VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY

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# THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL AGENCY

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# INTRODUCTION

The current research is a reflection on how teachers experience professional agency in their everyday practices, in relation to their students, colleagues, authorities and other members of the school community. The choice of the topic is not accidental, as it derives from reflecting on my personal professional pedagogical practice. As a former teacher, I wonder how certain teachers manage to develop students, strive for their well-being, improve their own professional skills, and adjust the curriculum in order to achieve the best results, while other teachers decline to make such attempts. For many years I have been talking to teachers and I often heard that educational curricula, initiatives, and rules are "let down from above" (from the Ministry of Education) and they, ordinary teachers, are not able to influence the situation. Thus, I became interested in knowing more about the nature of the interaction between teachers and the existing educational system, and about the role of teachers in modern education. I once read an article written by Professor Lilija Duobliene (2017), where she discusses the confrontation between teacher standardization on the one hand, and pedagogical innovation and creativity on the other. The author states that teachers become trapped, and have to choose whether to conform to the official requirements or act in accordance with their professional beliefs and attitudes. Duobliene (2017) discusses a "bottom-up" approach, when teachers are able to influence the situation in an educational system, and introduces the term "teacher agency", based on the ecological approach of Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015).

The primary idea of the research was to investigate how teachers experience their leadership of students within the professional environment. However, the pilot empirical data gathered through the two stages of the research demonstrated that in speaking about leadership the research participants are more focused on agency. The first stage of the research highlighted tensions between school system, teachers' attitudes and personal values, and distinguished the structures which surround teachers. The second stage demonstrated that pure leadership cannot be fully implemented within structures which oppress actors. Some teachers refused to recognize their leadership role, and additional explanations were needed in order to convince teachers to believe they are leaders in their classrooms. Therefore, at this stage, I saw a need to speak about agency rather than leadership. Thus, I decided to focus on the issue of teacher agency in relation to the existing educational system in Lithuania.

Searching for a theoretical framework and suitable research methodology took a while and did not happen at once. I aimed to conduct qualitative research in order to gain teachers' insights on how they experience their agency, and what it means to be a teacher who exercises agency. Phenomenology was chosen as it allows delving into people's experiences, mainly how teachers experience their agency and distinguish the essential components of the phenomenon. I have chosen Giddens' structuration

theory as a theoretical framework because the empirical results clearly demonstrated a link between surrounding structures and teacher professional agency, when the interaction between agents and structures implies a possibility of emancipation. This approach corresponded to my views on the situation in the system of education, when agents (teachers) are constrained by the system; however, at the same time, they are able to make an impact and contribute to change.

**Topicality**

Teacher professional agency is extensively described in the literature, however, there is a lack of empirical research of the phenomena (Toom et al., 2021). The main questions are what is teacher professional agency and why does it matter? In recent literature the first and most significant aspect of its importance lies in teachers' capacity to make positive changes at school, develop the curriculum, create more favorable conditions for student learning, and so increase student achievement (Priestley, 2015). Teachers are those who not only transfer knowledge, but create a learning environment for students and contribute to general school improvement (Hargreaves, 1998). For more than 30 years in educational research there has been a tendency to view teachers as change agents who are able to lead the process and bring innovations into the school curriculum (Badley, 1986; Hargreaves, 1998; Lane, Lacefield-Parachini, & Isken, 2003; Etelapelto et al., 2013; Buchanan, 2014; Forde & Dickson, 2017). An OECD (2018) report emphasized the need to develop learners' agency and co-agency in order to increase their engagement and responsibility for personal learning and collective achievement, and their ability to initiate actions and act responsibly for shaping the general well-being of humanity in 2030. The authors of the document stress the importance of creating favorable learning conditions and social environment; thus, the role of teachers is crucial. Similar tendencies may be seen in Lithuania, where the significant role of the teaching profession is being discussed in public discourse (Skarbalienė, 2015; Želvys, Dukynaitė, & Vaitekaitis, 2018). The teacher is seen as the most important element of the educational system, an agent of change (Priestley, 2015), who is able to learn constantly and increase her or his own professional competencies (Paruliene, 2013).

In teachers' professional practice, professional agency is realized through competencies, motivation, autonomy, acting, creativity and initiative. However, the notion of agency is a political-social phenomenon, and the capacities of teachers are sometimes over-emphasized (Priestley, 2015). Accordingly, teacher agency may be seen as an individual phenomenon, while over-emphasis on teacher qualities often omits another important condition emerging for teacher agency – the surrounding environment and social structures which frame a teacher's work (Datnow et al., 2002). Teacher agency exists in terms of interaction with others within the working conditions (Eteläpelto et al., 2013), where teachers collaborate with students and other members of the school community. It implies that teacher agency exists in relation to certain structures and within certain socio-cultural conditions, for instance, policy, institutional traditions, culture, norms, and others.

