose was to be a collaborative and helpful actor who took the needs and conditions of workplaces into account. All in all, these teachers' agency was broadly based on their professional interests and competencies, their previous work experiences, and their views of their relationship with the employees. In case of multifaceted balancing agency, teachers could create new ways of acting as teachers, and novel working practices between the school and the work, and prepare the ground for developing education. All this was mainly possible because the teachers were active without being too aggressive, but without receiving adequate help, resources or support from the school.

In the case of *situationally diverse agency*, the teachers acted differently depending on the situation in boundary-crossing conditions. This variety meant that they were both active and passive actors, mainly on the basis of their views of their professional tasks, and their awareness of the quite unequal relationships between workplace personnel and teachers from their perspective. On the one hand, the teachers acted energetically and were active in demonstrating their professional competencies within the vocational field, with a view to re-negotiate their relationships with the employees in order to fulfil their professional tasks successfully. Their good professional competencies were a further resource in these activities. On the other hand, they acted passively in the sense that they drew back from developing the practices of the workplaces. They did not see it as their professional duty and did not wish to irritate employees, and thus they did not question existing work practices or

did not give advice to the employees, even if it would have been useful. That is, in the case of situationally diverse agency, the teachers carried out their professional duties without developing workplace practices.

The teachers who exercised *relationally emergent agency* were constantly active in carrying out their responsibilities as teachers in boundary-crossing settings, although they felt that school did not offer sufficient working time for their working. In addition to actively performing professional duties, the teachers acted differently over time. If they were not familiar with the employees, they were fairly cautious in their dealings with them. When these relationships became more familiar and equal over time through demonstrating teachers' knowledge within the field, the teachers became more active in terms of questioning employees' ways of working and developing the work practices. In case of relationally emergent agency, the teachers thus acted on the basis of how they viewed themselves in relation to their professional tasks and to the employees. Their active role was further promoted by their good professional competencies.

To sum up, the findings demonstrated that there were considerable differences in exercising agency among vocational teachers, and how agency was related to the resources and constraints that were both individual and social by nature. Furthermore, the teachers might exercise agency in a more or less identical manner through different situations and over time. The findings also revealed that depending on its nature and direction, agency appeared to create diverse conditions for teachers' productive work in boundary-crossing settings, for developing education, and for remaking the work practices of workplaces. However, despite the form of exercising agency, all the teachers felt that boundary-crossing is a fruitful landscape for their individual learning.

So far, the sub-studies (Articles I–II) have mainly addressed vocational teachers' agency in terms of influencing one's work within and outside the educational organization. The following sub-studies (Articles III-V) deepen the understanding of professional agency in the course of educational reform. The next sub-study (III) illustrates how teachers' agency was manifested through taking a position towards the reform and influencing the reform at its initial stage.

6.3 Orientations towards the reform at its initial stage: Variation from resistance to approving (Article III)

The third sub-study sought to illustrate vocational teachers' orientations, which illuminate the teachers' self-positioning towards an educational reform at its initial stage. Here, I briefly introduce teachers' orientations towards the reform, and the individual backgrounds and social affordances related to them. Then I illustrate teachers' shared views of the reform, including their accounts of opportunities to influence the reform.

The findings revealed the main orientations, comprising a *resistant* orientation, an *approving* orientation and an *inconsistent* orientation towards the reform. The teachers with a resistant orientation were against the current reform by positioning themselves openly as opponent of the reform. The teachers with an approving orientation were generally positively and enthusiastically inclined towards the reform by positioning themselves wholesale as supporters of the reform. Some teachers had also conflicting perceptions of changing work practices and an ambiguous position towards the reform. Thus, their orientation towards the reform was inconsistent.

Teachers had different orientations precisely because they were individually utilizing various resources in self-positioning towards the reform. The orientations were shaped by the following aspects: (i) the teachers' *actual sense of their professional selves*: this involved conceptions of their role, beliefs about the students' learning, and views of the goals of education, (ii) their *prior working experience:* this included working in vocational institutions and working-life institutions and moving between the two; it also included experiences of organising students' workplace learning, (iii) their *expectations concerning their professional future*: this included their ideas of their own future role as teachers, and their orientations to the future, and (iv) their *social affordances*: this involved the practices and traditions of the vocational study programmes, and also the social suggestions provided by organizational factors in the schooling and working-life contexts**.** Overall, the different resources seemed to emerge from the past, present and future. *However,* the teachers' age, teaching experience and gender were not directly related to their orientations, which is not in accordance with the previous findings (e.g. Hargreaves 2005).

Although there were differences among the vocational teachers' self-positioning, all the teachers also shared particular views on the reform. On the plus side, the teachers emphasized that the reform would open up opportunities for teachers' professional development within the vocational field, and that it would increase co-operation between the school and workplaces. The top-down planning and imposition of the reform was seen as a negative aspect; there had been no serious attempts to take into account the opinions of teachers or of representatives from working life. Indeed, the reform was planned and organized mainly on a top-down basis without ample opportunities for the teachers to influence reform practices other than putting the reform ideals into practice. In addition, the timetable of the reform was seen as too rapid, and the information provided on the reform had been inadequate. In a sense, the teachers also saw the reform as a means of cutting costs. Under the new curriculum the students would do more of their studying in the workplace than before. In view of this, the teachers thought that the reorganization would reduce their working hours within the school, but perhaps not all these working hours would be transferred from the school to the working-life context.

The sub-study offered a delicate description of vocational teachers' initial orientations towards the reform. However, without a further follow-up study

we cannot assume that the positions will remain stable towards the reform. Such a study is presented in Article V. Furthermore, this third sub-study focused only on teachers' positions – mental stances – towards the reform. Thus, in order to better understand teachers' involvement with the reform, it is important to investigate how teachers implement reform's ideas in practice and engage with the reform, which is the focus of the following sub-study.

6.4 Engagement within the reform at its initial stage: Variation from active participation to withdrawal (Article IV)

The fourth sub-study sought to discuss how vocational teachers manage with rapid transformations in their work practices through active, personally-shaped processes. It examined how teachers exercised agency through the adaptation of strategies of engagement with the educational reform. The teachers concerned were selective in their relation to workplace social suggestions, and from their accounts, we identified five distinct strategies that were adopted to engage with the reform. The strategies were labelled as follows: (i) professional development, (ii) passive accommodation, (iii) active participation, (iv) a balancing act, and (v) withdrawal. Teachers' different orientations towards the reform (Article III) did not unambiguously explain the nature of their engagement. Instead, the strategies were aligned to the teachers' concerns about teachers' personal well-being, the practice of professional identity, work performance, workload, and the impacts of the reform on the students. Next, I summarize different strategies that the teachers adopted in engaging with the reform, plus particular concerns interconnected with them.

Teachers with the *professional development* strategy mainly had a positive attitude towards the current reform, and they were also motivated to carry out the tasks mandated by the reform. However, they were concerned about their performance as teachers, reporting that their professional competencies were inadequate to carry out the expanded tasks. They viewed professional development and training as a strategy to secure all the competencies needed to fulfil the required duties as a teacher. That is, professional development played a key role in terms of coping with the social expectations and changing tasks, and successfully engaging in the reform.

Teachers with the *passive accommodation* strategy were simply ready to accept and adjust to the social demands in the reform context – despite their opinions, also negative, of the continuous changes and the current reform – through taking a less involved approach to their work. They were ready to carry out their professional tasks, but since their main concern was their well-being, they wanted to do their job without excessive investment with small effort. In the reform context, they also wanted to avoid criticism of the reform; they believed that resisting the changes would be exhausting and fruitless because of the organization's management culture.

Teachers who expressed the *active participation* strategy had both negative and positive comments about the educational changes and the recent reform. In particular, teachers were worried about how the reform would impact on the students. Therefore, despite their own – also negative – attitudes to the reform, they wanted to actively participate in the implementation of the reform in order to support students in a new situation and to make the reform successful through their own activities. In this situation, teachers did not passively accept the approaches and role-related ways of working determined by the organization, but they wanted to transform and refine them to be more suitable.

Teachers with the *balancing act* strategy had a positive attitude to the continuous development and how the current reform would influence their work. They could even be described as agents of change, since they were willing to develop actively educational practices. However, they reported that teachers' work amid continuous changes was exhausting. The exhaustion was held to be caused especially by having too much work and by not having enough time or resources, or the power to make decisions. Teachers mentioned many schemes and alternative ideas which might promote their well-being. These included working as part-time teachers and taking a sabbatical period. Overall, a balancing act illustrates both teachers' active engagement in the reform and their partial retreat from work.

Teachers with the *withdrawal* strategy criticised the continuous development and the current reform. They were willing to continue as teachers for the present, but their commitments to the organization or the profession were becoming less. There were two forms of withdrawal. The first form illustrates how conflicts between individuals' professional identities and the social demands of the reform can result in non-engagement with the organization. The second form of withdrawal demonstrates how teachers worried about their performance as teachers in the absence of adequate support, and they were also concerned that their working hours might be decreased. All this led them to talk about leaving the profession and the organization. Thus, the withdrawal strategy illustrates teachers' suspicious engagement with the reform and their readiness to disengage with the reform and the organization.

The findings emphasized that teachers' active and wholehearted engagement with the reform and commitment to educational organization cannot be taken for granted. Teachers' individually varied concerns, mainly related to their embodied and practical aspects, and identities at work, influence their engagements and commitments in the reform context. Taking a broader perspective, teachers and their agency are intertwined with the social context. They could exercise agency within the reform context by making choices in the adoption of particular strategies – although one could also say that they were forced to make these kinds of choices and decisions, given the social demands they faced.

This fourth sub-study offered a way to understand teachers' engagement with educational reform at its initial stage. However, in order to gain exact details of the complexity of reform processes and teachers' agency in the reform

context, it is important to take a longitudinal approach to how teachers transform and maintain their professional identities and positions towards the reform in the long run. These issues are addressed in the next sub-study.

6.5 Transforming and maintaining professional identities and positions in relation to the reform through its different stages (Article V)

The fifth sub-study examined vocational teachers' pathways in the course of an educational reform by addressing teachers' professional identity negotiations and self-positioning as longitudinal processes. This was done by utilizing the teachers' repeated interviews conducted in 2006 and in 2007. The teachers were found to exhibit distinctive pathways through the reform: an empowerment pathway, a critical but adaptive pathway, an open and expectant pathway, a successful transformation pathway, and a struggling pathway. The pathways demonstrated that the teachers' self-positioning in respect of the reform and their own professional identities showed varying degrees of continuity and transformation. Next, I briefly introduce these pathways; the construction of each pathway was based on interviews with one teacher.

The *empowerment pathway*, demonstrated by Ella's narrative, showed how she remained approvingly disposed towards the reform through its different stages. Initially she was optimistic and saw the reform as an excellent opportunity to adopt some desired tasks as a teacher and to practise her professional interests through meaningful tasks better than previously. For Ella, the professional tasks had not corresponded to her desired view of teacher's work, and she had even considered leaving the profession. During the reform, her initial hopes were realized, and she gained positive experiences from interacting with partners from working life. She experienced that she was successful at her work, which she also experienced as interesting and meaningful. Based on her experiences, Ella exercised agency by positioning herself in a similar manner throughout the reform and by maintaining, or even strengthening, her existing professional identity. All in all, she was more satisfied with and committed to her work than before.

The *critical but adaptive pathway*, illustrated by Jacob's narrative, revealed his unchanging, resistant position towards the reform. He maintained professional identity as the reform process unfolded. Initially, he interpreted the reform as being in conflict with his professional beliefs and interests, and he foresaw difficulties in carrying out his tasks. During the reform, his negative expectations were realized: he gained negative experiences concerning the students and their learning. Nor could he perform all his tasks, which he experienced as emotionally difficult and frustrating. Despite this, he adjusted to the new situation as a matter of deliberate strategy. He had noticed from previous experience over the years that it was easier to be quiet and adaptive,

even if he had to carry out tasks that went against his professional beliefs, since there were no opportunities to influence the conditions of his work or the reform context despite serious attempts. During the reform, he did exercise agency in terms of maintaining his critical position and refusing to change his professional identity. However, this reluctance to change seemed to lead to cynicism and a sense of conflicted identity.

The *open and expectant pathway*, demonstrated by Oliver's narrative, displayed how he continued to maintain his professional identity and an open mind concerning the reform. Initially, he had some negative comments about it, but he also mentioned some advantages. However, he wanted to wait and see what the consequences would be for his work and for the students' learning; meaning that he oriented inconsistently towards the reform. As the reform progressed, he had both negative and positive experiences and also some fears related to the future. However, in this situation he handled disappointments and emerging emotions with good grace, and did not wish to define his position definitely. His pathway suggests that the actual nature of the experiences gained during the reform was not always the essential factor in positioning oneself. In fact, what seemed to matter most was the way in which the experiences and emotions were interpreted. All in all, Oliver was as committed and satisfied with his work as he had been previously.

The s*uccessful transformation pathway*, demonstrated by Martha's narrative, showed a transformation in self-positioning and professional identity. Initially, she criticised the reform, because its directions were in conflict with her professional identity, including her professional interests as a teacher and her beliefs concerning students. However, Martha later became increasingly enthusiastic and satisfied, to the extent of becoming positively and approvingly disposed towards the reform. It seemed to be her positive experiences – related to her own professional development, success at carrying out her professional duties, recognition from employees, and the activities of employees related to taking care of students – that did most to promote her self-repositioning and to change her professional identity. Another factor promoting change was the fact that her fears regarding students' learning were not realized. Overall, Martha exercised her agency by changing her position towards the reform and by renegotiating her professional identity, using positive experiences as resources.

The *struggling pathway*, illustrated by Hannah's narrative, portrayed a transformation in her position towards the reform and continuity in her professional identity. Initially, Hannah was enthusiastic, seeing the reform and new, expanded, professional duties as congruent with her professional identity. She thought that the reform would particularly offer an opportunity for working in the desired role. However, the reform did not bring what she had desired or had been promised. She was unable to carry out meaningful professional tasks, and was unable to remedy the situation or influence the content of her work in spite of her active efforts. She was forced to take on roles which she did not want and had not been trained for; she also had a huge workload with inadequate external resources. Nor had the effects on students

been as positive as she had expected. As time went on, she increasingly experienced a lack of motivation, disappointment, exhaustion and a troubled identity, while all the time becoming more critical of the reform. Although her agency was restricted in influencing her work, in a sense she maintained some degree of agency in her refusal to abandon her professional interests and the role she believed in.

The findings showed that there were similarities and differences in the teachers' positions towards the reform. It further appeared that the same teacher could have multiple and even contradictory positions at different moments, or that the positions could be more or less permanent. The teachers' professional identities also showed varying degrees of continuity and transformation during the reform. The teachers changed or sustained their positions and identities on the basis of their individual interpretations of the experiences and emotions they underwent during the reform. Their experiences and emotions concerning the reform were related to its influences on their work and on their students, and on the social resources that had been available to them. The opportunities and constraints surrounding professional identity and/or the exercise of agency (in terms of influencing the work and the reform) undoubtedly had a powerful influence on how teachers experienced the reform emotionally, and on how they responded to the reform and negotiated their identities. The findings also showed how the reform tended to polarize teachers, especially in terms of work satisfaction, well-being and motivation.

7 DISCUSSING THE MAIN FINDINGS ON PROFESSIONAL AGENCY

The central aim of the study was to contribute to a more detailed understanding of professional agency. This section gives an overview and discusses the findings of the empirical sub-studies according to the overarching research questions. For a start, I describe the manifestations of (Subsection 7.1), the resources of (Subsection 7.2), and the temporal nature of (Subsection 7.3) professional agency. Following this, I portray the meaning of vocational teachers' professional agency at the individual and social level (Subsection 7.4).

7.1 The multifaceted manifestations of professional agency

The first overarching research question focused on the manifestations of professional agency. This section illustrates how professional agency was manifested variously in terms of (i) influence on one's work, (ii) involvement with educational reform, and (iii) the negotiation of professional identity.

7.1.1 Influence on work: Weak – strong

The findings revealed that vocational teachers' professional agency, in terms of influencing one's work, was manifested to a lesser or greater extent. On the one hand, the teachers experienced a lack of direct influence on the contents and conditions of their work at the community and organizational levels since their work was considerably controlled by external decision-making bodies and social, administrative suggestions. The teachers also experienced a lack of influence on the contents and conditions of educational reform at its different stages (Articles I, III, V). This illustrates that the teachers' professional agency appeared to be weak. The teachers shared a common understanding of this kind of weak agency regarding their work. These findings are in line with the recent discussion, which emphasizes that the work of teachers in general and

that of Finnish vocational teachers seems to be increasingly controlled (e.g. Filander 2008; Menter 2009; Vanhalakka-Ruoho 2006). The findings further support the recent notions that in the context of transforming education, teachers can perceive themselves more often as outsider or passive objects whose actions are mainly regulated by external actions than as active subjects whose opinions and ideas do matter (Lasky 2005; Pyhältö et al. 2012).

On the other hand, the findings showed that teachers' professional agency in terms of influencing their work seemed to be strong, since they were able to make choices about the ways of working at an individual level. Similarly, some other authors have suggested that the ways of working of employees, including teachers, are not totally externally imposed, but that there is always space for their agency at work (e.g. Billett 2008; Ketelaar et al. 2012). The exercising of agency was possible when vocational teachers taught and guided students within the educational organization (Article I; see also Hökkä et al. 2010a; Vähäsantanen 2007) and when they worked in boundary-crossing settings, guiding the students' workplace learning outside the educational organization and working with the representatives of working life (Article II). In boundary-crossing settings, all the interviewed teachers actively exercised agency in terms of making work-related choices and decisions and executing them (see also Isopahkala-Bouret 2010). Their choices, however, led to the various strengths and forms of practical activities. Teachers' activities varied from actively working and initiating suggestions to improve work practices of working life to being passive and uncritical. The findings showed altogether five diverse ways of exercising agency in boundary-crossing settings: (i) restricted agency, (ii) extensive agency, (iii) multifaceted balancing agency, (iv) situationally diverse agency, and (v) relationally emergent agency.

Overall, it seems that vocational teachers were able to determine how to work, but they might be unable to participate in influencing change directions and determining what to do. Thus, as a main finding, one can stress that in terms of influencing one's work, the teachers' professional agency was manifested to a lesser or greater extent, and varied from weak to strong agency. This implies that, in a sense, teachers balance between their independence and external control at their work (see also Pyhältö et al. 2012).

7.1.2 Involvement with the reform: Reserved – progressive

The findings showed that vocational teachers individually made choices concerning their involvement with changing work practices. Even if the reform in question was the same, there was tremendous variation between teachers in terms of taking positions towards the reform (see also Ketelaar et al. 2012; van Veen & Sleegers 2006) and engaging with the reform (see Ballet & Kelchtermans 2008; Brain et al. 2006). The teachers' positions towards the reform at its initial stage were resistant, inconsistent and approving (Article III). This shows (see also Luttenberg, van Veen & Imants 2011) that teachers' reactions to reforms cannot be perceived only in terms of agreement or resistance (e.g. März & Kelchtermans 2013). Furthermore, the teachers' engagement strategies varied

from active participation to withdrawal. The strategies also included professional development, a passive accommodation and a balancing act (Article IV). The strategies showed that there might be a conflict between actions at the mental and practical level. For example, some teachers took the stance to strongly resist the reform, but still participated actively in its implementation, e.g. they innovatively refashioned the ways of working suggested to them.

In the course of the reform, the teachers' perceptions of and positions towards the reform were changed and sustained. For example, one teacher stayed as a critical performer over time, while another initially resistant teacher became an enthusiastic supporter of the reform. Yet another initially enthusiastic teacher lost passion and motivation over time (Article V). That is, the findings showed how initially reform-enthusiastic teachers can be at risk (van Veen et al. 2005; van Veen & Sleegers 2009), but teachers can also have positive pathways through the reform despite their initial positions. In contrast, the study of Lee and Yin (2011) has shown teachers' quite unsuccessful journeys through educational reform. They identified three types of teachers with different emotions and professional identities in the reform, including the losing heart accommodators, the drifting followers and the cynical performers.

The findings of this study concur with emerging notions that teachers' professional agency in the reform context can be manifested not only in proactive actions in line with the reform, but also in criticism and even well-justified resistance (Pyhältö et al. 2012; Sloan 2006). However, teachers' resistance was here manifested more in teachers' talks and attitudes. In fact, there was much resistance "in the air", but all in all teachers still implemented and engaged with the reform without active and visible resistance in practice. For example, they did not collectively go to the barricades or did not refuse to implement the reform (see also Giles 2004). In a sense, their resistance was quite passive and invisible. One explanation for this was reported in Article V. One teacher explained that it is easier to be quiet and adaptive without loud resistance and grouse, since he had learnt over years that resistance does not yield any results. In their study of Chinese teachers in the reform, Lee and Yin (2011) also did not find a real rejecter or resistor to the reform even when teachers had faced many disappointments and misfortunes. The researchers explained that the reason for this might be cultural; people are not used to resisting. Julkunen (2008) has also noticed that currently it is not typical for Finnish employees to resist and express their opinion collectively.

Overall, as a main finding, one could emphasize that in terms of involvement with the educational reform, the teachers' professional agency was manifested through stances and activities that varied from reserved to progressive. By reserved, I mean that the resistant positions were expressed towards the reform, and some teachers did not perform more than the minimum activities required by the reform. By progressive, I mean that the approving positions also emerged, and a proportion of the teachers engaged actively and innovatively with the reform.

7.1.3   Negotiation of professional identity: Maintenance – transformative

The findings also concerned professional agency as negotiating professional identity, which is understood as teachers' conceptions of themselves as professional actors. Teacher identity includes in particular their professional interests and values, their perceptions of meaningful responsibilities, and their beliefs concerning teaching and students' learning. The findings showed that vocational teachers had different perceptions of themselves as teachers and the most meaningful professional tasks (Article I). This implies that at least a part of the nature of teachers' professional identity is individual instead of being similar among teachers (see also Canrinus et al. 2011; van Veen & Sleegers 2006).

The findings showed that vocational teachers' identities seemed to be in conflict with social suggestions concerning changing educational practices and their work if they were wholeheartedly oriented to educating and teaching the students within the school context. It follows that these teachers' existing professional identities were threatened and they could not do what they felt was meaningful and important. Teachers claimed that they were not able to influence this situation, since they could not actively negotiate the contents of their work. At the same time, some teachers' professional identities were in balance with social suggestions, in particular if they were mainly oriented towards working outside the educational organization (Article I). Similarly, other authors (e.g. Filander 2007; Isopahkala-Bouret 2010) have emphasized that changes in Finnish vocational education and training appear to limit teachers' role as the educator, whereas their role as organizers, co-workers, developers and facilitators has been emphasized.

According to Akkerman and Meijer (2011), recent conceptualizations of teacher identity seem to describe identity as ongoing process of construction (referring to discontinuity) and as relating to social contexts and relationships (referring to the social nature of identity). The findings of this study identified both transformations and continuities in vocational teachers' professional identities during the process of the reform (Article V). First of all, when the teachers' professional identity fitted the reformed social suggestions and they experienced positive consequences of the reform, they exercised agency by maintaining their identities. In a situation where the teachers' existing professional identities and social suggestions were in conflict, the teachers exercised professional agency in different ways. Some teachers were ready to re-negotiate and change their existing professional identities to correspond to the social expectations associated with the reform. Other teachers, however, refused to adjust their professional identities and to fill the gap between their existing professional identity and socially expected identity (Article V). Hence, it appeared that changes in social suggestions can challenge teachers to re-negotiate their identities (including professional beliefs, interests, and conceptions), but such changes may also be insufficient to require the subject to enact the process of identity reformation and thus to produce identity transformations (see also Hoekstra et al. 2009a; Korthagen 2004). All this

emphasizes the meaning of professional agency in professional identity negotiations; the social suggestions alone are not enough to change teachers' identities without the presence of individuals' active efforts and influence (Akkerman & Meijer 2011; Beijaard et al. 2004; Hodkinson et al. 2008a; Lasky 2005). This is in line with the view that identity construction is not simply a matter of passively adopting socially pre-existing identities (Brown 1997). Although the reform did not by definition pose the transformation in teachers' identities, it seems that teachers' professional identities can be expected to undergo transformations more readily when educational reforms affect educational practices and teachers' work (e.g. Day 2002; van Veen & Sleegers 2009). Indeed, teachers' professional identities seem to remain fairly stable and unchangeable when teachers do not face the kinds of powerful educational reforms that might have forced them to adapt to new educational practices (e.g. Hökkä 2012).

All in all, professional identity appeared to be as a phenomenon which can have some degree of stability – but which can nevertheless have the potential for change during teachers' careers and changes (see also Akkerman & Meijer 2011; Day et al. 2006; FAME Consortium 2007). The negotiation of professional identities takes place as an interplay between individual agency and the social suggestion of work practices. As a main finding, it could be claimed that in terms of negotiating professional identity, professional agency was manifested through activities whose aims ranged from maintenance to transformation.

7.2 Social and individual resources for professional agency

The second overarching research question addressed resources for professional agency. First of all, the findings showed that teachers were not able to exercise strong agency concerning educational reform practices and the contents of their work (Article I). All the interviewed teachers shared this experience; it was not different among the teachers depending, for example, on the amount of work experience. Thus, it can be suggested that the management culture of the vocational institution narrowed teachers' professional agency in terms of influencing and negotiating the contents of their work, rather than their individual backgrounds. However, in trying to understand vocational teachers' working, involvements with the reform and negotiations of professional identity, they cannot be merely viewed as subjected to management culture and social suggestions.

When vocational teachers made decisions on how they work in boundary-crossing situations, there was the presence of professional responsibilities which were determined to be carried out and their relationships with workplace personnel (Article II). The latter means that there appeared to be traditional relationships and boundaries between teachers and employees in terms of being members of different professions, and teachers are basically not equal to and vocationally competent with workplace personnel. However,

social suggestions for their working and mainly unequal professional relationships to the employees did not comprehensively shape teachers' working, although they were at stake. In many cases, teachers' own professional competencies, experiences and professional interests were also related to their agency. In particular teachers' professional competencies within their vocational field appeared to be essential for the exercise of agency, both as resource and obstacle for active actions. It seems that vocational teachers need various professional skills and knowledge, including the ability to speak the same language with the workers in order to work successfully in interaction with employees (see also Majuri & Eerola 2007). In this respect, I agree with Lipponen and Kumpulainen (2010), who argue that the exercising of agency actively requires the exercising of various tools, such as language. It is easier to participate in discussion and take initiatives if a person can use the concepts and manner of speaking familiar to other people. Overall, the meaning of both the individual and the social resources for teachers' agency became clear in boundary-crossing settings. Similarly, professional agency, in terms of involving with the reform and negotiating professional identities, was also imbued by individual and social resources.

At the initial stage of the reform, vocational teachers' individual backgrounds (including professional identity, prior working experiences, and expectations of professional future) and social affordances, such as the practices and traditions of the vocational study programmes, made a clear difference in teachers' positioning in relation to the reform (Article III). Consistent with some previous studies (Ballet & Kelchtermans 2008; März & Kelchtermans 2013; van Veen & Sleegers 2006), the findings here showed that there were similarities and differences in responses towards the reform according to teachers' individual interpretative framework. When vocational teachers considered their engagement with the reform, their orientations towards the reform did not unambiguously expound the nature of their engagement. Whereas teachers' individual concerns about their personal well-being, professional identity, work performance, and the impacts of the reform on the students were the most at stake (Article IV; cf. van Veen et al. 2005). Within the framework of Archer's views (2000, 2003), I could say that teachers' concerns could be placed mainly at various levels, including natural (well-being), practical (competencies) and social (values and beliefs).

In the course of the reform, the continuities and transformations in teachers' professional identities and positions towards the reform were grounded on the teachers' interpretations of their experiences and emotions they underwent during the reform (Article V; see also Beijaard et al. 2004; van Veen & Sleegers 2009). Their experiences and emotions were strongly related to reform's influences on their work and on their students, and on the social resources that had been available to them. The opportunities and constraints surrounding professional identity and/or the exercise of agency (in terms of influencing one's work and the reform) undoubtedly had a powerful influence on how teachers experienced the reform emotionally, and on how they

responded to the reform and negotiated their identities. Recently, other scholars (Ballet & Kelchtermans 2008; Day 2002; Ketelaar et al. 2012; Wallace & Priestley 2011) have also emphasized that teachers' professional identity and their experiences of being powerful or powerless in reform context are important for teachers' experiences of and positions towards the reforms. Furthermore the findings of the study are supported by the emergent notions of the meaning of emotions for teacher identity negotiations and self-positioning (Karlsson 2012; März & Kelchtermans 2013; van Veen & Sleegers 2009; Zembylas 2003). However, vocational teachers' professional identity negotiations and self-positioning in the course of the reform can be understood differently from those findings concerning teachers in comprehensive schools, since vocational teachers utilized experiences related to the two contexts (i.e. the school and working life) in question when they took stances towards the reform and negotiated their identities.

In summary, as a main finding, one could stress that professional agency was bonded with both individual (e.g. one's professional identity, competencies and work experiences) and social (e.g. the management culture and professional relationships) resources. Various individual and social aspects made a difference in the practice of agency between vocational teachers.

7.3 Temporal nature of professional agency

The third overarching research question was related to the temporal nature of vocational teachers' agency. First of all, based on the findings, professional agency seems to be intertwined with the past, the present and the future in a temporal continuum. This became clear here since the vocational teachers utilized resources from the past (e.g. work experience), the present (e.g. professional identity) and the future (e.g. the expectations for the future), for example, when they made choices concerning their engagement with the reform and their working in boundary-crossing situations (Articles II, IV). That is, vocational teachers' professional agency was related to the dynamic interplay of different temporal dimensions. In particular, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) have emphasized temporal dimension related to agency (see also Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto 2010). The temporal nature of professional agency also became clear in the fifth sub-study (Article V), in which a teacher said that he had learnt from his past that it is pointless to even try to influence work and reform practices, because it does not produce any results. This shows that previous experiences can shape how a teacher acts in a reform situation.

The findings revealed that the manifestations of professional agency seemed to emerge in specific temporal situations and moments (see also Emirbayer & Mische 1998; Ojala 2011). For example, the teachers made choices at specific moments on how to position themselves towards the reform or to work in boundary-crossing practices (Articles II, III). However, these manifestations of professional agency can be changed or maintained over time.

For example, the findings showed that the same teacher could have multiple and even contradictory positions towards the reform at its different moments, or that the positions could be more or less permanent (Article V; see also van Veen & Sleegers 2009). The findings further illustrated that the teachers exercised agency in boundary-crossing settings in a more or less uniform manner through different situations and over time – or in an otherwise varying manner, depending on the elapsed time and on how the situation developed (Article II). For example, the teachers with restricted agency were passive and humble in boundary-crossing situations, while the teachers with relationally emerging agency strengthened their work activities from passive to active over time. These findings are in line with Billett (2006a), who has noted that the exercise of agency can vary over time and situations.

Furthermore, as previously said, the findings revealed that teachers were not provided with the opportunity to have much influence on their work and the reform. In a sense, the teachers' experience of this kind of weak professional agency was stable and unchanging over time, since they did not feel that more opportunities for their agency were available over the reform (Articles I, V). At the same time, it is possible to say that teachers' professional agency, in terms of influencing and negotiating the objective contents and conditions of one's work, was changing. That is, the teachers said that the management culture of the educational organization previously created more opportunities for this kind of professional agency, but when changes took place in the management culture, everything changed (see also Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto 2010).

Overall, as a main finding, one could highlight that professional agency and its manifestations were fundamentally temporal, since the individual and social resources for agency can be seen to be related to the past, the present and the future. As another main finding, it would be possible to stress that professional agency could be seen as emerging in specific temporal moments and situations, but at the same time, in its manifestations agency displayed features of both change and a degree of stability over time and situations.

7.4 Significance of professional agency at individual and social level

The fourth overarching research question focused on the significance of professional agency at the individual and the social level. In this section, I first describe the significance of professional agency from the viewpoint of individual teachers and how professional agency was related to the individual phenomena (7.4.1). Afterwards I illustrate the relation between individuals' professional agency and the transformation of social practices (7.4.2).

7.4.1 The viewpoint of individual teachers

Recent studies have emphasized the significance of agency for subjects' working (Billett 2008, Smith 2011). The findings of this study give support to these notions. It was shown that depending on the nature and direction of teachers' professional agency, it appeared to create diverse conditions for teachers' productive work in boundary-crossing settings (Article II). On the one hand, when teachers were really active and energetic in their working, they were able to productively fulfil their professional duties and to create new ways of acting as teachers. On the other hand, the extremely passive and humble activities of teachers seemed to have prevented the carrying out of their professional tasks adequately. However, it is important to note that sometimes this latter approach might indeed be a totally appropriate strategy to work for individual teachers so that they, for example, did not cause conflicts with the employees due to being too questioning and critical.

Although the various ways of exercising agency created different conditions for teachers' working, all the teachers reported, regardless of different ways of exercising agency, that they learn vital skills and gain new insights in boundary-crossing situations through collaboration, working, sharing knowledge and experiences (see also Article V; cf. Akkerman & Bakker 2011; Fuller & Unwin 2004; Hoekstra et al. 2009b; Messmann & Mulder 2011). So, the way of exercising agency actively does not solely create the prerequisites for teachers' individual learning, at least in boundary-crossing practices. However, the focus and direction of teachers' agency play a key role in negotiating and reshaping professional identity. Overall, agency can be seen as fundamental for working and for workplace learning when it is understood as negotiating professional identities.

The findings emphasized that all the teachers criticised the reform at its initial stage because of the lack of opportunities to influence the reform practices. The teachers were also disappointed about their opportunities to influence their work contents (Articles I, III). Thus, the weak sense of professional agency caused many negative emotions. The findings also revealed that when the teachers were not able to influence their work contents and to practise their professional orientations by doing what is meaningful to them, they appeared to be dissatisfied with their work and to lose their commitment to the work organization (Article I; see also Hodges 1998). The study of Vähäsantanen and Eteläpelto (2010) also revealed that one vocational teacher resigned from the vocational institution in question because of the experience of not being able to express and develop her professional identity and competencies creatively in a context of weak agency due to increased external management. What emerges from the findings is that – in particular for the sake of teachers' work satisfaction and organizational commitment – it is important for an individual to be given enough opportunities to practise agency and professional orientations. Recently, other scholars have similarly emphasized the meaning of teachers' agency at work, and/or the practice of identity for

their satisfaction and organizational commitment (Beltman, Mansfield & Price 2011; Day & Kington 2008; Hulpia, Devos & van Keer 2011; Sawyer 2004).

The continuous changes in work practices have raised the question of their perceived consequences for individuals. Findings of this study showed that many teachers felt that their well-being was at stake at the initial stage of the reform. In particular, the teachers who actively wanted to develop educational practices were concerned about their well-being. Their exhaustion was held to be caused mainly by having too much work and by not having enough time or social resources, or power over their work (Article IV). One teacher also took a sabbatical, since she felt that her well-being was threatened and that the organization did not provide enough support for teachers' well-being (Vähäsantanen 2009). The findings further showed that the reform tended to polarize teachers at its later stages (Article V). Some teachers seemed to experience increased work satisfaction and commitment. For other teachers the reform seemed to have negative effects on motivation, well-being, and the sense of meaningfulness at work (see also Ballet & Kelchtermans 2008; Cribb & Gewitz 2007; Day et al. 2005; Kirpal 2004). For some teachers the reform strengthened their existing professional identity, whereas for others it resulted in troubled identities. Overall, the situation was positive (i) if teachers had opportunities to practise their professional interests in the reformed context, (ii) if they were willing to re-negotiate their identities to correspond with existing social suggestions, using their positive experiences and emotions as resources, or (iii) if they had the ability to be flexible and to adapt to changes despite negative experiences. Indeed, changes at work can also provide a vehicle by which workers can enact their preferences, practise fulfilling and personally rewarding work, as the study of Billett and Pavlova (2005) has also showed. By contrast, the greatest harm seemed to come from social suggestions offered by the reform context that were in conflict with the vocational teacher's existing professional identities, at least in cases where teachers lacked power to influence the content of their work, and further, when they did not have the willingness or resources to re-negotiate their identities and/or positions. Overall, I could suggest that in some cases giving teachers the opportunities to influence their work and reform practices and to practise professional identities, could decrease their negative experiences and could lead them to have less resistance in the reform context (see also Ballet & Kelchtermans 2008).

It follows, therefore, that a key finding, is to suggest that professional agency is closely related to many phenomena at an individual level, such as productive working, professional identity transformation, organizational commitment, well-being and work satisfaction. Recently, many working life researchers have also suggested that the opportunities for influencing are a key to employees' satisfaction, sense of meaningfulness and well-being at work (see Eteläpelto et al. 2011). Next, I move to describe the significance of manifesting professional agency from the viewpoint of the transformation of social practices.

7.4.2 The viewpoint of the transformation of social practices

In this study, the vocational institution could be conceptualized as a tightly coupled organization, with strong control over vocational teachers' work (Article I). This kind of management culture may have certain disadvantages for individual teachers as presented previously. However, it might also have certain advantages. I suggest this possibility because it seemed that in the context of strong administrative regulations and teachers' weak agency, it was possible to transform educational and organizational practices fast and productively (Articles I, V). These notions are in line with recently presented views that a strong, tight management culture might support the creation and promotion of changes (e.g. Burke 2011; Millward & Timperley 2010; Priestley 2010). Vice versa, it is stated that where there is strong agency among individual teachers and weak social linkages within educational organizations, even necessary changes may be hard to initiate and implement (Hökkä 2012; Orton & Weick 1990). Overall, teachers' strong professional agency is not always good from the viewpoint of transformation of education. However, I also want to emphasize that as far as the transformation of educational practices is concerned, it is meaningful how teachers involve with reform practices, since it depends on the nature of teachers' engagement how actively and eagerly they implement the reform (Article IV). For instance, vocational teachers with passive accommodation wanted to carry out their professional duties without extensive efforts in order to protect their well-being. On the other hand, teachers with active participation created new ways of working in order to make the reform successful.

Although the findings emphasized the meaning of the combination of teachers' weak professional agency and external regulations for transforming education, the findings also showed the meaning of subjects' strong and active professional agency for workplace learning in terms of remaking the social practices (Article II; see also Billett 2011; Billett & Somerville 2004; Smith 2011). The school and workplaces can benefit if teachers cross the boundaries between school and working life (see also Akkerman & Bakker 2011). From the viewpoint of educational organization, teachers' boundary-crossing can be worthwhile for the purposes of developing education, for matching education better to the needs of working life, and for bringing new insights to the school from working life. Nor are the benefits just one-way – within the workplaces, work practices can be developed on the basis of the teacher's active suggestions and actions.

However, it cannot be taken for granted that the co-operation between teachers and employees is innovative from the viewpoint of developing educational and working life practices. I suggest this since the findings revealed that depending on its nature and direction, teachers' agency created diverse conditions for developing education and for remaking the work practices of workplaces. Indeed, it was through the teachers' activities related to criticising and questioning the working ways of workplace personnel, and suggesting

new ones, that the basis for transforming social practices was created. Recently, Lipponen and Kumpulainen (2010, 2011) have also argued that the prerequisite for transforming social practices and the course of activities is the questioning of matters, given norms and positions, and the assumptions taken for granted, and deviation from the familiar ways of working. However, the findings also showed that not all the teachers exercised agency in a way that would make a difference to the existing practices of workplaces or to the pre-existing professional relationships and boundaries, since some teachers worked quite uncritically and humbly in boundary-crossing situations. Similarly, according to Lipponen and Kumpulainen (2010) weak and normative agency can maintain the existing social practices.

To sum up, a main finding related to the significance of professional agency at the social level could be packaged as follows: major changes in education appeared to be achievable through administrative suggestions and external instructions, but also teachers' agency emerged as a fundamental element for social transformation.

7.5   Overview of the findings

In one sense, it seems that vocational teachers did not have extensive opportunities to influence the contents and conditions of their work and current reform. However, in trying to understand teachers amid changing work practices, individuals cannot merely be viewed as passively drifting and being subjected to social suggestions in the stream of change. They found some ways to exercise professional agency through making decisions and exerting influence on their own ways of working, their involvement with the reform, and their professional identities. The main findings of the study related to the manifestations of professional agency are presented in the middle in Figure 2 (pp. 88). Social resources related to professional agency are presented on the left and individual resources on the right. At the bottom of the figure, various phenomena at individual and social level that are intertwined with the manifestations of professional agency are summarized.
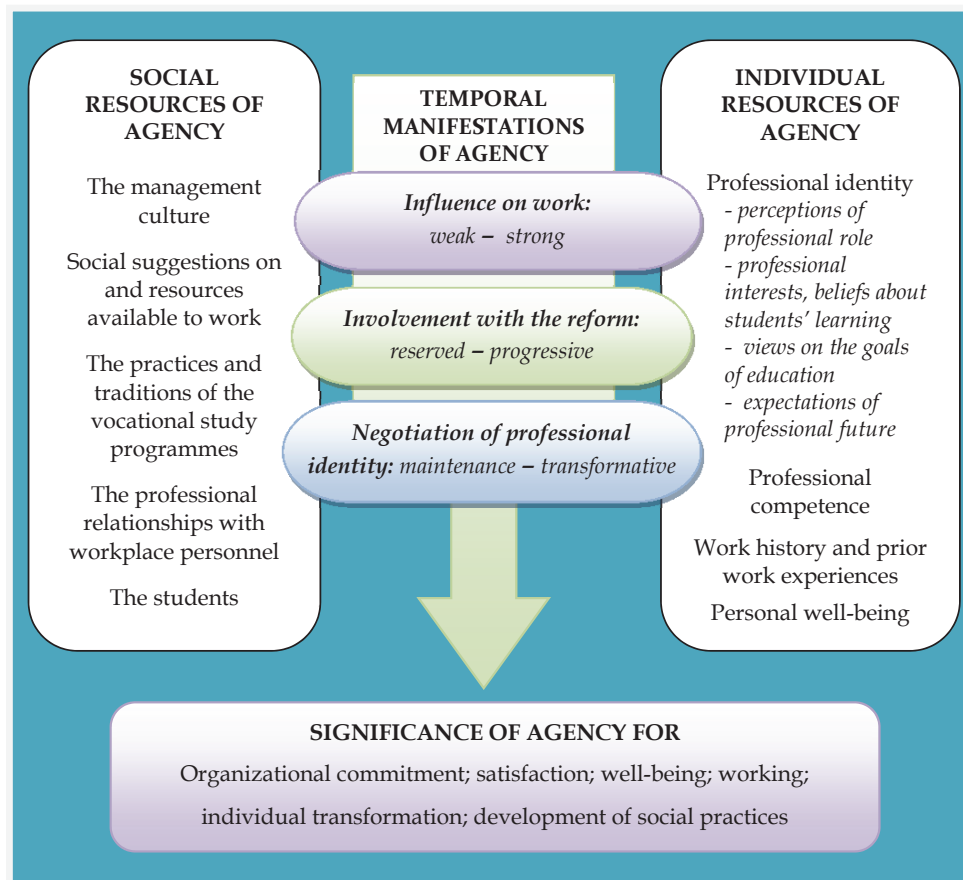
FIGURE 2   Summary of the findings: Professional agency in the stream of change

8   CONCLUSIONS

In this section, I present theoretical conclusions (Subsection 8.1) and practical suggestions (Subsection 8.2) emerging from the empirical findings of the sub-studies which are presented and discussed in the previous sections. This section also includes the evaluation of the study regarding methodological and ethical matters (Subsection 8.3). In the end, I present my final theoretical evaluation of the study and suggestions for future research (Subsection 8.4).

8.1   Theoretical perspectives

Agency is an abstract and multifaceted concept, often understood in different ways. In this section, based on the findings, I first contribute to the conceptualization of professional agency by suggesting four main perspectives related to professional agency (Subsection 8.1.1). I then present my notions concerning how the findings could enrich the views of workplace learning, in particular within the socio-cultural theory (Subsection 8.1.2).

8.1.1   Conceptualization of professional agency

At the general level, agency is understood as referring to such matters as activity, intentionality, making choices and decisions, and the power to choose the ways of action (e.g. Emirbayer & Mische 1998; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2010). In this study, I generally committed to notions that agency means that an individual has the power to affect work-related matters, make decisions and choices, and act accordingly (e.g. Billett 2008; Eteläpelto et al. 2011). Professional agency was here investigated through three complementary lenses, emerging from the theoretically informed understanding of agency, comprising (1) influence on one's work, (2) involvement with educational reform, and (3) the negotiation of professional identity. Related to these perspectives, I suggest the following pivotal ways to conceptualize professional agency:

- o Professional agency can be understood as influencing one's work, which encompasses (i) influencing and negotiating the conditions and contents of work and reform practices at organizational and community level; and (ii) making choices and decisions concerning the ways of working, and acting accordingly at the individual level. This kind of professional agency could be conceptualized as *work agency*, and the extent of its manifestations could be seen to vary from *weak* to *strong*. In theoretical discussions concerning agency, it is vital to consider the three levels mentioned above (i.e. the organizational, community and individual levels) in order to understand its complexity.
- o Professional agency can be understood as making choices about one's involvement with educational reform, which includes (i) taking a position towards reform, and (ii) engaging with reform. This kind of professional agency could be conceptualized as *reform involvement agency*, and it could be seen as manifested through stances and activities that vary from *reserved* to *progressive*.
- o Professional agency can be understood as negotiating one's professional identity, which brings continuities or transformations to subjects' identities. This kind of professional agency could be conceptualized as *identity agency*, and it could be understood as manifested through activities whose aims range from *maintenance* to *transformation*.

Overall, vocational teachers' professional agency is proposed as giving a fingerprint to one's own work, educational reform and professional identity (see also Ketelaar 2012; Vähäsantanen 2007). The fingerprint can be more or less strong and visible, since professional agency can be understood as manifested through various ways and activities which can be placed in the continuum whose extremes are (i) weak, reserved and maintenance, and (ii) strong, progressive and transformation. Quite similarly, Lipponen and Kumpulainen (2010) suggest that agency can vary from normative to creative.

While it is possible to conceptualize the manifestations of professional agency as presented above, agency can also be conceptualized differently depending on its focuses. For example, if professional agency concerns career pathways, it is possible to talk about career agency or life-course agency (cf. Biesta & Tedder 2007; Hitlin & Elder 2007a, b).

Many scholars have suggested that agency refers to bringing about a change to prevailing matters. This means, for example, that subjects transform their social practices and identities, and produce new cultural tools (e.g. Billett & Somerville 2004; Eteläpelto et al. 2011; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2010). Nevertheless, I suggest that agency should not be understood only as making a change, but the conceptualization of professional agency should also include the element of maintenance of matters, such as identities and social practices (see also Hodkinson et al. 2008a; Lasky 2005). In a sense, the maintenance of professional identity can be understood as a powerful form of agency, since this illustrates the situation where teachers refuse to change their identities even if

they are contrary to the social suggestions. In such a situation, it actually might even be easier to simply change professional identity. In line with the views that have emerged from feminist research (e.g. Ojala 2011; Ojala et al. 2009; Paju 2012), I suggest that the exercising of agency does not always mean the emergence of activities that are visibly active and productive and aim at mobilizing changes. Sometimes the activities, which might seem to be passive for external authors, can in fact be very purposeful and conscious in terms of exercising agency as presented, for example, in the second sub-study in case of restricted agency. Furthermore, professional agency should be understood mainly as an individually varying process, since there was variation in manifestations of professional agency between teachers. Overall, I suggest that *professional agency should be understood as multifaceted and mainly an individually varied phenomenon.*

So far, many authors have suggested that agency is closely intertwined with social settings and other people, and how social resources and tools are related to exercising agency is emphasized (Edwards 2005; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2011; Rainio 2010; Ojala 2011). To enrich these views, this study showed that professional agency is related to both individual resources (e.g. the teacher's professional identity, competencies, and work experiences) and social resources (e.g. the management culture of the organization and the teacher's professional relationships). This implies that agency is realized and resourced in close interdependence between the individual and the social (see also Billett 2006c; Eteläpelto et al. 2013; Smith 2011). Therefore, it is not exercised by free subjects or determined only by social context. Among the vocational teachers, the social and the individual were variously and individually emphasized as the dominant party in the processes of negotiating identities, involving with the reform, and influencing work. Thus, it is impossible to say whether the social or the individual is more powerful for the practice of agency. All in all, I suggest that *professional agency should be understood as relational, bounded with individual and social resources.*

In various disciplines there has been discussion on the nature of agency. For example, it is suggested that agency is temporal, being related to the past, the present and the future (Emirbayer & Mische 1998). It is also argued that agency is a developing process (e.g. Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2010, 2011), and situational (e.g. Ojala et al. 2009). In a sense, this study agrees with all these views. Namely, it revealed that professional agency is fundamentally temporal, since the individual and social resources of professional agency can be seen to be related to the past, the present and the future. Furthermore, the study showed that the manifestations of agency can be seen as emerging at specific temporal moments and in situations, but its manifestations can also remain stable or change over time and situations. Overall, I suggest that *professional agency should be understood as temporal by nature.*

This study also shows that the manifestation of professional agency is significant for the individual and the social. For example, the opportunities to influence work and express professional interests are essential for subjects' organizational commitment, well-being and satisfaction at work. Professional

agency is also an important part of subjects' professional identity negotiations and working. The different extent of agency can be seen variously as enhancing the transformation of educational and workplace practices. Large changes in organizational and educational settings are possible to execute through a combination of tight management culture and teachers' weak agency, but it is also possible to develop educational and working life practices through subjects' emerging professional agency. All this implies that it is not only a good thing that teachers' agency over work is extremely strong from the viewpoint of developing social practices, although restricted agency might have negative consequences for teachers. All in all, I suggest that *professional agency has significant implications at the social and individual levels.*

To conclude, professional agency should be conceptualized as a multidimensional and individually varied, temporally imbued and relational phenomenon that is socially and individually resourced. Furthermore, the significance of professional agency is essential for both individual teachers and the transformation of social practices.

8.1.2 Professional agency and workplace learning

What do the findings then imply for current theories concerning workplace learning? Traditionally, many theories within the socio-cultural tradition concerning workplace learning have emphasized the meaning of social context and resources for learning (see also Fenwick, Nerland & Jensen 2012). Recently, some parts of a workplace learning tradition have moved towards the individual. This has occurred by emphasizing the role of subject and professional agency in learning at work and developing social practices (e.g. Billett 2011; Hodkinson & Hodkinson 2004; see also Tynjälä 2012), and professional identity negotiations (Hodkinson et al. 2008a; Kirpal 2004; Lin & Bound 2011). This means that it is principally through the individual's active actions that identity at work is shaped and workplace practices are transformed.

This study shows that strong social suggestions can be effective in initiating large-scale transformations in social practices, but that subjects' agency also remains a fundamental element for social change (the development of educational and workplace practices) and for individual change (the re-negotiation of professional identity). By illuminating the meaning of professional agency for workplace learning, this study agrees that there is a need to turn more towards the active role of a subject in theories of workplace learning. Indeed, in trying to understand and examine learning and identity negotiations at work, individuals cannot merely be viewed as being subjugated to social suggestions of workplaces (FAME Consortium 2007). People practise agency when using individual and social resources that are available to construct and modify work practices and identities at work. Thus, although professional agency with individual resources can be seen as playing a fundamental role in processes of workplace learning – it can actually be seen as an important mediating factor – the role of social context cannot be neglected in the processes of negotiating professional identities, working and developing

social practices (see also Hodkinson et al. 2008b). This means that both individual and social resources should be taken into account for professional agency in the processes of workplace learning which includes the ideas of individual and social transformation.

Overall, it is important to emphasize the meditational role of professional agency, and to examine the interplay of subject and context for workplace learning. This kind of approach, which takes into account the social context and aspects related to the individual subject and agency, can be termed a subject-centred socio-cultural approach (see also Eteläpelto 2008; Eteläpelto et al. 2013).

8.2 Practical viewpoints

In this section, I first focus on the challenges of current management trends and what might be future lines for managing and leading educational organizations (Subsection 8.2.1) and educational reforms (Subsection 8.2.2). I then present some suggestions for supporting teachers in their work, particularly amid change processes (Subsection 8.2.3).

8.2.1 Agency-centred coupling management practices

A recent transition from loosely coupled educational organizations towards tightly coupled organizations with a stronger control over teachers' work and stronger linkages between teachers and administration seems to be a worldwide trend (e.g. Lindbland & Goodson 2010; Meyer 2002). This kind of transition also seemed to occur in the educational organization under study, since vocational teachers reported the increased external regulations and directions concerning their work. The findings here imply that the trend towards new management principles and tighter couplings in organizations may have serious consequences for individual teachers. Teachers' professional agency and identities may be threatened, and their organizational commitment and well-being can lessen.

However, there are also some clear advantages to tight management. The findings here showed that tight management practices can support organizational change and help the organization to adopt new educational practices (see also Millward & Timperley 2010). The other side of the story is that within the so-called loosely coupled educational organizations, necessary changes may be hard to initiate (Burke 2011; Hökkä 2012; Orton & Weick 1990). This occurs because of teachers' strong professional agency as individuals – the opportunities to influence their work practices – enhances nurturing and maintaining the tradition of an individualized working culture, and which, in turn, strengthens boundaries and barriers between individual teachers and groups (Hökkä 2012; Hökkä, Eteläpelto & Rasku-Puttonen 2010b).

Overall, one fundamental question that emerges from the findings seems to be how organizations could manage teachers' work and create sustainable

changes without compromising teachers' positive identities, organizational commitment and satisfaction at work. This could occur through combining the purposeful aspects from both tightly and loosely coupled management patterns (Burke 2011; Rowan 2002). As an answer to combine and balance loosely and tightly coupling models, it seems reasonable to suggest that the management of educational organizations could be approached through notions of *agency-centred coupling* (Hökkä & Vähäsantanen 2013). This means that the promotion of teachers' agency must be considered indispensable in educational management. As part of such an approach, teachers should be able to influence their work with regard to community and organizational issues, and to negotiate the conditions and contents of their core work. Failing in this aspect, educational organizations might lose competent staff, when the system and quality of education could also suffer. The emphasis should also fall on communication, collaboration, and couplings in order to enhance educational and organizational change (see also Messmann & Mulder 2011). Therefore, there is a need to promote (i) two-way collaboration between actors within different levels of organization, including teachers and administration, (ii) high-quality communication systems and communication, and (iii) shared meaning construction within and beyond organizational boundaries.

The agency-centred coupling management (Hökkä & Vähäsantanen 2013) advocated is closely linked to the recent views of Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) about ways to manage educational changes and educational organizations. They emphasize teachers' interdependence instead of bureaucratic and market-oriented thinking, and also stress the importance of multiple networks in teachers' work. Teachers' strong agency and collaboration are also seen as extremely important to students' high-quality learning (see also Sahlberg 2011). That is, teachers' strong agency and multiple social linkages are relevant from a wide variety of perspectives, including the development of educational organizations, teachers' well-being and professional commitment – all aspects that contribute to students' learning (Hökkä & Vähäsantanen 2013; see also Hämäläinen & Vähäsantanen 2011).

8.2.2 Change management

Based on the findings, I contribute here to a discussion on how to successfully manage changes. The findings showed that among the vocational teachers there was a common critical agreement that the educational reform had been planned and organized (i) with a too hectic schedule, (ii) without properly informing teachers, and (iii) without asking their opinions and giving them the opportunities to influence reform practices (Articles I, III). This means that in a reform context, teachers should have enough time to construct meaningful and shared conceptions of reforms' implications and maps of how to reach established goals (see also Pyhältö et al. 2012), which could also decrease teachers' criticism. In light of the findings (Article I), teachers should also be better informed about the goals and backgrounds of reforms so that they could be more committed to the reforms.

In particular, vocational teachers criticized the lack of agency in terms of influencing reform practices (i.e. the top-down strategy in planning and organising the reform). This implies that the focus should be on empowering the individuals involved in the reform processes, giving them the opportunity to exercise agency in terms of actively participating in the planning process and contributing to the transformation of existing practices (Billett & Somerville 2004; Buck 2005; Wallace & Priestley 2011). In such a case, the professional competency of experienced teachers could also be exploited, and teachers' criticism and resistance might be weaker and they would not be confused about the motives and contents of reforms (see also Schmidt & Datnow 2005). This kind of empowerment of teachers' agency could also help to better integrate the reforms into teachers' everyday practices, since the reforms implemented by a top-down strategy do not always provide solutions to problems and concerns arising from teachers' daily life (van Veen & Sleegers 2009). All in all, collaborative and two-way cooperation between individuals and administration is needed in reform contexts (see also Alasoini 2011), not only strong individual agency or strong administrative regulations.

If we want to enable teachers' active participation in the change processes, we can neither neglect their resistance – which can also be seen as the manifestation of their agency (see also Ketelaar 2012; Sannino 2012) – nor see resistance as a negative matter, which should be gotten rid of. I suggest this since this study showed, in line with some other notions (e.g. van Veen & Sleegers 2009), that teachers' resistance does not emerge from the "resistance to change". Instead, teachers here had several good reasons for their resistance during the different stages of the reform, e.g. protecting their professional identity commitments and students (Article III, V; see also Goodson et al. 2006). Therefore, resistance should not be understood as something negative (Ketelaar et al. 2012; Sannino 2010) or as fighting against something; rather it should be understood in a positive sense of what teachers are fighting for (Goodson et al. 2006; Hargreaves 2005). In this case, it would be important to recognize teachers' critical arguments, which could be used further for the process of change to be successful.

Additionally, this study highlights that if we really want the educational change and improvement agendas to meet with success, it is important to notice their potential effects upon teachers' professional identities, since the relationship between reform suggestions and teacher identity strongly determines teachers' positions towards reforms and their reform engagements (see also Day 2002; van Veen & Sleegers 2006). Nor it is irrelevant how reforms influence teachers' working hours and salaries (also see Buck 2005), because teachers here were worried and criticised the fact that the reform might reduce their working hours overall, so that salaries could be reduced (Article III). All in all, in planning and organizing educational change, it would be important to focus on teachers' opinions and agency, although tight management makes it possible to implement changes effectively and to bring about changes.

8.2.3   Practical tools for handling with changing work

Change is not always a negative matter from the viewpoint of teachers, as this study revealed. However, the educational reform in question also had negative consequences for teachers and it polarized vocational teachers, for example, in terms of satisfaction and well-being at work. Thus, it is essential to discuss ways to support teachers amid changing practices, i.e. what kinds of wetsuits and shoes teachers need to have for handling changes better.

The findings of the study suggest that teachers should be individually supported to handle changing work conditions at various levels so that they can become progressively involved in educational changes. I suggest this since the findings showed that teachers had different worries and concerns, in particular relating to the performance of professional competencies at a practical level, well-being at a natural level, and professional identities at a social level (Article IV; cf. Archer 2003). This implies that workplace learning (developing teachers' professional competencies) is one factor for managing in the reform context (see also Kirpal 2004; Reio 2005). The educational organizations should also create an environment in which the leaders support the teachers in their work and take their human resources and well-being into account. In the reform context, there is also a need for supporting teachers' professional identity work (see also Chappell, Scheeres & Solomon 2007), since individual professional development and school development should go hand in hand. If teachers are not able and/or willing to transform their identities in line with changes, there might be negative consequences as far as their motivation, well-being and enthusiasm are concerned.

By supporting professional identity work, I mean that it would be important to give more opportunities, space and time to reflect on and discuss individual challenges arising from the reform context. At the initial stage of the reform, this could include the following sense-making: Who am I at this moment, and what is my relationship with changing work? How do I experience the reform? What do the reform mean for my work and roles, and for my students in the future? There seems to be a need for this kind of identity work, since at least many teachers in this study found that they had not had enough opportunities to make sense of the reform, to elaborate its influences for the future, and to discuss the reform. Thus, at the initial stage of the reforms, there might be a call for different practical tools and interventions (e.g. individual reflection and social platforms for discussion) which could particularly help subjects become aware of themselves and their relation to the changing social environment, to understand their changing work roles, and to make sense of their initial views on reforms (see also Geijsel & Meijers 2005; Mahlakaarto 2010).

In addition, in the course of the reform, it would be essential to create opportunities for teachers to make sense of their emotional experiences, to find resources to redefine their positions towards the reform and their professional identities, to reflect on their practices, to make reform efforts part of their own

working, and to create future directions (see also Hoekstra et al. 2009a; Zembylas & Barker 2007). It would be important to offer spaces and opportunities for emotional sharing and social support, especially for those teachers who have initially resisted change, since collaboration could decrease teachers' resistance (Sannino 2012; Zembylas & Barker 2007). At the same time, practical tools would be needed for supporting teachers' professional agency. This could include, for example, educational tools and interventions which help teachers become aware of their relationship with the organization and its administration, and to strengthen teachers' possibilities to affect their working environments (Mahlakaarto 2010).

The findings revealed a lack of social support and resources for carrying out teachers' professional tasks, in particular in boundary-crossing situations in which the teachers guided students' learning and co-operated with the workplace personnel. Many teachers enjoyed these kinds of professional tasks and carried them out well. However, generally speaking, the co-operation with working life seemed to depend on the teacher's individual efforts, and thus it required teachers' huge personal contribution. In fact, some of the interviewed teachers had used their free time for creating relationships with workplace personnel and for working in workplaces in order to do their work successfully and to develop schooling. Actually, many teachers hoped for more resources (e.g. working hours) and support from the organization for carrying out their work responsibilities and tasks (Article II). Many teachers also reported that it is not easy to train workplace personnel to act as workplace trainers who guide students' workplace learning. The challenges were related to limited numbers of working hours and, in particular, to the fact that workplace personnel did not have that much time alongside their own work duties to participate in this kind of training (Article V). For them, it was more important to carry out their professional duties productively than to guide students without extra time or money. All in all, it would be essential to offer more social support and working hours to teachers when they carry out their professional duties in boundary-crossing settings. This is a prerequisite for preserving the workable system of students' workplace learning, and in particular for creating opportunities for teachers to develop themselves and education, as well as work practices in working life, which is also seen to be a task of the vocational education system.

8.3 Evaluation of the study

In this section, I first reflect on my methodological choices and decisions from the viewpoint of the quality and trustworthiness of the study (Subsection 8.3.1). Then, I present my main ethical decisions and choices, which are also an essential part of the criteria in research evaluation (Subsection 8.3.2).

8.3.1 Methodological reflections

In this study, I understand knowledge production to be a series of constructions within the relationships. First of all, interview data is formed situationally in dialogical interaction between the researcher and the participants with their specific interests and backgrounds. However, the data has the contacting surface to interviewees' identities and their lives; it is thus not false. Finally, knowledge is produced in the analysis, interpretation and reporting process, in which the researcher with a specific task, research questions, and methods interprets data and proportions it theoretically with other theories and research (see also Ojala 2011). Although the interpretation processes occur in the relationship between the researcher and the data, the findings are not only fabrication; they are produced with the data. Overall, in a sense, in the research process, the lived and experienced life, told life, interpreted life and reported life are intertwined (cf. Hänninen 2004; Riessman 2008).

When it is thought that knowledge is subjective, socially constructed and partially incomplete (Riessman 2008), the traditional criteria – validity, reliability and generalisability – to assess the quality and trustworthiness of research are not so competent and applicable in such qualitative and narrative research as it is in quantitative research (Heikkinen 2010; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Myan 2009; Patton 2002; Tracy 2010). The concept of validity is useless, since the knowledge produced in the research is not even expected to respond to the reality outside interviews absolutely objectively (Burr 2004; Gubrium & Holstein 2002; Heikkinen 2010). Thus, the main criterion for the trustworthiness and quality of the research is not to convince the readers that the data and findings respond to the reality and the true state of affairs. Nor is it seen as relevant to assess how many random factors have influenced the construction of data and findings, or whether the research is replicable and the findings are reproducible (Burr 2004).

Furthermore, qualitative researchers rather use the term "transferability" instead of "generalization" (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Myan 2009; Patton 2002; Tracy 2010). This means that it is not thought that the findings from the sample represent the entire population, but it is suggested that the findings can be applicable to other settings (see also Riessman 2008). This study was conducted in the context of Finnish initial VET. It cannot be assumed that all Finnish vocational teachers share similar stories about their work, work organizations and themselves, since this study was conducted in a specific change situation in one organization. However, the continuous changes in their work and organizations are familiar to many teachers – like also generally to many employees – in Finland and beyond. Thus, these findings might work as a pointer, for example, to what negative and positive matters emerge when organizations decrease subjects' opportunities to influence the conditions and contents of their work.

In previous sections, I have tried to transparently describe the overall research process with my methodological decisions and epistemological and

ontological assumptions so that the readers can assess the question of transferability and, more widely, the quality and trustworthiness of this research. The quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research rest on the coherence and cohesion of the overall research process, including decisions about the research topic, theoretical constructs, and methodological choices made by the researchers about the selection of participants, data collection and data analysis (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Myan 2009; Tracy 2010). Next, I address and discuss the most important issues related to the selection of the topic, data gathering, analysis and reporting, which I see as the strengths, weaknesses and critical points relating to the quality and trustworthiness of this study.

The selection of the topic. In my views, this study offers a great deal of worthy knowledge about vocational teachers and their work amid changing work practices from the viewpoint of professional agency. The concept of professional agency was taken as the main concept, because it was seen to be an overarching concept related to all the sub-studies. The study consists of five sub-studies in order to address teachers' professional agency from different perspectives and at the different stages of educational reform. However, the coherence of this thesis might have suffered because of too many perspectives on vocational teachers' lives and agency. Maybe less would be more regarding the perspectives and sub-studies included in this thesis. Although this study reveals many issues about vocational teachers' work, it has also paid less attention to other important aspects, such as teachers' teaching methods, and their relationships with the students and colleagues. Additionally, this study did not take the perspective of students on the educational reform into consideration, since this kind of perspective would have widened the content of this study considerably. Finnish students' workplace learning is also addressed widely in other studies (e.g. Virtanen et al. 2008; Virtanen & Tynjälä 2008).

The number and selection of participants. Here, sixteen teachers were interviewed and fourteen of them again later. For a qualitative study, the size of the data was quite good. However, I was not able to re-interview two teachers in 2007. The drop-out of participants is often a problem in longitudinal studies (Elliott et al. 2008; Miller & Bell 2005). In this study, the teachers who did not participate in the re-interviews were willing to be interviewed, but we were not able to find time for interviewing due to the teachers' other commitments during the time I was conducting the interviews in their workplace, which was located in a different place from where I lived. The study was conducted in one vocational institution in a specific change situation by interviewing the teachers who were at the forefront of the implementation of educational reform. Thus, it is possible to say that these teachers were able to report in depth about their work and work organization in this specific change situation. However, this kind of limited sample might also be a weakness of this study. The participants might be seen as a group who did not represent all the teachers in the organization or other vocational institutions. Alternatively, the group can be seen as comprehensive, since the findings showed much variation between the

teachers (including their opinions and positions related to the educational reform), but also similarities.

The data collection. The data for this study was gathered through interviews. Via interviewing, it is possible to reveal subjects' experiences, opinions and ideas about different work-related matters, as well as explanations and reasons for subjects' choices and actions (Ahearn 2001), which are not possible to examine, for example, by observing people. For example, in the second sub-study the understanding of the exercising of agency would have been much narrower without knowing the explanations for why teachers worked through particular ways in boundary-crossing settings. Without the explanations and reasons, it is also difficult to interpret subjects' visible non-agentic actions as active action (Article II). However, through observing, it would have been possible to have new and different perspectives on professional agency through obtaining information on teachers' activities and working in authentic situations; now the analysis only focused on teachers' accounts of their work. In fact, the ethnographic framework (e.g. Paloniemi & Collin 2010), which combines interviewing and observation, would have produced richer research data in particular concerning contextual aspects and how agency is relationally intertwined with other people and social settings. This kind of information was here gained via teachers' told experiences and viewpoints. The ethnographic framework would also have made it possible to become more familiar with the people and the context through prolonged engagement. Now, it was more like the researcher's visits to the organization and interviewing teachers, which is not the best option to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Myan 2009; Patton 2002).

In a sense, I was an "outsider researcher" who did not know teachers before the interviews and did not work in the same organization. This can be seen as both a weakness and a strength of this study. The nature of the interviews certainly would have been different if the researcher was an "insider" from the same organization or, for example, a researcher with different backgrounds. At least, I think that comments and actions related, for example, to my age and gender would not have been so much at stake then than they were now. It has also been emphasized that it is a positive factor from the viewpoint of constructing a shared understanding of the matters discussed that the researcher and participants know each other and share similar backgrounds (Garton & Copland 2010). It might be difficult to talk and tell about personal issues to a stranger. In this study, despite the fact that I was unfamiliar with the teachers, I felt that the teachers spoke openly and honestly about their work and personal matters. It is also possible to suggest that it might be easier to talk to an unfamiliar researcher. For example, many teachers openly criticised their organization; one could ask whether this would have happened if the researcher had been a familiar person or had been working in the same organization.

A longitudinal study design. The data consisted of repeated interviews with the vocational teachers at two stages of the educational reform. Interview

research always takes retrospective perspectives on the issues examined (e.g. Spector-Mersel 2010), and the telling of the participants can always be seen, in a sense, as remembering. A longitudinal research approach, however, made it possible to achieve quite authentic experiences and opinions at different stages of the reform, since the teachers did not have to remember a long way back in time. It also made it possible to examine the different phenomena at the two stages of the reform, including the initial orientations towards the reform and the experienced consequences of the reform for teachers at its later stage. The longitudinal study design also enabled examining teachers' professional identity negotiating and taking positions towards the reform as a longitudinal process. However, the study design could also have been more long-term.

The triangulation is widely seen as an essential way to secure the credibility and quality of the research (King & Horrocks 2010; Tracy 2010). Triangulation was here utilized through multiple data sources, the researchers and methods within and across various sub-studies (Patton 2002). Researcher triangulation took place in all the sub-studies, but a combination of data and researcher triangulation was applied only in the first sub-study (Article I). The main data of the study was the interviews with the vocational teachers, but in the first sub-study the vocational teachers' accounts of their work and work organization were compared with teacher educators' accounts through collaborative work with the second author. The comparison made it possible to have new perspectives on the research data, to see the data in different ways, to understand what was special in the data, and to address new issues in the data.

In this study, analytical triangulation also took place when various data analysis approaches were utilized. This provided various perspectives on the data. For example, through thematic and content analysis applied in the first sub-study (Article I), the general descriptions and accounts of how teachers described their organization were produced across all the interviews. On the other hand, the narrative analysis here focused holistically on the interviews. For example, without a holistic narrative approach, it would have been impossible to reveal the inconsistent orientation towards the educational reform (Article III) or the way to exercise situational agency (Article II), since a cross-base analysis could not reveal differences and similarities within the individual interviews regarding teachers' opinions on reform and exercising agency in various boundary-crossing situations. In the fifth sub-study, the repeated interviews gathered in 2006 and 20007 were analysed holistically in order to reveal the continuities and transformations in teachers' professional identities and self-positions in relation to the reform and the reasons beyond them over time. This would not have been possible, for example, in a cross-case-based analysis. Overall, narrative ways of analysis were here utilized widely, since in the course of the study it became clear that they are useful in revealing the contradictories, changes and continuities in the phenomena under examination.

During the *analysis process* of the research data, I made analytical decisions regarding the background information of the participants. In the third sub-study (Article III), it was found that teachers' age, gender or working

experience were not directly related to teachers' orientations towards the educational reform in question, but the teachers said that their vocational field seemed to be related to their orientations. However, in other sub-studies, I did not focus precisely on how the background of the teachers (e.g. vocational field, age and working experience) as objective factors were related, for example, to the ways of the teachers' working in boundary-crossing settings if they did not themselves make this kind of connection in their stories. Nor did I reveal the teachers' backgrounds in relation to their narratives and accounts when I reported the findings in the articles in order to protect the anonymity of the teachers (see also 8.3.2). These kinds of decisions were also partly made due to the nature of the data. It was impossible to objectively indicate and compare the similarities and differences among teachers related to vocational study programmes, since there were only a few teachers from the same study programmes and teachers taught in many study programmes. However, these kinds of analytical decisions can be seen as a weakness of the study, in particular since the vocational field and teachers' competencies related to that are generally seen to be an essential part of vocational teacherhood (Filander 2007; Tiilikkala 2004). The scholars have also found that there are field-specific differences in the implementation of students' workplace learning (e.g. Virtanen et al. 2008).

Peer reflections and member checks. During the implementation of the sub-studies, I discussed with the co-authors and received accurate feedback from them, which can be seen as enhancing the quality of the articles. All the articles have also gone through the anonymous peer-review processes. This procedure can also be seen as an essential part of strengthening this research (e.g. Riessman 2008). The interviewed teachers also had an opportunity to check the interpretations of the researcher and give feedback. These kinds of member checks and reflections (Kaiser 2009; Myan 2009; Spector-Mersel 2010; Tracy 2010) took place in this study mainly due to ethical principles (see more 8.3.2). For example, Riessman (2008) points out the ethical reasons why the participants should be able to read the interpretations.

Reporting the findings of this study in English in international publications can also be seen to be related to the issue of trustworthiness. The data gathering was conducted in Finnish, which was the mother tongue of the interviewer and interviewees. The interview material was also transcribed in Finnish, not firstly in English. The actual analysis was done on this original data. However, the sub-studies were reported in English. In order to use data extracts in the publications, the original extracts needed to be translated into English. Translation is not a technical procedure but an interpretative process (Nikander 2008; Riessman 2008) and important from the viewpoint of the quality of the research. During the translation process, I first translated the original extracts into English. Afterwards, a language consultant (a native English speaker, who also speaks Finnish) checked the translations in relation to the original extracts. Sometimes we also discussed the translations in order to assure the quality of the translations. I only reported the translated data in the publications, although

it is also said that hiding the original data from the reader's view violates the validity because of the transparency and access principle (Nikander 2008). It was quite impossible to include the original data in the publications due to the maximum length allowed for them.

8.3.2 Ethical considerations

Narratives reveal the detailed and often personal perspectives on the phenomenon (Hyvärinen 2008). Several ethical issues are to be considered, especially when the research is dealing with people's told personal experiences and identities (Elliott 2005; Hänninen 2010; Riessman 2008). During the interviews, the vocational teachers revealed personal information about their work and personal life, and several critical views of their vocational institution. Although teachers knew that they participated in a research interview whose findings would be published, ethical considerations were at stake during the whole research process (see e.g. Flick 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009) so that the teachers would not suffer from the research personally or professionally. Next, I will specify my main ethical principles and activities, in particular the protection of confidentiality and anonymity of the teachers.

Before the data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the head of the vocational institution in question. In addition, the participating vocational teachers' consent was obtained (Elliott 2005; Flick 2006; Kuula 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). In a longitudinal study such as this one, the consent should be on-going and renegotiated between the researcher and the participants through the research process (Elliott et al. 2008; Miller & Bell 2005). Here, the teachers were able to re-assess if they wanted and were able to participate in the re-interviews. For the teachers, participation in the interviews was voluntary, and all the interviewed teachers were aware of my intentions as a researcher, including reporting the findings in articles and this thesis (see Flick 2006; Kaiser 2009; Kuula 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009; Tracy 2010). The information was given both orally and in a written form before and during the interviews, and teachers were also able to ask supplementary questions about these matters during the interviews if they wished. At the beginning of all the interviews, I also discussed with teachers issues of analysing and reporting the findings so that individual teachers would not be identifiable to the readers of research reports. I further told that the interview material was only for my own use and not for the representatives and administrators of the vocational institution.

The analysing of the data and reporting of the findings were realized in a manner that aimed to secure the anonymity of the interviewed teachers. By doing this I aimed to ensure that my study would not cause any harm to the teachers (e.g. Elliott 2005; Flick 2006; Kuula 2006; Tracy 2010). Firstly, only I analysed the research data; the co-authors were able to read only some data extracts, not the original, authentic data. In order to protect the anonymity and unidentifiability of the teachers in the sub-studies and this summary, the names of the interviewed teachers are pseudonyms in the data extracts (e.g. Kvale &

Brinkmann 2009), and the teachers' background information (including age, teaching experience and vocational field) was not directly added to the extracts. To avoid the identification of the teachers, the name of the organization was not used in this study (see Flick 2006). The first supervisor knew the name of the organization in question, but did not know who participated in this study. The other supervisor and co-authors in sub-studies were not aware of the organization and the participants.

In terms of ethics and trustworthiness, all the teachers – who wanted to – were able to read the articles before publication. I think that this kind of opportunity for member checks was particularly important, since the analysis processes of the sub-studies were mainly conducted in a narrative framework. A narrative approach can be more risky from the viewpoint of the identification of participants, since in many cases it produces detailed knowledge of individual participants (e.g. Elliott 2005; Rapley 2007), as compared with, for example, research conducted through discursive analysis (see also Hökkä 2012). In addition, longitudinal research, where typically more detailed information is received on participants, increases the possibility of being able to identify individuals (Elliott et al. 2005). However, I hope that the tools used here for protecting the anonymity of the participants have been adequate. Due to ethical reasons in most sub-studies, the teachers' narratives and accounts were constructed from many interviews (Elliott 2005; Hänninen 2010), but also individual narratives related to the research questions were presented. As regards member checking, I sent the manuscripts to the teachers via email and asked them to read and check the texts carefully, especially the authentic data extracts. The teachers had an opportunity to give feedback and comments. They could have suggested those parts of the manuscripts which made it possible to identify an individual teacher to be removed or changed (see also Kaiser 2009; Riessman 2008; Tracy 2010). I received some comments on the articles, but no-one asked for any changes.

8.4   Final words and future research

The concepts of agency and professional agency are often used in theoretical discussion and everyday speech, and almost as often people do not define what agency truly means. This study offers some conceptualizations of professional agency in terms of influence on one's work, involvement with educational reform, and the negotiation of professional identity amid changing work practices. I suggest that these kinds of professional agency could be conceptualized as *work agency*, *reform involvement agency* and *identity agency.* This study focused more or less on vocational teachers' individual agency, not teachers' shared or collective agency as groups (see more Clegg 2006; Hökkä 2012; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2010), although to a limited extent the study considered professional agency at different levels: at an organizational, community and individual level. Since recent studies have also often neglected

collective acts, we need more discussion and research on collective agency. In that case, questions such as "How do professional communities create suggestions for new, creative work practices?" and "What are the collective ways to influence professional matters at community and organizational levels?" could be emphasized (see also Eteläpelto et al. 2012; Peck et al. 2009). In the case of vocational teachers, this kind of further examination could also investigate, for example, how vocational teachers exercise collective agency together with working life partners in social networks outside the school, and how they together create new work practices and bridges between education and working life.

This study was broadly committed to a socio-cultural approach. By emphasizing the significance of professional agency resourced by individual and social aspects, for example, for teachers' professional identity negotiations and the transformation of social practices, this study offers novel views on the socio-cultural approach and suggests that there is a need for a *subject-centred socio-cultural approach* in investigations of workplace learning. Therefore, I hope that this thesis encourages researchers to focus more on professional agency that is in touch with the subject and social context in examining workplace learning. I also suggest, in line with some recent notions (e.g. Luttenberg et al. 2011), that an agency-centred approach, including various perspectives on professional agency presented here, is needed to understand the complex processes of educational change.

In methodological terms, I suggest that the research interview should be seen as a social and powered state in which both the interviewee and interviewer can be powerful and powerless (Vähäsantanen & Saarinen 2012). From the viewpoint of knowledge construction this matter is important to elaborate on in every interview study. Furthermore, I emphasize a pressing need for longitudinal and multi-method research on professional agency in the future. The study revealed how professional agency and its manifestations can change over different situations and time; these are dimensions that are not revealed by cross-sectional studies and analyses. For the future, agency thus needs to be investigated temporally by addressing its manifestations over time by utilizing a *longitudinal research strategy*. This study was based on interview data. The interview study made it possible to reveal, for example, the manifestations of professional agency and the purposes of exercising agency via teachers' told narratives. This kind of information cannot be gained via observation research alone. However, I suggest that multi-methodological approaches, such as *ethnography*, could be used more often in examining agency in order to capture the complex nature of the phenomenon. In that case, agency could be analysed by focusing on (i) actions in social practices and discourses via observation, and (ii) the meanings and purposes of these actions and the decisions beyond them via interviewing (see also Ahearn 2001). For example, the exercise of professional agency could be studied by observations in authentic situations together with interviews (see also Ketelaar 2012). So far, agency and professional agency have been mostly studied via qualitative

methods, such as interviews and/or observation (e.g. Isopahkala-Bouret 2010; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2011; Rainio 2010). In the future, professional agency could also be studied with quantitative methods, for example via questionnaires, which are based on the conceptualizations of professional agency presented so far and its relations to other phenomena, such as identity and learning at work. An ethnographic approach and questionnaires are used, for example, in our recent Proagent research project (see Eteläpelto et al. 2012).

This study showed that a strict, tight management culture which limits teachers' opportunities to influence their work and by implication to practise their professional interests, does not create optimal spaces for teachers' organizational commitment, satisfaction and well-being at work, although it can support the transformation of educational practices. Here it is suggested that *agency-centred coupling management* (Hökkä & Vähäsantanen 2013), which creates spaces for teachers' professional agency and interactional couplings between different actors and levels in the organizations, could be a better way to manage educational organizations in the future. This kind of management style could create sustainable individual and social transformation, and at the same time support in particular subjects' well-being and organizational commitment and create spaces to work meaningfully. I hope that these findings and suggestions stimulate research and discussion at a practical level on how we want to lead and manage educational organizations and the work of teachers. More discussion and research are also needed as related to workers and working life generally, at least in Finland, since two opposite arguments are presented: working life does not change enough and workers' well-being and meaningfulness at work are threatened because of too many changes (e.g. Alasoini 2010, 2011; Siltala 2004; 2010).

In the opening pages of this summary, the citation from the book Fakta om Finland was presented. In this citation, a person said that "*…whenever I dream about water I think: damn it, do I have to change again. Will it never end?*"As an answer to this question, it is possible to say that change never ends, or as one interviewed teacher put it: *There is no other state besides change. We are waiting all the time for the next call for change*. In a rapidly changing knowledge-dependent society, educational organizations need to constantly develop their operations and settings. Thus, it seems to be absurd to consider how to prevent change. Instead, it is more vital to ask what can be sustainable and truly needed change from the viewpoint of subjects and organizations, and how can subjects be empowered to be active actors instead of just waiting to see what the next call and instructions from above are. This might be a challenging task and there is an urgent need for multi-level educational interventions that will support and empower at the same time both individuals and organizations to reshape professional identities, and organizational and collective work cultures and work strategies through enhancing professional agency (see also Alasoini 2011; Eteläpelto et al. 2012). Indeed, learning at work can occur at different levels (Tynjälä 2008, 2012; Peck et al. 2009), and thus it is important to combine individual, community and organizational learning (see also Hökkä 2012). All

in all, I hope that this study stimulates a true aspiration to create and find practical ways and tools – wetsuits, shoes and even boats – to support and equip people in the stream of change and work organizations to create sustainable and participative transformation. It does not benefit anyone that non-committed and exhausted people are drifting in the stream of change without proper opportunities to be active agents.

YHTEENVETO

Ammattiopettajien ammatillinen toimijuus muutosvirrassa

Tutkimuksen tausta

Tutkimus tarkastelee ammattiopettajien ammatillista toimijuutta muuttuvissa työkäytännöissä. Tämä väitöskirja koostuu viidestä artikkelista sekä johdannon, teoreettisen viitekehyksen, menetelmät ja tulokset kokoavasta ja niistä keskustelevasta yhteenvedosta.

Toimijuuteen liitetään usein sellaisia määreitä kuin aktiivisuus, intentionaalisuus, osallisuus, vaikutus- ja valinnanmahdollisuus, sekä toimintatavoista päättäminen (esim. Emirbayer & Mische 1998; Gordon 2005; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2010). Samalla tapaa Eteläpelto, Heiskanen ja Collin (2011) toteavat, että toimijuus ei ole mahdollista, ellei toimijalla ole valtaa ja voimaa vaikuttaa asioihin, tehdä valintoja ja päätöksiä sekä saada aikaan jotain. Toimijuus voi näyttäytyä myös vastustamisena, asioiden kyseenalaistamisena sekä poikkeamisena totutuista tavoista ajatella ja toimia (Fenwick 2006; Rainio 2008). Vaikka toimijuudesta on käyty enenevässä määrin keskustelua niin kasvatustieteissä kuin muissakin tieteissä, toimijuudesta näyttää olevan toistaiseksi hämmästyttävän vähän empiiristä tutkimusta, erityisesti työelämän konteksteissa ja niissä esiintyvissä muutostilanteissa.

Toimijuuden tutkimiselle työelämän muuttuvissa toimintaympäristöissä on kuitenkin tarvetta, sillä nykyään toimijuuden kysymykset ovat ristiriitaisina läsnä työntekijöiden arjessa (ks. myös Eteläpelto ym. 2011; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2010). Toisaalta työntekijöiltä odotetaan aloitteellisuutta, kriittistä ajattelua, luovuutta, vastuullisuutta, yrittäjämäisyyttä, jatkuvaa ammatillista uusiutumista ja uuden luomista työssä. Samalla kun työelämässä vaaditaan tällaista toimijuutta, työntekijät näyttävät kokevan ulkoisen kontrollin ja valvonnan kiristyneen työssään. Onkin tarpeen ja ajankohtaista pohtia, miten yksilöt kokevat tällaisen ristiriitaisen tilanteen ja millaisia seurauksia sillä on. Työelämän muutostilanteissa oleellisena kysymyksenä voidaan pitää myös sitä, palveleeko yksilöiden aktiivinen toimijuus sosiaalisten käytäntöjen kehittämistä ja yksilöiden ammatillista uudistumista vai estääkö se niitä.

Muutosten aikaansaamisen ja yksilöiden ammatillisen uusiutumisen tutkiminen ja tukeminen on tarpeellista niin työelämässä yleensäkin kuin koulutusorganisaatioissa. Näyttää nimittäin siltä, että usein uudistusten toteuttaminen on haasteellista eikä jatkuvasta uudistamisesta huolimatta mikään välttämättä muutu. Esimerkiksi koulutuksen kentällä toteutetaan jatkuvasti erilaisia uudistuksia, mutta usein ilman todellista ja toivottua muutosta (Hargreaves 2008; Hökkä 2012; Sugrue 2008). Samanaikaisesti yksilöiden ammatillisen uusiutumisen prosesseista puuttuu tutkimustietoa muutostilanteissa. On kyllä todettu, että koulutusuudistukset haastavat opettajien ammatilliset identiteetit eli käsitykset itsestä ammatillisina toimijoina (Beijaard ym. 2004; Day ym. 2005), mutta ei tiedetä paljoakaan siitä, kuinka ammatillisia identiteettejä uudistetaan

ja muokataan uudistustilanteissa. Erityisesti tarvitaan pitkittäistutkimusta sosiaalisista ja yksilöllisistä uudistumisprosesseista (ks. myös Sugrue 2008). Tämä tutkimus avaa tärkeän, mutta melko laiminlyödyn näkökulman keskusteluun toimijuudesta tarkastelemalla ammatillisen toimijuuden merkitystä erityisesti koulutuksellisten uudistusten läpiviennille, työkäytäntöjen uudistamiselle ja ammatillisten identiteettien rakentumiselle.

Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys

Tässä tutkimuksessa ammatillinen toimijuus ymmärretään kolmella eri tavalla: (1) vaikuttamisena omaan työhön, (2) osallistumisena koulutusuudistukseen ja (3) ammatillisten identiteettien neuvotteluna. Ymmärrys ammatillisesta toimijuudesta on ammennettu toimijuutta koskevasta teoreettisesta keskustelusta (esim. Billett 2008; Hodkinson ym. 2008a; Lasky 2005).

Tutkimus pohjautuu pääasiassa sosiokulttuuriseen lähestymistapaan. Näin ollen opettajien toimijuuden ja työn ymmärretään kietoutuvan sosiokulttuurisiin käytänteisiin, olosuhteisiin ja välineisiin, kuten opetussuunnitelmaan, kulttuurisiin normeihin ja sosiaalisiin resursseihin (esim. Edwards 2005; Lasky 2005; Lipponen & Kumpulainen 2011). Sosiokulttuurinen lähestymistapa ei ole kuitenkaan täsmentänyt kovin tarkasti sitä, kuinka yksilölliset resurssit liittyvät toimijuuteen. Tämän lähestymistavan piirissä on myös keskusteltu jossain määrin siitä, kuinka toimijuus voidaan ymmärtää ajallisesti kehittyvänä ilmiönä. Kaiken kaikkiaan onkin tarpeen ymmärtää paremmin toimijuuteen kietoutuvia yksilöllisiä ja kehityksellisiä tekijöitä. Keskustelua toimijuudesta on käyty vilkkaasti myös sosiaalitieteissä, jossa toimijuuden nähdään liittyvän ajallisesti menneisyyteen, nykyisyyteen ja tulevaisuuteen (Emirbayer & Mische 1998) sekä toimijuuden ilmentymisen olevan erilaista eri ihmisillä ja myös vaihtelevan samankin ihmisen elämässä eri ajankohtina (Archer 2003). Vastaavasti poststrukturalistiset näkemykset kasvatustieteissä, erityisesti naistutkimuksen piirissä, korostavat toimijuuden moninaisuutta ja tilanteista ilmenemistä (esim. Fenwick & Somerville 2006; Ojala 2011). Näitä hedelmällisiä, mutta keskenään jännitteisiäkin, teoreettisia avauksia toimijuudesta, samoin kuin toimijuuden luonteen ymmärtämiseen liittyviä puutteita, on hyödynnetty tämän tutkimuksen tutkimuskysymysten muodostamisessa.

Tutkimuskysymykset

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on ymmärtää ammattiopettajien ammatillista toimijuutta muuttuvissa työkäytännöissä. Tutkimuskysymykset ovat seuraavat:

1. Miten ammatillinen toimijuus ilmenee?
2. Millaiset yksilölliset ja sosiaaliset resurssit kietoutuvat ammatilliseen toimijuuteen?
3. Millaisia ajallisia ulottuvuuksia liittyy ammatilliseen toimijuuteen?
4. Millainen merkitys ammatillisella toimijuudella on opettajalle itselleen ja hänen toimintaympäristöjensä uudistumiselle?

Kukin tutkimuksen viidestä osatutkimuksesta pyrkii vastaamaan jokaiseen tutkimuskysymykseen, mutta osatutkimukset tarkastelevat ammatillista toimijuutta eri näkökulmista. Niissä käsitellään vaikuttamista omaan työhön, osallistumista koulutusuudistukseen ja ammatillisia identiteettineuvotteluja.

Ensimmäinen osatutkimus (artikkeli I) tarkastelee ammattiopettajien ammatillista toimijuutta omaan työhön vaikuttamisena omassa oppilaitoksessa. Toinen osatutkimus (artikkeli II) käsittelee opettajien ammatillista toimijuutta rajanylitystilanteissa koulun ja työelämän välimaastossa. Artikkelissa kuvataan opettajien erilaisia tapoja tehdä ja toteuttaa työtapojaan koskevia valintoja. Kolmas ja neljäs osatutkimus tarkastelevat opettajien osallistumista opetussuunnitelmauudistukseen sen alkuvaiheissa. Kolmas osatutkimus (artikkeli III) havainnollistaa opettajien asenteita uudistusta kohtaan, ja neljäs osatutkimus (artikkeli IV) hahmottaa opettajien erilaisia strategioita sopeutua ja kiinnittyä uudistukseen. Viides osatutkimus (artikkeli V) kuvaa muutoksia ja jatkuvuuksia opettajien ammatillisissa identiteeteissä ja asenteissa uudistusta kohtaan uudistuksen edetessä.

Tutkimuksen toteutus

Tutkimuksen lähestymistapa on narratiivinen. Tutkimusaineisto kerättiin yhdestä ammatillisesta oppilaitoksesta. Aineisto koostuu avoimista narratiivisista haastatteluista: kuuttatoista ammattiopettajaa haastateltiin vuonna 2006, ja heistä haastateltiin uudelleen neljäätoista vuonna 2007. Haastatellut opettajat olivat iältään 31–57-vuotiaita, ja heidän työkokemuksensa opettajana vaihteli neljästä vuodesta kolmeenkymmeneen. He toimivat opettajina ammatillisen peruskoulutuksen eri koulutusohjelmissa, esimerkiksi tekniikan ja liikenteen alalla sekä sosiaali-, terveys- ja liikunta-alalla.

Tutkimusaineiston hankinta tapahtui oppilaitoksessa meneillään olleen koulutuksen työelämälähtöisyyttä ja opiskelijoiden työssäoppimista lisäävän uudistuksen eri vaiheissa. Ammatillisen peruskoulutuksen tutkinnot sisältävät vähintään 20 opintoviikkoa opiskelijoiden työssäoppimista. Kyseisen uudistuksen seurauksena joidenkin tutkintojen työssäoppimisen määrä lisättiin 40–60 opintoviikkoon. Samanaikaisesti ammattiopettajien työn sisällöt ja työtehtävät muuttuivat ja laajenivat. Erityisesti opettajien työssä korostuivat opiskelijoiden työssäoppimiseen liittyvät tehtävät ja työpaikkaohjaajien kouluttaminen. Haastatteluaineiston laadullisessa analysoinnissa hyödynnettiin erityisesti narratiivisia analysointimenetelmiä (esim. Lieblich ym. 1998; Riessman 2008). Lisäksi sovellettiin temaattista analyysia (Braun & Clarke 2006) ja sisällönanalyysia (Patton 2002).

Tulokset

Tämä tutkimus osoitti, että ammattiopettajien ammatillinen toimijuus ilmeni eri tavoin. Opettajien ammatillinen toimijuus työhön vaikuttamisena vaihteli vahvuudeltaan heikosta vahvaan. Opettajat kokivat, etteivät pystyneet suoranaisesti vaikuttamaan työnsä ja opetussuunnitelmauudistuksen sisältöihin. Samanai-

kaisesti he kuitenkin pystyivät neuvottelemaan ja tekemään yksilöllisiä valintoja koskien työtapojaan ja työtehtävien suorittamista esimerkiksi työskennellessään koulun ja työelämän rajapinnoilla. Opettajien ammatillinen toimijuus osallistumisena koulutusuudistukseen vaihteli varautuneesta progressiiviseen. Tämä tarkoittaa sitä, että toisaalta uudistusta vastustettiin ja opettajat tekivät työnsä ilman suuria ponnisteluja; ja toisaalta uudistusta kannatettiin ja opettajat osallistuivat uudistuksen toteutukseen innokkaasti ja innovatiivisesti samalla kehittäen heille ehdotettuja työ- ja toimintatapoja. Koulutusuudistuksen edetessä opettajien ammatillisissa identiteeteissä todettiin olevan sekä muutoksia että pysyvyyksiä. Näin ollen voidaan päätellä, että ammatillinen toimijuus ammatillisen identiteetin neuvottelussa ilmeni sekä muuttavana ja ylläpitävänä voimana.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että ammattiopettajien ammatillinen toimijuus liittyi sekä yksilöllisiin (esim. ammatillinen identiteetti, osaaminen ja työkokemus) että sosiaalisiin (esim. organisaation hallintotapa ja ammatilliset suhteet) resursseihin. Ammatillisen toimijuuden ilmenemisessä oli yksilöllisiä eroja, koska opettajat vaihtelevasti hyödynsivät erilaisia resursseja esimerkiksi neuvotellessaan ammatillisia identiteettejään ja tehdessään työtään koskevia valintoja.

Tutkimustulokset kuvasivat myös ammatillisen toimijuuden ajallisia ulottuvuuksia. Toimijuus kietoutui ammattiopettajien menneisyyteen, nykyisyyteen ja tulevaisuuteen toimijuuteen liittyvien resurssien kautta. Opettajat työskentelivät ja tekivät ammatillisia valintoja tietyissä ajallisissa hetkissä ja tilanteissa, mutta toimijuuden ilmenemismuodot, kuten työskentelytapojen valinnat, saattoivat muuttua ja kehittyä tai pysyä samana ajan kuluessa ja eri tilanteissa.

Tutkimuksessa kuvattiin lisäksi ammattiopettajien ammatillisen toimijuuden moninaisia ja vaihtelevia merkityksiä opettajalle itselleen ja hänen toimintaympäristöjensä uudistumiselle. Yksittäisen opettajan näkökulmasta heikot mahdollisuudet vaikuttaa työolosuhteisiin ja työn sisältöihin sekä keskittyä itselle merkityksellisiin työtehtäviin heikensivät opettajien työtyytyväisyyttä, organisaatioon sitoutumista ja työssä jaksamista. Lisäksi ammatillinen toimijuus liittyi vahvasti ammatillisen identiteetin neuvotteluun. Erilaiset tavat toteuttaa toimijuutta loivat myös erilaisia lähtökohtia työtehtävien onnistuneelle suorittamiselle rajanylitystilanteissa. Vastaavasti sosiaalisten käytäntöjen uudistamisen näkökulmasta vaikutti siltä, että tiukka hallinnollinen säätely – ilman opettajien vahvaa toimijuutta – mahdollisti koulutusuudistusten toteuttamisen ja koulutuksen uudistamisen. Tosin koulutuksen kehittäminen ruohonjuuritasolla ja työkäytäntöjen uudistaminen työelämässä toteutui myös opettajien aktiivisen yksilöllisen toiminnan kautta. Näin ollen vahvat hallinnolliset ohjaukset voidaan nähdä tehokkaina luomaan muutoksia, mutta samanaikaisesti myös yksilöiden ammatillinen toimijuus on oleellinen elementti sosiaalisten käytäntöjen ja yksilöiden ammatillisen identiteetin muokkaamisessa.

Johtopäätökset

Tutkimustulosten pohjalta voi todeta seuraavia teoreettisia ja käytännöllisiä johtopäätöksiä. Ammatillinen toimijuus tulisi ymmärtää teoreettisesti monimuotoisena ilmiönä, joka on pääosin yksilöllisesti ilmentyvä, yksilöllisesti ja sosiaalisesti resursoitu, ajallisesti määrittynyt ja merkittävä niin yksilöiden kuin organisaatioiden näkökulmasta. Ammatillista toimijuutta tulisi myös tutkia tällaisen ymmärryksen valossa. Lisäksi tulosten pohjalta voidaan ehdottaa, että työssä oppimista tulisi tutkia ottaen lähtökohdaksi *subjektikeskeinen sosiokulttuurinen lähestymistapa*. Tällainen lähestymistapa korostaa ammatillisen toimijuuden merkitystä työssä oppimiselle – niin yksilöiden ammatilliselle uusiutumiselle kuin sosiaalisten käytäntöjen uudistamiselle – ottaen huomioon sekä henkilöiden yksilölliset taustat että sosiaaliset olosuhteet.

Tulosten pohjalta näyttää olevan oleellista kysyä, miten koulutusorganisaatioita tulisi johtaa, jotta saataisiin aikaan toivottuja uudistuksia ilman että opettajat väsyvät ja menettävät sitoutumisensa työssä. Käytännön johtopäätöksenä voi sanoa, että koulutusorganisaatioita tulisi johtaa siten, että samanaikaisesti luodaan riittävästi mahdollisuuksia yksilöille vaikuttaa omaan työhönsä niin yksilö- kuin organisaatiotasolla sekä tuetaan monimuotoisia kytköksiä organisaatioiden eri toimijoiden ja tasojen välille. Jälkimmäinen pitää sisällään niin opettajien keskinäisen yhteistyön kuin toimivan ja molemminpuolisen vuorovaikutuksen opettajien ja hallinnon välillä.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Information letter about the study for the teachers

Dear Teacher!

What? I am doing my doctoral study about professional identity of vocational teachers and its construction in the context of changing work contexts. The working title of my study is *The construction of vocational teachers' professional identity on the boundaries between schooling and working life institutes*. My study relates to a research project *Professional identity in working life communities: The challenges, constraints and dilemmas encountered in learning and the construction of professional subjectivities in creative and human-centred work* at the University of Jyväskylä (Department of Education). The leader of the project is Professor Anneli Eteläpelto. The project is funded by the Academy of Finland. More information: http://www.cc.jyu.fi/~etelapel/

How? I shall gather research data in your vocational institution. I shall examine vocational teachers' professional identities and possible transformations in identities in the context of change, when the way of implementation of vocational educational and training is being transformed. I shall gather data via interviewing and I am seeking voluntary participants in the study. Now I am approaching you with the request for participating in this interview study. The participation offers you the opportunity, for example, to tell your own story about acting as a vocational teacher, as well as your thoughts, opinions and experiences of the current educational reform influencing the curriculum. Your individual views are important from the viewpoint of my study. At the same time, you can help me in gathering the data. The data is only for the use of the researcher. For example, the representatives of the employer do not have access to the data at any time. I shall deal with the data in the strictest confidence. I shall also ensure that the identification of an individual research participant is not possible during the research process.

When? I am planning to interview all participants twice: The first interview will be conducted in May in your vocational institution. I shall arrange the date personally with all interviewees. The second interview will be dated at the end of the year, when the new curriculum has been brought into use and teachers already have some views and experiences of the implementation of curriculum and its consequences for their work. The interviews will take about an hour or one and a half hours. If you want to ask about the study or give comments, you can contact Katja Vähäsantanen by phone (050 3290 678) or via email (katvaha@cc.jyu.fi).

Collaborative greetings, Katja Vähäsantanen
MEd, PhD-student in adult education, University of Jyväskylä

Appendix 2. Interview guide in 2006

1. Vocational teachers' professional development and career pathway
  o A vocational field and the nature of work contract
  o Educational background and work experience related to vocational field
  o A career shift to a teacher
  o Vocational teacher education and teacher career
  o The current professional duties and a job description

2. The continuous educational reforms
  o The general changes in teachers' work practices
  o The opinions and consequences of the changes

3. The current curriculum reform
  o The general views of students' workplace learning
  o The views, opinions and feelings of the current reform
  o The background of the change and information
  o The role of a teacher in the change process (planning, implementation)
  o Change management
  o Teachers' upcoming job description, work load and competencies
  o The other influences of the reform on teachers and their work
  o The influences on students and companies
  o The opportunities and treats related to the reform
  o The change strategies of teachers
  o The spaces for discussion and consideration
  o Learning, training and professional development
  o Taking into account and support of human resources
  o The factors that are related to the implementation of the reform

4. The sense of professional identity
  o Work roles as a vocational teacher and the core of teacher's work
  o A subject's conception of oneself as a vocational teacher (a teacher or an expert in the vocational field)
  o The most important goals and interests
  o The students: their professional development and guiding, their meaning for teacherhood
  o Professional competencies (strengths, requirements) and development
  o The influence on one's work and the meaning of the curriculum for one's work
  o The respect of vocational teachers' work
  o The meaningfulness of work and commitment to work
  o Satisfaction with the current work
  o The relation between work and other life areas

5. Work organization and community
- Draw your position in your organization (Drawing figure 1, see Appendix 3) and tell about that
- The forms of collaboration and the functionality of co-operation
- Traditions, work culture and ways of working
- The shared perception of teacherhood and of students' workplace learning
- The atmosphere of the workplace and the sense of collegiality
- Support, encouragement, trust and management culture
- The opportunities for participation and influence
- The meaning of work community and belonging
- Support for teachers' professional development and well-being
- The strengths and weaknesses of collaboration across the boundaries of various fields
- Collaboration with other vocational institutions

6. Teacher's work in middle ground of education and working life
- Draw your position between the school and work (Drawing figure 2, in Appendix 3) and tell about that
- Teachers' competencies, the ways of working, and roles in both contexts and between them
- The expectations and demands for a teacher's position and work emerging from education and working life; the main differences in these expectations and demands
- The attitude to teachers in working life
- The difficult and rewarding experiences and feelings regarding collaboration with working life
- The feedback from the representatives of working life and their influence on teacher's working
- The functional practices and strengths that could be transferred between the contexts
- Bringing education and working life closer together

7. Future
- One's future
- One's future as a teacher (plans, hopes and challenges)
- The prospects in vocational education and training

8. Ending
- Would you want to tell or add anything?
- The year of birth
- The willingness to participate in a re-interview

Appendix 3. Drawing figures

Figure 1 Teacher's position in work organization and community

Work organization

Work
community
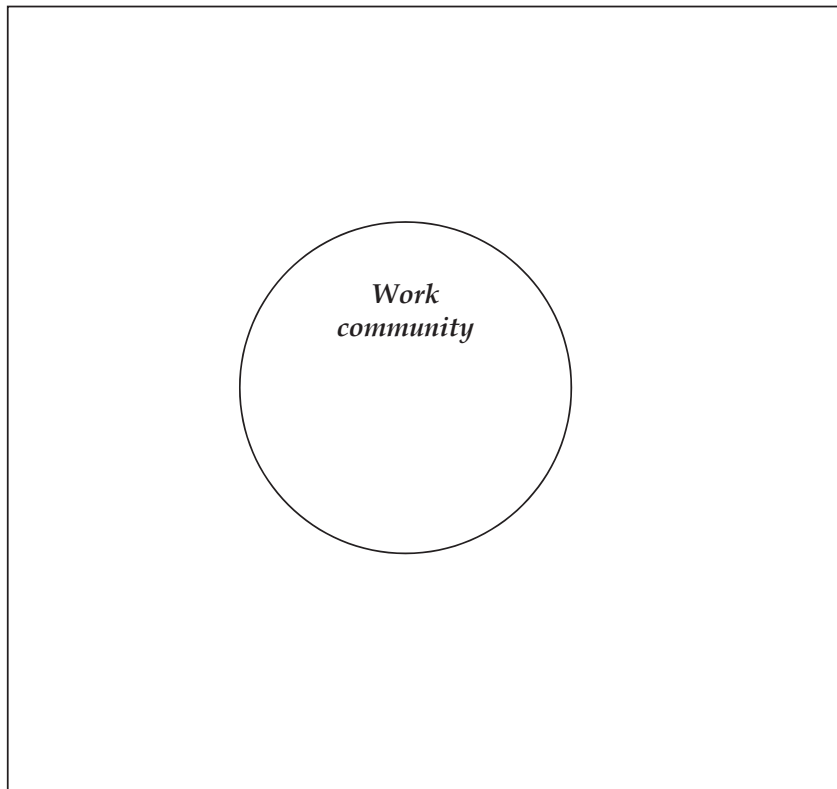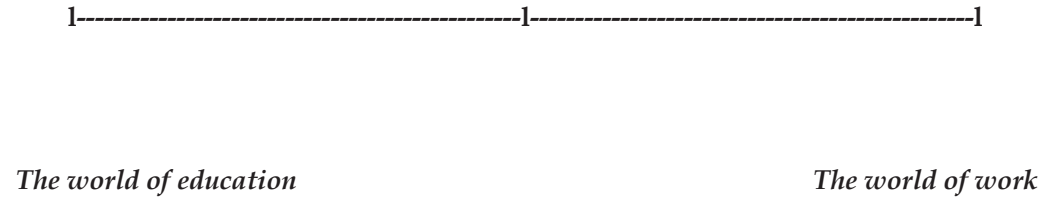
Figure 2 Teacher's work in the middle ground of education and working life

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The world of education   *The world of work*

Appendix 4. Interview guide in 2007

1. Opening
- o Experiences and thoughts during the time after the previous interview; what has been happening?
- o Current feelings and views

2. The current curriculum reform
- o Participation in the implementation of the reform
- o Experiences, thoughts, views and opinions
- o The matters that have succeeded and failed
- o The progress of the reform
- o The difficulties, challenges and opportunities
- o Supportive factors and hindrances
- o Resources, e.g. salary and support
- o Change management and information
- o The teacher's role and opportunities to influence the planning and implementation of the reform
- o The teacher's work contents, autonomy, work hours, and work load (the consequences of the reform, possible positive and negative changes)
- o Teachers' work, e.g. the training and guiding of workplace trainers, marketing and informing tasks
- o Teachers' professional development and the emergent challenges for teachers' professional competencies
- o Teachers' individual resources; how they are taken into account and supported
- o The students and working life; feedback from them and the influences of the reform on them
- o Have there been changes in your positions and orientations towards the reform during its implementation?
- o Future prospects; challenges and opportunities

3. The sense of professional identity – the possible change
- o A subject's conception of oneself as a vocational teacher; the possible change
- o The views of teacher's core work, professional interests and professional tasks; the opportunities and spaces for them
- o Teacher's influence on one's own work and the meaning of the curriculum for one's work
- o The meaningfulness of work, satisfaction with work
- o Commitment to work, work contract and well-being

ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY NEGOTIATIONS IN TWO DIFFERENT WORK ORGANISATIONS

by

Katja Vähäsantanen, Päivi Hökkä, Anneli Eteläpelto, Helena Rasku-Puttonen &
Karen Littleton 2008

Teachers' Professional Identity Negotiations in Two Different Work Organisations

**Katja Vähäsantanen · Päivi Hökkä ·
Anneli Eteläpelto · Helena Rasku-Puttonen ·
Karen Littleton**

Abstract Recent studies have described professional identity as the interplay between individual agency and social context. However, we need to understand how these are intertwined in different kinds of work settings. This paper focuses on teachers' professional identity negotiations as involving the work organisation, the professional community and individual agency. The data were gathered from two work organisations representing different management cultures and sources of control over teachers' work. Open-ended narrative interviews were used, focusing on teachers' own experiences and perceptions. A data-driven qualitative analysis was applied. Our findings indicated that different work organisations provided differing resources for teachers' professional identity negotiations. Teachers were more committed to their work organisation if they had enough agency, if they had opportunities to practise their own orientations towards the profession, and if major changes were not imposed on their working practices from outside.

Keywords Teachers · Professional identity · Agency · Commitment

Introduction

Traditionally, teachers have had substantial autonomy, especially in matters concerning the content of their work and pedagogy. There is an orthodoxy that teachers' professional development could be best promoted when the management culture emphasises the autonomy of teachers' work (Hargreaves 2000). Hence,

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teachers have traditionally been encouraged to be self-directed and reflexive in their work. Work organisations that operate in this way can be described as *loosely coupled* organisations, i.e. consisting of small-scale separated and self-governing teams. In such organisations, individuals and groups are tied together loosely, although they can interact with each other. Management operates via a "flat" management culture, i.e. one in which weak control is exercised. Individuals have the opportunities to oppose social suggestions and reforms, with the likelihood that any changes within such an organisational setup will be slow and steady (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Weick 1976).

Over recent years, societal changes have moved many organisations towards a new public management culture, with a parallel move from loosely coupled organisations to *tightly coupled* organisations. The emphasis here is increasingly on strong, strategy-oriented control, aiming at maximum profitability (Meyer 2002; Moos 2005). In the field of education, this has led to teachers being increasingly supervised and monitored, to the extent that external evaluations now control teachers' work. Different professional groups have to co-operate closely with each other and with upper levels of administration: participants are coupled through dense, tight linkages. Educational organisations are seen as accountable, and they are expected to implement continuous externally-driven reforms (Meyer 2002; Moos 2005). Strong social control as opposed to professional autonomy is regarded as a prime factor in the professional development of teachers. Although the new public management culture has been widely adopted in schooling organisations, there is little evidence as to what this implies for teachers' professional orientation and commitment. There is clearly a need to understand how teachers negotiate their professional identities in the present climate, and how they perceive their agency in different work and management cultures.

This paper seeks to investigate teachers' professional identity negotiations in the context of interdependencies among the work organisation, the professional community and individual agency. Using interview data based on Finnish teachers' subjective experiences and perceptions, this paper will consider how two different organisations provide resources for teachers' professional identity negotiations. The differences in the organisations involve the amount of scope they allow for individual agency, and the type of management culture they practise. On the basis of the teachers' accounts, the organisations can be described as: (a) a tightly coupled organisation, and (b) a loosely coupled organisation. The study examines professional identity negotiations in terms of how two organisations with different management cultures create constraints and possibilities for teachers to exercise their agency and their orientations towards their profession, and to commit themselves to the work organisation. The study is located within a subject-centred sociocultural framework, and is informed by the literature concerned with the professional identity negotiations of teachers. The key work is reviewed below.

The Professional Identity of Teachers

The teachers' work demands the continuous negotiation of professional identity, taken here to embody individuals' perceptions of themselves as professional actors. It includes their sense of belonging, notions of commitment, and values regarding

education (Beijaard et al. 2004; Day et al. 2005; Little and Bartlett 2002). Professional identity is held to be negotiated in the course of the individual's biography. Moreover, it is influenced by future prospects: individuals have goals, aspirations, and notions of the kind of professional they desire to be (Beijaard et al. 2004). In this way, professional identity is based on those elements which give a sense of meaning and commitment to people in their work (Eteläpelto 2007; Kirpal 2004a, b).

In previous studies, the concept of professional identity has usually been related to the teacher's self-image (Knowles 1992), based on the belief that concepts or images of the self determine the way people develop as teachers. In addition, the emphasis has been placed on teachers' roles (Goodson and Cole 1994), or on what teachers themselves see as important in terms of their own personal background and practical experience (Tickle 2000). Professional identity also encompasses moral, emotional and political dimensions, including teachers' values and interests (Geijsel and Meijers 2005; Hargreaves 1998; Rasku-Puttonen et al. 2004). The study reported here focuses on teachers' orientations towards their profession (van Veen and Sleegers 2006; van Veen et al. 2001), with orientation being defined as teachers' perception of what is important in their work, and the tasks that they find meaningful.

Professional Identity Negotiations Between Personal Agency and Social Suggestion

Professional identities are constructed in the course of negotiation processes, at the interaction between personal agency and social suggestion (e.g. van Oers 2002). Having agency means being able to make occupational choices concerning one's core work, based on one's own interests and motivations; it means that in relation to social suggestions one is able to act in a way that corresponds to personal values and hopes (Eteläpelto and Saarinen 2006; Fenwick 2006). For its part, social suggestion includes organisational conditions and cultural practices, along with situational demands, constraints and opportunities. The social suggestion can be either weaker or stronger in degree (Billett 2007). The relationship between the personal and the social has been examined from different theoretical viewpoints. Recognising this, Billett (2006) has distinguished between *humanist*, *structuralist*, *late modernity* and *post-structural* approaches.

The *humanist tradition* assumes that social suggestion is weak, or that it is not present in identity negotiations. Individuals are held to be able to exercise autonomy in realising their goals, almost independently of social structures. They can freely express their subjectivity and negotiate their identity based on self-actualisation and agency (Mansfield 2000; Rogers 1969). Hence, there are no insurmountable limits to the practice of agency or to individual orientations towards the profession.

The structuralist approach assumes that individuals are subjected to social structures and pressures. Professional identity is thought to be strongly shaped by the sociocultural context of work organisations. The self is developed most fully when the individual adopts the community's norms and values (Foucault 1979; Mead 1934). This means that there are many restrictions in the practice of agency or in maintaining an individual orientation towards one's profession. As compared to structuralist approaches, the *late modernity tradition* offers more scope for agency,

although identity negotiations are still thought to take place within the limits of social suggestion. Subjects are thought to be self-reflexive, formulating and maintaining their identity agentially within a transforming social system. Subjects both self-regulate and self-subjugate themselves while performing particular roles within and through their working life (du Gay 1996; Rose 1990). In terms of individual orientations towards a profession, individuals will try to achieve a fit between social suggestion and individual values.

In the *post-structural theoretical framework*, identity is presumed to be created via ongoing changes in relations, and in response to cultural practices and discourses. The subject selectively engages and negotiates with social suggestions that are directed at her/him, and the subject's intention is to secure, develop and maintain identity (Fenwick 2006; St. Pierre 2000; Weedon 1997). The subject is formed within specific sociocultural practices and relationships and as it emerges so too does the subject's capacity to exercise political and moral agency. The subject can thus resist social structures, outmanoeuvring or avoiding strong social suggestions (Billett 2006; Fenwick 2006).

To date, there has been a lack of research concerning identity negotiations in different work organisations. We therefore need to go beyond the existing research and current theoretical notions, in order to understand the relationships between social context and individual agency, and to try to gain a more elaborated understanding of the interdependence between work organisations and identity negotiations. This paper examines how teachers' professional identities are negotiated via the interaction between individual agency, the professional community and the work organisation, given that the most prominent social groups that workers belong to are their work organisation and their professional group or community of practice (Baruch and Cohen 2007; Kirpal 2004a). Wenger (1998) has suggested that communities of practice are the place for constructing professional identities, meaning that identities are constructed through participation, and through becoming a member of a professional community. However, Wenger has not thematised the relationships between the individual worker, the professional community and the work organisation.

This study is theoretically informed by a subject-centred sociocultural framework. Consistent with a sociocultural approach (e.g. Lasky 2005; van Oers 2002), individuals' identities and social context are held to be mutually constitutive. This means that the cultural resources of communities and organisations provide affordances for individuals' identity negotiations. Nevertheless, since in our view sociocultural approaches have not thematised subjectivity to a sufficient extent, we have additionally utilised theories that emphasise the role and agency of subjects in a social context (e.g. Fenwick 2006; Weedon 1997). In keeping with the post-structural approach, we would expect different work organisational contexts and immediate professional communities to create spaces for practising agency, in terms of subjects' individual orientations towards the profession. We understand that practising agency also means that teachers actively negotiate and renegotiate the conditions and the contents of their own work, and they have an influence on community and organisational issues. This includes, for example, having the opportunity to renegotiate and to oppose the directions laid down by the administration of the organisation.

The Commitment of Teachers

In this paper, the relationships between the sociocultural context of work organisations and teachers' professional identity negotiations are discussed also in terms of commitment, which is an important aspect of identity. Previous studies have shown that commitment to the organisation is strengthened if teachers are able to see the relationship between their professional identity and the strategic directions of their school. Day et al. (2005) found that the factors that most sustained teachers' commitment include: (a) sharing with and giving support to colleagues, (b) positive feedback from colleagues, and (c) shared educational values within the organisation. Conversely, the factors that most diminished teachers' commitment include: (a) the imposition of time-related innovations together with the steep learning curves involved, (b) department initiatives that increased bureaucratic tasks, (c) cuts in resources, and (d) a reduction in classroom autonomy and sense of agency.

In a reform context, teachers have been found to experience disappointments that can weaken their commitment to teaching and work, rooted for example in: (a) frustration with shifting levels of endorsement or support from school leaders, (b) dismay over conflicts with colleagues and/or a failure of support from colleagues, (c) emotional and physical exhaustion associated with extra and unfamiliar responsibilities, (d) disagreement over the interpretation of broadly defined reform goals, and (e) tensions over the balance between teacher autonomy and institutional demands (Little and Bartlett 2002). Baruch and Cohen (2007) have suggested a number of conditions necessary for subjects' commitments. At the organisational level, these include issues such as justice and trust, together with the absence of role conflict or ambiguity. At the individual level, a subject's commitment is influenced by self-efficacy, satisfaction, involvement and a variety of emotions (Baruch and Cohen 2007). On the basis of the studies mentioned above, we could expect that tightly and loosely coupled organisations will produce different strengths of commitment to the organisation.

Aims and Research Questions

The study reported here sought to gain an understanding of teachers' professional identity negotiations, through an examination of two organisations with different strengths of social suggestion. Thus, this paper focuses on professional identity negotiations in terms of the interrelatedness of the work organisation, the professional community and individual agency. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do teachers perceive the social suggestions of their work organisations, and how are these related to their agency?
2. How do teachers describe their orientations towards the profession, and how are these related to the various social suggestions of their work organisations?

Research Methods

We interviewed 24 Finnish teachers working in a vocational institution and a university department of teacher education. The teachers who consented to

participate in the study varied in age, subject matter, and length of work history in the organisation. The data were obtained by open-ended narrative interviews during 2005–2006. The interviews addressed the nature of the teachers' work, professional development at work, the work organisation and professional community, and future expectations concerning the work. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The data were analysed in accordance with data-driven qualitative approaches, applying qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006; Patton 2002). We focused on the teachers' individual perceptions and experiences. However, in the analysis, we looked for patterns and common elements that recurred across the different interviews, aiming to produce general characterisations from the interview data.

To address the first research question, we analysed all the 24 interviews, identifying at a general level how teachers described their own work organisations' social suggestions, and how these were related to their agency. From a holistic reading, we noticed that the teachers from the two organisations described their organisations in two different ways, with the management cultures exhibiting particularly striking differences. One of the educational organisations was described as strongly controlling teachers' work practices, and hence (in our terms) representing strong social suggestion. We named this organisation as the "stronger social suggestion organisation". The other workplace was described as less controlling of teachers' work; hence it could be taken to represent weak social suggestion, and was named as the "weaker social suggestion organisation". Our analysis of teachers' perceptions was thus the basis from which we identified two organisations as representing different degrees of social suggestion. A more specific comparative process involved more discussion among the researchers, re-reading the interviews and finding similarities and differences in the teachers' accounts. By thematising we were able to define certain more specific aspects which illustrated the social suggestions of the work organisations. We grouped these aspects, placing them on three levels: *work organisation*, *professional community*, and *individual*. Whilst it could be argued that the contrastive research strategy used might result in an over-simplification of organisational complexies, our concern was to reflect the teachers' perceptions and experiences. The descriptions of the work organisations should not, therefore, be construed as objective descriptions of the reality within the workplace.

Then, to address the second research question, we analysed and interpreted what the teachers said was important to them in their work, including the tasks that were meaningful for them. From the accounts given, we identified and constructed four orientations to the profession. In addition, we examined how the teachers' different orientations towards their profession were related to the social suggestions of their work organisations.

Findings

This section is divided into two parts according to the research questions. In the first part, we report on the teachers' accounts of social suggestions within their work organisations, and how these were related to their agency. In the second part, we

describe how teachers perceived their orientations towards the profession, and how these were related to the various social suggestions of the work organisations.

Teachers' Accounts of Social Suggestions Within their Work Organisations

The two work organisations had social suggestions that differed in strength. We were thus able to identify two different modes of social suggestions, one belonging to the stronger social suggestion (SSS) organisation and the other belonging to the weaker social suggestion (WSS) organisation. Table 1 summarises the various specific aspects related to the work organisation, the professional community and the individual level. The professional community of the teachers is understood to be a subject-matter group, based on the subject taught.

In the following sections we shall first describe teachers' accounts of the *stronger social suggestion* organisation, on the work organisational, professional community and individual levels. Secondly we shall report on accounts of the *weaker social suggestion* organisation, considering these same levels.

Teachers' Accounts in the Stronger Social Suggestion (SSS) Organisation

Work organisational level In the stronger social suggestion (SSS) organisation, teachers reported that in recent years they have been faced with continuous, extensive and simultaneous changes. The institution's organisational structure has been substantially altered, and educational reforms both at national and local level have redefined the curricula and the contents of the teachers' work. The claim was made that organisational definitions of policy and other features of the current reforms have entailed particular duties for the teachers. Teachers noted that they have had to work increasingly outside the educational organisation, with requirements to organise students' learning within the workplace (i.e. outside the school), to

Table 1 Teachers' accounts of organisations with stronger and weaker social suggestions, with their perceived possibilities for negotiation at work organisational, professional community and individual levels

	Stronger social suggestion (SSS) organisation	Weaker social suggestion (WSS) organisation
Work organisational level		
Organisational culture	Continuous changes	Stable
Management	Hierarchical	Low hierarchical
Teachers' perceived opportunities for resistance to change	Low	High
Space for individual negotiation of agency	Limited	Extensive
Teachers' perceived power to affect matters	Low	Variable
Professional community level		
Perceived power of professional groups	Low	High
Collaboration within professional groups	Variable	Variable
Relationships between professional groups	Variable	Weak
Networks outside the organisation	Strong	Strong
Individual level		
Teachers' perceived agency in teaching	High/variable	High

provide information about education, and to market education outside their own organisation. In addition, teachers reported feeling increasingly obliged to carry out developmental and administrative duties.

The teachers described their own work organisation as hierarchical and bureaucratic. With the current educational reform, they reported not having a strong sense of agency. They claimed to be powerless to affect the reform, since the reform was planned and organised mainly by the administration. There were no possibilities for teachers to make their voices heard. This emerged in reports such as the following:

> Teachers have simply and brutally been told to adopt the current reform, which they must implement. No questions were asked, it's just an order coming from above….There were no opportunities to have an influence on anything. (SSS teacher 5)

Teachers commented that they were required to participate in the implementation of reforms and to do the tasks that were demanded: it was assumed that they would be flexible and dynamic, and that they would take on new roles. According to the teachers, the administration did not provide enough information about the reforms, and did not explain exactly why educational policy in general and the contents of the teachers' work in particular were continuously undergoing changes. The teachers claimed they would be more committed to the organisational demands if the organisation offered better reasons for them.

The teachers explained that many of the important decisions concerning education, resources, the curriculum and the teachers' work were made by the organisation's central administration, mainly without asking teachers' opinions. Dialogue between the teachers and the administration was non-existent. Teachers were expected to approve the goals determined by the organisation, and to enforce external decisions. As one teacher reported:

> I'm a bit confused. Let's say that the message I get is that the individual teacher is no longer listened to as much as before—an order is given as an order and it comes without any reasons for putting it into practice. (SSS teacher 15)

The management culture was described as an example of unsatisfactory managership, and the administration was described as having no respect for teachers. The teachers were dissatisfied with the remote possibilities for making decisions, and they wanted to have more influence on the decision-making process at the organisational level. They hoped that it would be possible to develop the organisation's administrative and structural procedures in a better direction.

The professional community level In the SSS organisation, the professional groups (consisting of teachers who taught the same subject) had no strong sense of having the power to affect broader organisational decisions. Within the professional groups, teachers reported being able to negotiate some concrete issues that had arisen. Collaboration within the professional groups varied, but overall, teachers experienced a lack of extensive collaboration, mainly because of teachers having different timetables. Thus, the organisation was characterised as not offering an ideal setting for teachers to collaborate and, in general, the groups did not provide all the teachers

with opportunities for professional identification. Moreover, the teachers' learning was inhibited, due to a lack of pedagogical discussions with colleagues and to inadequate feedback. The teachers usually indicated a desire for more collaboration. Those teachers who had experienced extensive collaboration within their own group emphasised the significance of collaboration for their work.

The relationships between the professional groups were variable. The organisation's structural and administrative boundaries were described as working against collaboration among teachers: the professional groups worked in isolation from each other and reported to different administrative bodies. Nevertheless, teachers who had participated in various developmental projects did see themselves as having the opportunity to co-operate with teachers from different subject groups. The teachers' networks with reference groups and partners *outside* their own organisation were quite extensive. In fact, many teachers thought they had better opportunities to consider professional issues and to develop their own competencies with partners who were outside rather than within the organisation. The organisation did support—and actually demanded—the co-operation of teachers with partners outside the organisation.

The individual level In the SSS organisation, teachers did appear to have a certain sense of agency when they were teaching and guiding students. They said that there was no direct supervision of the teachers' work at the most detailed level. However, some teachers reported that the organisation resorted to control when it was discovered that particular teachers did not follow the ways of acting determined by the organisation. The organisation and the managers were not described as supportive, and teachers had to work without feedback or encouragement. Amid the continuous reforms, teachers stated that they were working in conditions of uncertainty, with no possibilities for long-term planning. The teachers indicated that if the working environment were more stable, it would be easier to use the knowledge and experience they had acquired during their own career.

Teachers' Accounts in the Weaker Social Suggestions (WSS) Organisation

Work organisational level The teachers in the weaker social suggestion (WSS) organisation also experienced the national and organisational reforms as having an effect on their work. However, they reported that their core work was not under threat and that they could influence their work and the changes involved. They had confidence in the continuity of their work organisation and they did not see the reforms as a threat to their work. On the contrary, these teachers experienced strong agency in relation to the reforms. They indicated that they had the opportunity to negotiate and to oppose the directions laid down by the administration, if they believed that these were threatening their core work. They described themselves as being able to determine their teaching practices and to develop their work according to their own visions. An example of this was a sense of agency during the curriculum development process. Although the structure of the curriculum was defined at national level, they had an opportunity to engage in the objectives, contents and implementation of the curriculum.

The teachers reported that if they wished, they were able to influence their core work, and in addition to this, the decision-making and other shared issues pertaining to their work organisation. However, the ability to contribute to these issues required familiarity with the practices and conventions of the organisation. The teachers argued that anyone who wished to influence matters of work organisation had to be willing to participate in the groups that were planning these matters. Another way to influence matters could be to directly approach key persons within the organisation. In general, the teachers experienced strong agency, and did not see themselves as hemmed in by administrative structures. As one teacher put it:

> There's freedom here. Freedom. By that I mean that I can affect my own work, I can affect matters within the working community, and if I compare this to my previous work I can say that here I can do whatever it takes to get things done. I can carry out research and develop my teaching. (WSS teacher 4)

In the WSS organisation, the teachers reported that they had the chance to negotiate even when faced with the social suggestions offered by central administration. For example, measures such as the development of quality assurance were to some extent viewed positively. On the other hand, there was criticism of some of the measures introduced by central administration. In some cases, the measures put forward were seen as attempts to make teachers implement the strategy of the central organisation without giving them any chance to provide their own perspectives. However, despite these criticisms, teachers indicated that when necessary they were able to outmanoeuvre suggestions coming from central administration. The possibility of not giving in to strong social suggestions became evident, for example, in the teachers' accounts of their experiences of the development of quality assurance, as part of a set of procedures set up by central administration. If the teachers considered the quality assurance process to be merely "window-dressing", they found ways of avoiding excessive commitment to the process. They produced (as was required) an administrative paper for central administration, their aim being merely to produce the document without spending too much time and energy on it. However, the new salary reform created one exception to the teachers' possibilities to negotiate and resist the social suggestions of central administration. Many teachers highlighted their concern about the growing role of central administration in salary negotiations. The teachers reported that the salary reform had created insecurity, since they did not know the new rules for negotiating in such a changing situation.

The professional community level In the WSS organisation, the teachers' particular professional group (comprising teachers who taught the same subject) appeared to be a significant reference group for most of the teachers. The professional group seemed to provide possibilities for professional identification and identity negotiation. Teachers experienced their own group as offering the space and opportunity to discuss and develop their work.

> My own subject group is the only place where right now or in recent years I have had the chance to discuss various issues properly and in depth, really

looking at the work and the work community with all the knowledge and experience a person can have. (WSS teacher 8)

On the work community level, the power of the different professional groups appeared to be strong. The professional groups had a genuine role to play in issues concerning educational practices. Although there appeared to be active negotiation and collaboration within the professional groups, the actual collaboration *between* different groups was rare in the WSS organisation. The teachers reported that there had been attempts to develop collaboration between groups, but that these initiatives had not led to permanent changes. However, collaboration and networking with reference groups and partners outside the work organisation was common. The teachers were members of various reference groups outside the organisation, groups that were related to core teaching work and its development. The teachers indicated that networking with other professionals was a natural part of their core work; also that the management of the work organisation had motivated them to make connections and to collaborate with other reference groups.

The individual level In the WSS organisation, the teachers experienced strong agency related to their core work. They reported that they could work independently and develop their work as they wished. They experienced no strong social suggestions from the administration concerning their teaching practices.

> Everyone takes care of their own teaching and then our students get their degrees. That's our policy, that everyone takes care of their own business. So when everyone is allowed to do their own thing it means you can do whatever you want. (WSS teacher 2)

However, the teachers found that as well as being autonomous, the teaching was separated from other teachers' work. Furthermore, some teachers argued that no one was interested in the quality of their teaching. The priorities were merely that the teaching would be carried out, and that the students would get their study credits and graduate within the allotted time.

Teachers' Orientations Towards their Profession, and the Relationships of the Orientations to the Social Suggestions of the Work Organisations

In the second part of the findings section, the teachers' orientations towards their profession are discussed. Then, the teachers' orientations relating to the differing social suggestions within the two work organisations are discussed. The relationships between teachers' orientations and social suggestions are discussed primarily in terms of commitment.

Teachers' Orientations Towards their Profession

On the basis of the interviews, we identified four types of orientations towards to the profession: (a) an *educational* orientation, (b) a *subject-matter* orientation, (c) a *network* orientation, and (d) a *research and development* orientation. The

orientations should not be understood as unchanging or exclusive, but rather as dynamic, overlapping and renegotiable. They have the following characteristics:

– *The educational orientation*. The educationally orientated teachers considered their most important tasks to be educating; also creating a basis for students' individual development, and the construction of students' personal identities. For these teachers, teaching the subject was not the most urgent task; what they wanted to do was focus on the student's personal well-being. They cared about their students, desiring to help them with their problems, to improve their self-respect and to prevent them from becoming marginalised. They wanted to help the students to find their own place in working life and society, thereby underlining the importance of teaching life-values to students.

– *The subject-matter orientation*. When asked about the most important and meaningful tasks of a teacher, the subject-matter-orientated teachers mentioned teaching their subject and helping students to acquire knowledge of and qualifications in the subject. In the school context, they sought to promote the construction of the students' professional identities, in order that the students would have the opportunity to achieve good professional competencies; they also saw it as important that students would know how they should develop their professional competence and knowledge after graduation. They said that the obligation of a teacher is to evoke realistic images of the profession and of different working contexts.

– *The network orientation*. While teachers with the educational and subject-matter orientations were primary focused on teaching activities within the educational institution, the network-oriented teachers had a wider orientation to work. They wanted to act outside the educational institutions, to work with representatives of working life and to collaborate with other educational institutions. The network orientation was also related to the desire to guide students when they had practical training periods outside the actual educational institutions.

– *The research and development orientation*. The research and development-oriented teachers thought that their most important tasks—and also their sources of satisfaction—were to be found in research, in the development of education, and in participation in developmental projects. In addition, their purpose in life was to market and to provide information on their own subject, on a nationwide basis.

Teachers' Orientations Towards their Profession Within the Stronger Social Suggestion (SSS) Organisation

In the stronger social suggestion (SSS) organisation, the teachers did not have strong agency at the organisational level. This means that they considered themselves to be powerless to affect the larger definitions of policy, or the reforms. In addition, the organisation did not offer space for teachers to negotiate the contents of their work; on the contrary the organisation laid down duties that teachers had to carry out. In particular, the teachers were increasingly being required to work outside the schooling organisation, and to participate in developmental and administrative duties. Nevertheless, the SSS organisation did not simply constrain, but also opened up opportunities for teachers to practise their orientations towards the profession, depending on what the orientation might be.

In the SSS organisation, the *educational* and the *subject-matter*-orientated teachers argued that they were no longer able to practise their orientations freely, or not as much as before. The organisational demands were in conflict with the teachers' orientations; as a result, their professional identity was threatened and they were fairly dissatisfied. For this reason, they tended to disagree with organisational instructions, which were seen as conflicting with good practice—or indeed with reality—and as obstructing their core work. The teachers argued that many students had personal problems and learning difficulties which required a supportive teacher, at the same time as central administration wanted the teachers to concentrate on other duties. For these teachers, the ideal situation would be one in which they would concentrate only on educating and teaching; in such a case their work would actually be meaningful. Not all the teachers in these categories reported holding a strong commitment to the organisation, and they made it clear that their commitment would be further weakened if their job descriptions continued to undergo change. This can be seen in the following extract:

> …the teacher's job description is being altered; tasks outside teaching are being increased and the teachers are required to have more organising and planning skills. It's a minor concern. I'm not the kind of person that likes to organise and plan. I'm more of a practical doer. It could end up with things becoming too fraught and difficult. If I feel that I'm having to work more as a planner and a developer than as a teacher, at some point I'll probably think about doing some other job. (SSS teacher 10)

However, some of the teachers with educational and subject-matter orientations did not want to leave the organisation, or else they thought that they had no other option than to commit themselves to the organisation. For example, they might not have the competencies to move into other professions.

In the SSS organisation, the *network*-orientated teachers, and also the *research and development*-orientated teachers, were able to maintain their own orientations towards the profession. The teachers who experienced a balance between their orientations and social suggestions mainly had a positive attitude to their profession and to the organisational demands. Some of these teachers would actually have liked more opportunities to participate in development and to decrease their traditional teaching activities. Yet, although the network-oriented teachers and the research and development-oriented teachers had the chance to practise their orientations, not all of them were completely satisfied with their work. The problem was a lack of time and resources. Teachers had to be flexible and to work during their leisure time. Furthermore, the lack of a supportive organisation and of resources hindered teachers from doing their core work in the way they wanted. They were innovative and enthusiastic about their developmental duties, but argued that the organisation did not give them enough resources, agency or authority. In this situation, the teachers were becoming increasingly exhausted:

> …Powerless is one reason for stress….[Previously]we had plenty of power and agency as a team; we could do everything as a team….Everybody felt extremely good about it. Now little by little we've been whittled away. Now everything is being imposed from above. Teams no longer have any power. It's

tragic. Right now, when what is needed is energy, some kind of creativity and development, all the power has been taken away….We've developed things and stuck our necks out….At some point we might take a bit of a different approach. After all, this is just a job. Otherwise I feel that in our study programme we may simply not be able to carry on. (SSS teacher 3)

In the SSS organisation, the teachers had inconsistent attitudes to the changes. Some teachers were willing to admit the need for educational reforms. However, other teachers reported that the reforms were unnecessary and were having negative effects. In addition, the continuous changes were described as being stressful and exhausting, and some teachers wished for stability and continuity. Without this, they would become increasingly cynical and lacking in commitment, due to concerns about their own personal well-being.

Teachers' Orientations Towards their Profession Within the Weaker Social Suggestion (WSS) Work Organisation

In the weaker social suggestion (WSS) organisation, too, the teachers reported that external authorities (such as the Ministry of Education or the central administration of the organisation) had an influence on their core teaching work and on the resources available. Nevertheless, they indicated that they had opportunities to negotiate and to resist pressures, if this was needed. In the WSS organisation, social suggestions and administrative structures did not seem to fundamentally obstruct orientations towards the profession. The data suggested that teachers were able to negotiate and work meaningfully, regardless of their orientations toward the profession. They thus experienced a balance between their orientations towards the profession and the social suggestions provided by the work organisation:

…the best thing in this set-up is that you can influence your work as much as a person can do. I'd feel outraged if I had to obey instructions given by others. (WSS teacher 7)

However, in the WSS organisation, just as in the SSS organisation, the teachers had found that administrative work had increased considerably in recent years. In their everyday work this was apparent in the increased amount of administrative planning and meetings. However, there was a clear potential for negotiation in the teachers' work. In any case, many teachers did wish to participate in the various working and planning groups in the organisation. The teachers explained that by participating they had opportunities to prepare proposals and to have an impact on matters central to their core work. In the WSS organisation the teachers reported that it was possible for them to exert influence, particularly through the administrative and planning groups. Another pivotal negotiation strategy was direct contact with key persons within the organisation. The WSS organisation offered many possibilities for this kind of negotiation. The data also suggest that both the work community and the organisation as a whole provided a considerable number of possibilities for teachers to construct their professional identities. The teachers were very committed to their work, and to developing it. They also expected to continue working in the organisation in the future.

I have clear vision that I want to work in the department and develop myself here, and also play my own part in the development of this department…yes, I intend to continue here and develop, and I think it is good that I can affect this development, including when and how quickly it happens. (WSS Teacher 6)

Generally speaking, the teachers were not unduly suspicious of change or organisational development. On the contrary, some teachers even expected it. However, it seemed essential to teachers that organisational development should be led by them rather than by central administration or another outside body. At the same time, some teachers emphasised that if an administrative or external source was not willing to force change, no changes would take place at all.

The Relationships Between Teachers' Orientations Towards their Profession and the Social Suggestions of the Work Organisations

In all, we found varying relationships between teachers' orientations towards their profession and the social suggestions of the work organisations. The SSS organisation and the WSS organisation imposed different constraints on teachers; they also provided different opportunities for teachers to practise their agency, in terms of pursuing their professional orientations (Table 2).

Depending on the teacher's orientation, the SSS organisation could either constrain or promote the orientation. The core aspects of the educational and subject-matter-orientated teachers' professional identities were becoming eroded by strong social suggestions and continuous changes. By contrast, the network-oriented teachers and the research and development-oriented teachers did find opportunities to practise their orientations towards the profession. The management culture of the SSS organisation could be compared to the new public management culture. Having experienced this management culture, some of the teachers reported a lack of commitment, because of the continuous changes, the constraints on agency, and the difficulties in practising their orientations towards the profession. However, even under strong social suggestions, some teachers did feel a certain sense of agency, in the sense that they were able to control their own sense of commitment. They did not have to commit themselves to the organisation, provided they had enough professional competencies and personal resources to leave the organisation.

In the WSS organisation, by contrast, all the teachers expressed the view that they had the opportunity to specify their core work and negotiate the contents of their work; also, when necessary, to oppose the directions offered by central administration

Table 2 The relationships between teachers' orientations and the social suggestions of the work organisations

	Stronger social suggestion (SSS) organisation	Weaker social suggestion (WSS) organisation
Educational orientation	Conflict	Balance
Subject-matter orientation	Conflict	Balance
Network orientation	Balance	Balance
Research and development orientation	Balance	Balance

if they saw these directions as affecting their core work. This possibility to negotiate gave teachers the chance to practise their orientation, regardless of the nature of their orientation. Further findings showed that the teachers were committed to their work in the WSS organisation, in a place where they had the chance to practise agency and to act on their own orientations towards the profession. In other words, a "flat" management culture, one that emphasised the agency of the teaching profession, promoted teachers' commitment to their work organisation and to teachership.

Conclusions and Discussion

The findings, which were based on an analysis of teachers' subjective experiences, highlight many issues that deserve further investigation. The findings show that the stronger social suggestion organisation placed more restrictions on opportunities to practise agency and to act on orientations towards the profession; it also created continuous expectations of change. Conversely, in the weaker social suggestion organisation, teachers were able to negotiate the content of their work, practise agency and act on their orientation towards the profession, regardless of what the orientation might be. The findings demonstrate that the weaker social suggestion organisation, i.e. the loosely coupled organisation, created a work environment in which teachers were relatively more committed to the organisation. It appeared that teachers were more committed to the work organisation if they had enough professional agency, if they had opportunities to practise their own orientations towards the profession, and if their working practices were not subject to externally imposed major changes. The findings are consistent with the results of other studies addressing the conditions of commitment (Day et al. 2005; Little and Bartlett 2002). However, they also suggest that individual agency and social suggestion are closely intertwined, being mediated in professional identity negotiations through subjects' commitment. This aspect is often neglected in discussions concerning the interdependence between individual agency and social suggestion.

Recent changes in work organisations, with more flexible employment patterns, have increasingly meant that classical forms of work-related identity formation (e.g. belonging to particular work-based communities) have undergone significant changes (Kirpal 2004a). Although it is important for teachers that they can practise agency and orientations, this study also underlines the significance of the immediate professional community (i.e. a subject-matter group) for teachers' identity negotiation. Indeed, the professional community was very important for the teachers. Those who lacked membership of such a community had a keen sense of what was missing. Similarly, many teachers would have liked more collaboration within professional communities, if they experienced such collaboration as being limited. We conclude that teachers' immediate working community, and the collaboration it allows, has the potential to provide a safety net against external changes. In addition, the immediate professional community can promote teachers' individual agency in work organisations. Our findings imply that the essential conditions for teachers' successful negotiations of their professional identity include sufficient individual agency and the opportunity to belong to a supportive and safe professional

community. Such conditions were provided in the weaker social suggestion organisation representing the loosely coupled organisation.

However, one aspect that was experienced as troubling in the weaker social suggestion organisation—in which the relationships between professional groups were weaker—was the fact that the different groups did not share experiences and knowledge. Furthermore, there is evidence here that strong agency by teachers and self-governing work groups is a factor tending to prevent organisational change. Our findings thus support the suggestion of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), who argue that organisational development and learning can be inhibited if individuals merely develop their own professional knowledge and competence, separately from their own organisation, and without transfer of their knowledge within the organisation. Conversely, the stronger social suggestion organisation with its new public management culture organised continuous reforms which were supposed to develop the organisation and the education it provided. Yet, although strong social suggestions appeared to facilitate organisational change, the imposition of work changes from external sources, along with expectations of continuous change, can impact negatively on teacher commitment. The organisation with stronger social suggestion would have needed more dialogue between the teachers and the administrators. In such a case, the experience and knowledge of the teachers could also be better exploited within the reform process.

What emerges here is that—for the sake of commitment and professional identity negotiation—it is important for an individual to have enough opportunities to practise agency within the organisation. In the case of an educational organisation, this includes the possibility for teachers to practise their individual professional orientations, to actively negotiate and renegotiate the conditions and the contents of their own work, and to have an influence on issues arising on community and organisational levels. Moreover, in terms of teachers' agency, it is not enough that they can practise agency only in their own teaching work. In addition to this, there must be a chance to gain support from the immediate professional community, as well as the possibility of selecting and resisting organisational suggestions. We would thus argue that in theoretical discussions concerning agency, it is vital that there is consideration of all the three levels mentioned above (i.e. the organisational, community and individual levels).

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II

BETWEEN SCHOOL AND WORKING LIFE: VOCATIONAL TEACHERS' AGENCY IN BOUNDARY-CROSSING SETTINGS

by

Katja Vähäsantanen, Jaana Saarinen & Anneli Eteläpelto 2009

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III

VOCATIONAL TEACHERS IN THE FACE OF A MAJOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM: INDIVIDUAL WAYS OF NEGOTIATING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

by

Katja Vähäsantanen & Anneli Eteläpelto 2009

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IV

NEGOTIATING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY:
VOCATIONAL TEACHERS' PERSONAL STRATEGIES
IN A REFORM CONTEXT

by

Katja Vähäsantanen & Stephen Billett 2008

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3: NEGOTIATING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Vocational Teachers' Personal Strategies in a Reform Context

ABSTRACT

Recent studies of learning through work have included how professional identities are formed through participation in work. However, we need a more elaborated understanding of how professional identities are negotiated at times of rapid change in working practices. This chapter examines the personal strategies that vocational teachers adopt, and the professional identity negotiations that occur, in response to requirements to change professional practices. We report on a study in which open-ended narrative interviews were conducted with sixteen Finnish vocational teachers. From the teachers' accounts, we identified distinct personal strategies that were adopted to engage with change. The strategies were labelled as follows: (i) professional development, (ii) passive accommodation, (iii) active participation, (iv) a balancing act, and (v) withdrawal. The strategies were aligned to the teachers' individual concerns, and were bound up with the personal resources available in negotiating with the changing character of the work. An account of these strategies offers a new way of understanding how identities are negotiated through an active, personally-shaped process. The study also illuminates how to promote individuals' management of the self and of learning at work.

INTRODUCTION

 "The job of a vocational teacher – the change is apparently here to stay. It's such hard work all the time that there's really no time when you can just move ahead steadily. You have to be ready for changes in curriculum development, and many other things, practical things too..." (Vocational teacher 2)

Like other workers, vocational teachers nowadays are increasingly challenged to respond to changes in their work – changes often initiated by external agencies and administrations (Buck, 2005). In educational institutions, this can include transformations to educational goals and organisational norms, both of which impact on teachers' work. Educational reforms affect approaches to student learning and course content, imposing on teachers new tasks and responsibilities. The changes in teachers' work practices can also increasingly represent challenges to the established norms associated with teachers' professional beliefs and

competencies. All of these factors require continuous professional identity negotiations and learning at work if individuals are to engage with changing work practices (Buck, 2005; Kirpal, 2004a; Scheeres & Solomon, 2006).

Recent studies have addressed professional identity as something that is negotiated at work, and that involves the interdependence of the individual and the social context (e.g. Billett & Somerville, 2004; Kirpal, 2004a). However, we need more elaborated understandings of how professional identity is negotiated and how an individual's active agency is exercised in the context of a changing workplace. As a consequence, this chapter describes some of the personal strategies that Finnish vocational teachers used when negotiating their professional identity in an extensive reform context. In the vocational institution that was the location for this research, the teachers had recently confronted various educational reforms, imposed by both national and local levels of administration. The most recent curriculum reform meant that initial vocational education and training (VET) was now conducted much less in the vocational schools, and more in the workplaces (see appendix). This reform comprised more than changes in the vocational teachers' classroom practice. It also vastly increased the amount of work the teachers had to do outside their own institution, including extensive liaison, collaboration and personal interaction with workplaces. The reform was planned and organised mainly on a top-down basis, with teachers being requested and required to put it into practice. This situation provides the context for the vocational teachers' professional identity negotiations, essential if we are to understand how their activities, learning at work, and commitment evolve in a situation of upheaval within the system. It is evident that teachers' professional identities and their commitment will be crucial factors in the adoption of innovative practices (Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005; van Veen, Sleegers, Bergen, & Klaassen, 2001). Maintaining commitment to professional practice in times of change is central to the success of reform processes (Day, 2000), and loss of that commitment can have serious implications for professional practice.

In this chapter, the conceptual premises of the teachers' personal strategies are identified and advanced. Our investigation is located within a subject-centred socio-cultural framework, where professional identity negotiations are understood as being closely intertwined with learning and participation within workplace practices (Billett & Somerville, 2004; Fenwick, 2006). Having outlined the procedures of the study, we describe some of the personal strategies that vocational teachers used to negotiate their participation in the reform context. This illustrates how the teachers' active agency is exercised within the changing requirements of the workplace. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the possible personal and social consequences of educational changes, with some practical implications for the ways in which individuals could be helped to cope in the reform context and to maintain their learning at work.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY NEGOTIATIONS, LEARNING AND AGENCY

Learning is more than acquiring knowledge, developing professional competency or updating skills. It is also the construction of identities associated with the societal and cultural practices in which individuals engage (Wenger, 1998). Thus, in professional work such as teaching, individuals' professional development includes the maintenance of their identity as an effective professional (Hargreaves, 1995). Professional identity is a premise for individuals' perceptions of themselves as professional actors. For teachers, this includes the values and professional orientations held concerning their own teaching and the learning of their students; it further includes identification with and commitment to the teaching profession, and to the work organisation in question (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Day et al., 2005; Little & Bartlett, 2002). Learning through and at work includes the formation and transformation of workers' subjectivities and identities (Fenwick, 2006; Høyrup, 2006). Learning also comprises the dual process of individual change along with the remaking of cultural and contextual practices (Billett & Somerville, 2004), including (as in the present instance) how reformed practices should be enacted.

Increasingly, it seems that, the management of work organisations are demanding that individuals should have particular skills and knowledge, limiting the types of identities required and the ways of engaging with work (FAME Consortium, 2007; Høyrup, 2006). Nevertheless, despite the various organisational demands, individuals are not wholly subject to these institutional pressures. The construction of identities is not simply a matter of taking on identities and roles which are pre-existent or pre-structured in the environment (Kirpal, 2004a). Nor is professional identity purely a matter of being responsive to the influence of the conceptions and expectations posed by other people and social contexts (Beijaard et al., 2004). Instead, individuals construct what they experience on the basis of what they know, and this includes their professional values and beliefs (Billett, 2006). In a reform context, individuals will engage with changes in ways that can range from acceptance through to dismissal and outright rejection, as shaped by their personal interests, conceptions and construals. There will probably be diverse forms of engagement. These could include partial compliance or apparent acceptance of change in public spheres, with rejection of change in the privacy of the classroom.

The construction of professional identity, therefore, can be seen as an ongoing process in which individuals are active agents. Moreover, agency is likely to be based on one's personal interests and motivations – and also the capability to make vocational and occupational choices concerning one's core work, and to act intentionally on these choices (Beijaard et al., 2004; Eteläpelto & Saarinen, 2006; Fenwick, 2006). Agency is necessarily exercised within and through the social practices of the workplace (Billett & Smith, 2006), so it is likely to shape individual teacher's approaches to reshaping their professional practice during a process of reform. This means that identity negotiations comprise individuals who actively interpret and reflect the complex relationship between the personal and the social context (Archer 2003, Fenwick & Somerville, 2006; Høyrup, 2006). This

includes taking into consideration their own individual experiences, professional orientations and values, in conjunction with external conditions and situational expectations regarding their own subjectivity and work (Beijaard et al., 2004; Fenwick, 2006). Archer (2000) also emphasises reflexivity and agency in identity construction; individuals' personal identities will emerge via their emotional commentaries on their various concerns.

In the study reported here, we assume that both personal and contextual factors shape professional identity negotiations, and influence how teachers perceive themselves as professionals. This means that neither social suggestion nor the individual's agency alone is sufficient to secure professional identity construction and learning at work (Billett & Smith, 2006; FAME Consortium, 2007).

INDIVIDUALS' STRATEGIES IN PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY NEGOTIATIONS

Recent studies in other fields of work have shown that in workplace negotiations between the personal and the social context, individuals deploy different strategies to cope with continuous change and the social suggestions thrust at them (Fenwick & Somerville, 2006; Kirpal, 2004a). They may be selective in their readings of a particular suggestion, and possibly ignore it, or rebuff it (Billett, 2007). Thus, the approach may range from rejection to complete engagement, leading to very different types of identities (FAME Consortium, 2007). Individuals' capacities to exercise their agency at work has been shown to be strongly associated with how they value that work, and how they identify with it as permitting them to exercise a sense of self (Billett, 2007).

Analogously, Casey (1995) proposes that workers should learn to be themselves, in so far as their sense of self can be accommodated within organisational values and ideologies. She found that "corporate colonisation of the self" forces workers to adopt *defensive*, *colluded* or *capitulated* strategies or self-styles, which can arise in an individual's different career stages and situations. The defensive self is characterised by displays of many different forms of small-scale resistance and retreat, and it expresses confusion, fear and ambivalence, and criticism of the work organisation. The colluded self, for its part, is characterised by compliance, dependency and over-acceptance of the organisation's ideologies. This self will deny conflict through complicity with the corporate culture. Some colluded corporate selves will manifest a compulsive optimism in their beliefs about the company and their future with it. The third option, capitulation, contains elements of both defensiveness and collusion, but both are restrained by a degree of strategic, instrumental pragmatism. The workers regulate their relationship with the company: they know when to identify with the company and when to retreat. In such a case, they may be able to negotiate a settlement that provides sufficient psychic stability, so long as they are confident that they can leave the organisation whenever they wish to (Casey, 1995).

Kirpal, Brown and Dif (2007) reported that employees adjust to changing work and skill demands in a variety of ways: classical forms of identification with work (including both resistant and open-minded responses to changes), long-term

adjustment, short-term adjustment, flexible identification, and redefinition (see also Brown, 2004; Kirpal, 2004b). Similarly, Collin et al. (2007) noted how employees combated constraints on learning through adopting strategies referred to as attachment and bypass strategies. The attachment strategies comprised: (i) developing a stronger "we-ness" in the immediate local community, and (ii) maintaining a high level of work performance, when the means of fighting back are found in co-operation with others practising in the work community. The two bypass strategies comprised: (i) strengthening the meaning of other areas of life, and (ii) giving up, in which case the constraints on learning can be compensated by things outside the actual workplace, or by the social interaction which takes place within it. The fight-back strategies mentioned above included the practice of active agency and the construction of individual subjectivity in relation to work.

It follows that rapid change in work practices may lead teachers and other workers to adopt particular strategies, in situations where people experience stress, exhaustion, dissatisfaction, and negative manifestations of commitment, motivation or identification with their work. According to van Veen, Sleegers and van de Ven (2005), educational reform can impact on a teacher's professional and personal identity in terms of: (i) personal concerns related to motivation, with weakened self-esteem, and reduced opportunities for learning, (ii) moral concerns related to teaching perceptions, involving how students learn and what they have to learn, and (iii) social concerns related to relationships with students, the position within the school, and relationships with colleagues and the school management. However, changes can open also up new opportunities for individuals, including the exercise of a sense of self (Billett & Pavlova, 2005).

INVESTIGATING NEGOTIATIONS OF VOCATIONAL TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

Aims of the study

The studies referred to above indicate that workers adopt different strategies for managing changes and responding to social demands. However, there is a lack of detailed understanding of how vocational teachers negotiate their professional identity in a reform context, in particular when the reform requires significant transformations to the work. The study reported here aimed to elaborate further the means by which vocational teachers negotiate their professional identity in this context, and to identify some of the personal strategies that the teachers adopted in engaging with the reform.

Participants and procedures

The data illustrating vocational teachers' professional identity negotiations were gathered via interviews with sixteen vocational teachers (i.e. ten males and six females, aged 31 - 57 years, with teaching experience ranging from 4 to 30 years). The participants taught in various study programmes, covering various fields of initial VET, all within the same institution. Participation was voluntary. The

teachers interviewed had recently faced various educational reforms, imposed at the national and local levels, which had redefined or were in the process of redefining the work of the vocational teachers. In the institution referred to in this chapter, the recent curriculum reform was introduced in the spring of 2006 (see appendix), immediately prior to the interviews. At the time of the interviews, teachers had been informed about the reform and they had commenced tasks related to its implementation. The teachers participating in this project were at the forefront of the implementation of the reform. They were interviewed individually within their own vocational institution, and participated in the interviews during school hours.

Open-ended narrative interviews were used to capture data on: (i) vocational teachers' professional development and career, (ii) their sense of professional identity and the nature of their work, (iii) the continuous educational reforms and the current curriculum reform, (iv) the work community and organisation, and (v) teachers' hopes and expectations for the future. The teachers were encouraged to discuss freely their conceptions and experiences associated with these topics. Consequently, the interviews were truly unique to each person, even though the same issues tended to be raised across all the interviews. The interviews varied in length from over an hour to over two hours.

Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, with the collection and analysis being undertaken by the first author. Qualitative analysis was used, comprising the identification of themes and a categorisation of the data against those themes. The first step was to read the protocol several times in order to obtain an overall sense of the interview data, with a particular focus on identifying the various kinds of strategies teachers adopted in order to adapt to the changing work practices. We were interested in teachers' concerns in the reform context, including also their accounts of professional values and commitments, and their orientations to their work, their learning and the ongoing changes. From the similarities and differences in the teachers' accounts, five distinct personal strategies were identified as being adopted. These strategies were delineated through empirical data (i.e. the interview transcripts), rather than being premised on theoretical assumptions. However, terminology aligned with the study's theoretical orientation was used to describe the findings. Previously, it had been shown that these teachers' age, teaching experience and gender did not greatly affect their orientations towards the current curriculum reform (Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2008). It should also be emphasised that the teachers' personal strategies are constructions: that is the strategies do not relate to individual teachers' accounts on a strict one-to-one basis. Nevertheless, it was found that each teacher tended, broadly speaking, to identify with one or another of the strategies.

FINDINGS

The analysis of the vocational teachers' interview data indicated their adoption of five distinct personal strategies in engaging with the recent curriculum reform. These were categorised as involving primarily: (i) professional development, (ii)

passive accommodation, (iii) active participation, (iv) a balancing act, and (v) withdrawal. These strategies were shaped by the teachers' individual concerns about their performance, their wellbeing, the impacts of the reform on the students, the practice of their professional identity, and their workload. By focusing on personal strategies and concerns it is possible to describe individuals' professional identity negotiations and a more detailed understanding of the teachers' professional values and commitments, and of their orientations to work, learning and demands for change. The strategies are considered individually below.

(i) The professional development strategy

Vocational teachers with the professional development strategy held mainly positive, but also negative, attitudes to the current reform. They reported that they enjoyed their work. Overall, they were motivated to work as teachers and committed to teaching. They saw no reasons for leaving the profession or educational institution. On the contrary, they wanted to remain in the same profession and organisation for their entire teaching career.

They were also motivated to carry out the tasks mandated by the reform. However, the required tasks and roles were seen as professionally challenging, and they were concerned about their performance as teachers. The teachers reported that they lacked the competency, capabilities and knowledge to carry out the prescribed tasks. They reported needing more knowledge for training the students for workplace learning periods, better skills for supporting and guiding students during their workplace learning periods, and more developed capabilities that they could deploy in the event that students had problems in the workplaces, or needed special support. They claimed that they themselves required external support and professional training. Overall, they wanted to use professional development as a tool to fulfil their teaching role better. They had an optimistic attitude to the future: everything would work out, and they would do their tasks when they had received the right training and support. Further training thus played a key role in terms of coping with the social expectations that arise in teaching.

(ii) Passive accommodation

For some vocational teachers, the term that best defined their sentiments was one of passive accommodation to the recent reform. They reported having had to deal with continuous and extensive changes in vocational education – more than they could reasonably cope with. However, they wanted to avoid criticism and direct conflicts with their educational institution; they believed that resisting the changes would be exhausting and fruitless because of the organisation's management culture. In this situation, they were willing simply to accept the current reform and to adjust to the new expectations. This acceptance was irrespective of whether the goals of the reform were held to be either contrary to or consonant with the teachers' own values, or whether they perceived the new demands made on teachers as positive or negative.

This strategy of accommodation was closely connected to the teachers' attempts to develop a less involved approach to their work. For these teachers, work had been a meaningful part of life. However, they now reported a willingness to focus more on other areas of life. The significance of work had diminished for them; hence they sought a greater separation between their professional and personal lives, in order to protect their own wellbeing and reduce the threat of burn-out.

"…Sometimes I've given too much of my time to my work... But now I'm trying to keep some kind of balance between work and family, and to think about what's behind working too many hours, when I know that in the long run I can't – and [in fact] I couldn't do it before. But maybe it's a question of values changing or somehow seeing the bigger picture… so I have to have something else too, so that my work and the rest of my life can be in balance." (Vocational teacher 2)

In terms of their work, the intended strategies included reducing their working hours. They had no wish to overstrain themselves: they just wanted to do their job without excessive effort or investment. In addition, they wanted to take a more passive role, and be in the periphery of the work organisation. They reported no longer feeling it necessary to be aware of all the issues and events arising within the organisation. In the reform context, they were not really motivated to develop their competencies, since that was experienced as fairly exhausting and time-consuming, even if they felt that their professional competencies were not at the highest level. These teachers seemed to be hoping that they could retire before the next round of reforms. However, they were committed to the organisation, mainly on the grounds that they did have not enough courage or professional competencies to work in other professions.

(iii) Active participation

Vocational teachers who expressed the active participation strategy had both negative and positive comments about the educational changes and the recent reform. However, their criticism was not restricted to their professional practice. They wanted to participate actively in the implementation of the current reform and to make it successful. Yet, they were also concerned that, as a consequence of the reform, the students would be quite alone without adequate support in the workplaces and that their professional competencies would thus become narrower. They wanted to support the students, and to train the workplace trainers so that the latter, too, would support students better. In so doing, they sought to uphold their professional values concerning what was best for the students.

These teachers did not passively accept the approaches and role-related ways of action determined by the organisation. Some teachers claimed that these ways of action were not workable, and that they conflicted with good professional practice. They had already developed their own methods for organising the students' workplace learning and for informing the representatives of working life about the coming reform. Hence, they did not necessarily act in the way the organisation

expected them to, seeking instead to create better approaches in collaboration with their colleagues. They did not believe that the new roles and expanded activities would be easy to implement, yet they thought that successful experiences could be provided to the students, so long as teachers were active; the teachers would have to for example, seek out information, and look for ways to co-operate with workplace representatives. They, too, wanted to focus more on their family and free time in the future; however, they were committed to their work, and to working actively as teachers – either because they saw their work as meaningful or because they did not wish to see themselves as the kind of people who would change their job whenever problems came up.

(iv) A balancing act

The "balancing act" refers to the strategy reported by those vocational teachers who were both advocating the educational changes and identifying means to cope with the changes, however exhausting these would be. They were willing to change their work practices, and also to develop effective vocational education and study programmes. They had a generally positive sentiment toward the current reform and how the reform would hopefully influence teaching practices, tasks and roles. They thought the changes were genuinely adding fresh interest to their work. They wanted to take an active role in the development processes, including both the planning and the implementation stages. For them, the continuous learning at work was an important issue, despite their belief that they already had good competencies for working as teachers.

Even if these teachers enjoyed their work with its continuous development, and even if they had opportunities to fulfil their professional self, they reported feeling tired and exhausted amid the continuous changes. The exhaustion was held to be caused especially by having too much work and by not having enough time or resources, or the power to make decisions. During the interviews, they mentioned many schemes and alternative ideas which might prevent exhaustion and give motivation to work in the future. These included the desires: (i) to work part-time, on a self-employed basis, or (ii) to take a sabbatical period. The sabbatical would provide the opportunity to travel, to rest and to take care of their mental and physical wellbeing, or alternatively study at a university. In other words, they were committed to teaching, but they needed to have a break. Moreover, even if they saw the continuous development as positive, some of them also wished for stability. Without this, they were not sure if they could commit themselves to the work, due to concerns about their own personal resources and wellbeing:

> "It would be really nice if these changes would come to an end for a while; that we could have some kind of stable period without the constant curriculum development… I wish some kind of rationality would come in place of the uncertainty, confusion and everything… Now when I've been tired in the spring, a couple of times I've felt like saying 'I just can't carry on, why am I working in a way that gets me totally exhausted'... This change has been going on for a long time, I wish that there would be some kind of period

of calm… if nothing changes then I do have other workplaces I could go to."
(Vocational teacher 6)

In this way, these teachers' personal strategy was to manage their work in ways which could sustain them through the rigours of the job, and the demands for continuous changes to their professional practices and expectations.

(v) Withdrawal

Vocational teachers who had a withdrawal strategy strongly criticised their work organisation and the recent reform they were expected to carry out. Continuous development was not seen as necessary, since they believed that the existing practices were workable. They were willing to continue as teachers for the present, but they were also planning to leave the current organisation or even the profession. They were confident that they could leave whenever they wished to.

There were two forms of withdrawal. The first was represented by a teacher whose sense of professional identity was in conflict with the social demands of the reform. He wanted to work as an educator within the school (not the workplace) context. This meant not focussing so much on working outside the vocational institutions, or to carry out much organising, guiding and evaluating of students' workplace learning. In addition, he reported lacking the competencies for carrying out these kinds of duties. Moreover, he did not really want to learn these kinds of skills, believing that they were not related to the teacher's core competency. He indicated being unable to remain working as a teacher in the institution if he could not practise a sense of professional identity there. So, although committed to the teaching profession, he was considering leaving the educational organisation and moving elsewhere:

> "...So far I haven't really seriously thought about changing my profession, though I have considered changing the workplace. Let's say that in the last few years the thought has surfaced, and indeed I have been asked if I'd like to work for another place. I've been mulling the matter over, but, you know, the work would be the same, I would still teach the same subject, so yeah…"
> (Vocational teacher 7)

This participant illustrates how conflicts between individuals' professional identities and the demands of the social world can result in non-engagement with the organisation, in ways similar to those described by Hodges (1998).

The second form of withdrawal occurred when teachers worried about their performance as teachers. They reported that, in the future, they might face many problems without receiving satisfactory support – given that the organisation and its leaders had not supported them so far. In addition, the impending reform would challenge some of their professional skills. They did not know how they could motivate the representatives of working life to undertake the expanded duties, since the students were required to do more learning in the workplaces. Furthermore, they were afraid that the working hours of the teachers were going to be reduced. All this led them to talk about leaving the profession and the organisation. The

teacher's work was seen as just one profession amid others, and in future they would not necessarily work as teachers. Their short-term commitment to their current profession was influenced by the awareness that they had enough skills and knowledge to move into other professions.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that vocational teachers negotiated their professional identities individually and actively through the adoption of particular personal strategies in the reform context. These strategies, and their selection and adoption by the interviewees, were shaped by concerns about personal wellbeing, the practice of professional identity, performance, workload, and the impacts of the reform on the students (cf. Archer, 2000; van Veen et al., 2005).

To summarise these findings: (i) Teachers with the *professional development* strategy had mainly positive attitudes to the current reform, but were worried about their performance as teachers, reporting that their professional competencies were inadequate. They viewed professional development and training as a means to secure all the competence needed to fulfil the required duties of vocational teachers. (ii) Teachers with the *passive accommodation* strategy were worried about their wellbeing. They mainly wanted to adjust to all the social demands in the reform context – despite their own opinions concerning the continuous changes and the current reform – and to take a less involved approach to their work, in order to promote own wellbeing. (iii) Teachers with the *active participation* strategy were worried about how the current reform would impact on the students. In spite of their own – also negative – attitudes to the reform they wanted to participate in the implementation of the reform, in order to support students in a new situation. Thus, they were willing to do the duties demanded of them, but they wanted to transform and refine the approaches that had been laid down. (iv) Teachers with the *balancing act* strategy had a positive attitude to the continuous development, and they could even be described as agents of change. However, they reported that the teachers' work, and working amid continuous changes was exhausting. They wanted either to work as part-time teachers or else to have a sabbatical in order to promote own wellbeing and motivation. (v) Teachers with the *withdrawal strategy* criticised the continuous development and were losing their commitments; the current reform was seen as a threat to the practice of professional identity, or teachers worried about their performance as teachers in the absence of adequate support, and were also concerned that their working hours might be decreased. Although the findings here are quite consistent with those of other studies on individuals' strategies in identity negotiations (e.g. Casey, 1995; Kirpal et al., 2007), the strategies and professional identities should be understood as situationally negotiated in a specific context and at a particular moment in the subjects' careers (Beijaard et al., 2004; Billett & Somerville, 2004). In other words, the strategies identified are likely to be dynamic and unstable.

In conceptual terms, this study emphasises that the adoption of different personal strategies can be seen as illustrating individual means of negotiating professional identity, involving different ways of practising active agency in a reform context. The point is that personal agency can mediate the relationship between the individual and the social in diverse and distinct ways. Overall, even if the current reform was planned and organised mainly from above, the subjects had identified ways to exercise agency and to make occupational decisions through the exercise of personal strategies. The teachers' personal interests, values, resources and capacities had a particular influence on their decision-making. They exercised personal strategies in deciding whether or not they wished to commit themselves to the profession and work organisation. The findings indicate that the individuals' commitment to the profession and organisation differed. Some teachers were strongly committed to both the profession and the organisation. Others were losing their sense of commitment under the impact of continuous change, because there were fewer opportunities to practise professional identity, or because they had concerns about their well-being, and about possible reductions in their working hours. Hence, in such a reform context, teachers' commitment cannot be taken for granted (e.g. Day et al., 2005). Teachers also exercised their agency in deciding their orientations to their work. The range of personal strategies illustrates the fact that some teachers were motivated to work and learn, and to perform actively. However, amid all the continuous demands, some teachers saw their work as burdensome and wearisome. Hence, they wanted to engage less fully or have a sabbatical. Taking a broader perspective, subjects and their agency are intertwined with the social context (Billett, 2007; Fenwick & Somerville, 2006). The teachers in our study could exercise agency within the reform context by making occupational and personal choices in the adoption of particular strategies – although one could also say that they were forced to make these kinds of choices and decisions, given the demands and concerns they faced.

It follows that in reform processes and in professional development practices, greater consideration needs to be given to the needs, aspirations and professional sentiments of individuals. At a general level, teachers should be given the encouragement and opportunity to practise their professional identity and to achieve professional development, in accordance with their individual needs. One point of particular importance emerges here, however. The educational institution should create an environment in which the leaders support the teachers in their work and take account of their wellbeing. Workplace learning is not the only key factor for managing a reform; it is also important to address people's professional identity and wellbeing. Failing this, those concerned may well lose commitment and motivation. One teacher considered this issue as follows:

"…Finnish teachers put their whole heart into their work, put themselves into it like madmen. Nobody understands how much work we've done; we don't count up the hours we work, in fact we've given our lives to the teaching profession… that kind of flexibility [that is now required] of teachers, all that tightening of the screws till a person's energy and willingness completely dries up… people are going to leave the organisations and then new, younger

people will come in. Will the profession continue to function, and where will all that tacit knowledge go, all that existing knowledge? Yet the students' actual results are extremely good in our institution…" (Vocational teacher 10)

The careful management of changes in teachers' practices has consequences for individual teachers, for the educational system they serve and for the students they teach. The continuous demand for change can lead to the loss of experienced teachers and their professional knowledge, which is hardly a positive tendency for vocational education and training, or for the quality of the teaching taking place within it. Our findings suggest that the future educational organisations should invest more in supporting teachers in dealing with changing work practices, in order to minimise the negative personal and social consequences of changes. Of course, this request has been made many times before, and seems to go unheeded.

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APPENDIX

The development of initial vocational education and training

The Finnish system of initial vocational education and training (VET) has traditionally been school-based rather than workplace based. However, recent reforms at national and local levels have aimed at greater integration between schools and workplaces, progressively increasing the amount of students' workplace learning. Since the transformation of initial VET in 2001, vocational institutions have provided three-year study programmes in all fields leading to vocational qualifications. The qualifications include at least 20 credits (out of 120 credits) for workplace learning. In the institution used in the study, the most recent curriculum reform was introduced in the spring of 2006. The reform was planned and organised mainly by upper levels of administration. As a consequence of the reform implemented by the institution, vocational qualifications now include 40–60 credits of students' workplace learning (i.e. more than the national minimum). At the time of the interviews, revised qualifications had been planned for particular study programmes; these were due to be implemented the following semester, alongside existing qualifications. The reform has mandated particular duties for teachers, including an increasing amount of work related to organising, guiding and evaluating students' workplace learning periods, informing workplace personnel about the goals of the reform, co-operating with workplaces, and giving instruction to workplace trainers (i.e. workers who will guide students within the workplace itself) (Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2008).

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4. Work organization and community – The possible change
- o Draw your position in your organization (Drawing figure 1, see Appendix 3) and tell about that. Has some change been happening in your position?
- o The work organization and the community as a work environment
- o The forms of collaboration and the functionality of co-operation
- o The management culture and decision making
- o The opportunities for participation and influence
- o The support and resources for teachers' acting, professional development and well-being
- o The changes in personnel
- o The strengths and disadvantages of organizational change

5. Teacher's work in middle ground of education and working life
- o Draw your position between the school and work (Drawing figure 2, see Appendix 3) and tell about that. Has some change been happening in your position?
- o Experiences, feelings and thoughts of movement and collaboration
- o The tasks, the ways of working and roles in various contexts and between them
- o The differences in expectations and demands for teachers' positions and work emerging from different contexts
- o The requirements for good collaboration with working life from the viewpoint of a teacher (professional competencies, the use of free time)
- o Collaboration with the representatives of working life and their attitude to teachers
- o Bringing education and working life closer together

6. Future
- o One's future as a teacher (prospects, thoughts, hopes and challenges)
- o The prospects in vocational education and training

7. Ending
- o Would you want to tell or add anything?
- o The experiences of previous and current interviews
- o The willingness to participate in a re-interview
- o The member-checking of the articles

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