Some researchers (Hökkä, Rautiainen, Silander, & Eteläpelto, 2019) and theorists (Bandura, 1989) focus on agency in terms of a teacher's inherent capability to influence the professional environment. Others emphasize the socio-cultural and ecological (Priestley et al., 2015) conditions under which teacher agency may be developed. At the same time, agency is not a personal trait, but rather a capacity of an individual or groups of individuals. The supporters of the ecological approach are regarded as "pragmatists", because they view teacher agency as an achievable capacity aimed at investigating the conditions under which teacher agency may be achieved (Leijen et al., 2020).

Although teachers are expected to work in certain ways prescribed in curriculum and educational standards, they face numerous situations which require making professional choices and taking actions. The ability to exercise agency in part depends on teachers' inner beliefs, commitment, and understanding of professional practices (Stillman & Anderson, 2015). Giddens (1984) states that people are able to exercise agency if the system poses some irrelevant requirements which contradict their conceptions. "Action or agency is defined as the stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the on-going process of events in the world" (Giddens, 1976, p. 75). Therefore, teacher agency may be seen as a process caused by interaction with external conditions. Teacher agency may go beyond prescribed teaching roles, or contradict the established order and even resist change (Buchanan, 2015); teacher agency exists within the particular context in which teachers are able to act and interact with other actors (Lane & Sweeny, 2019). Thus, teachers shape and create the educational reality within the given social and cultural context, and their actions shape that context.

**Research problem**

Speaking about teacher agency and existing structures, Morrison (2005) asks a rhetorical question *"Why do teachers perpetuate practices that are, in many ways, anti-educational, rather than change them?"* (p. 312). Indeed, there is an issue when some discredited practices, for instance, over-testing or enhancement of student competition, are being widely implemented. Many complaints are heard from the teachers who blame the existing educational plans and programs and view them as constraining and limiting their creativity. The Concept of Good School (2015), a document which contains a set of guidelines for organizing educational process in Lithuanian schools, implies autonomy and freedom of choice for educators and all participants of learning process. However, in practice, many teachers blame the educational policymakers for standardization and bureaucratizing the learning process. However, some teachers choose to act differently despite the external restrictions or control (Buchanan, 2015). We may explain their actions by analysing the existing external structures (constraints caused by external social pressure) or self-imposed beliefs and practices (Morrison, 2005). Therefore, the current research will consider theories of structuration and reproduction of social practices as a possible explanation of teacher professional agency (Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1990).

The concept of "professional agency", which is a key concept for the current research, refers to professional actors (employees and leaders) who can exercise control over, or influence their work and work environment (Hökkä, Rautiainen, Silander, & Eteläpelto, 2019). The particular interest of the current research is gaining understanding of how teachers experience agency in relation to school structures. Professional agency is closely intertwined with subjects' professional identities, competencies, knowledge, and experience, but is always temporally realized within sociocultural conditions (Hökkä et al., 2019). The research is focused on analysis of teachers' everyday professional practices, when their experiences are shaped by their sociocultural conditions and professional environment; the teacher's ability to exercise control over one's actions and decisions within the sedimented, habitualized structure of educational system.

The scope of the current research encompasses several issues related to the research:

– Teacher professional agency experiences as going beyond the prescribed teaching roles and/or resistance to the structures.

– Tensions between the normalization (becoming through being subordinate to the structures) and the extent to which a teacher is able to exercise control over one's professional practices and make professional choices.

– The interaction between crystallized school structures and teacher professional agency, when certain aspects of school life are perceived as natural and accepted without question by the members of the school community.

– Continuous interaction between professional agency and leadership in daily teaching practices.

**Research questions**

*Research aim.* The aim of the current research is to identify how teachers experience agency in their professional everyday life. The research is not aimed at searching for a new theory to explain teacher agency, but to investigate teacher-lived existential experiences phenomenologically. According to Dahlberg, the main goal of "lifeworld research" is to reveal and clarify the essential meaning which is inherent to a certain phenomenon, disclosing the set of inherent features *(essences)*, which distinguish it from other phenomena (Dahlberg et al., 2008). However, according to Dahlberg (ibid.) the number of essences of the phenomenon may be endless, and the researcher's goal is to disclose as much as possible. Thus, the current research seeks the essences of the teacher professional agency phenomenon within their professional working environment.

*Research object*. The object of the current research is teachers' lived experience of professional agency. "Lived experience" means knowledge, information, and encounters which teachers gain during their everyday teaching practice, and communication within their working environment.

*Research questions.* The current study seeks to answer the main questions:

What are the essences of the teacher professional agency phenomenon?

What does it mean for teachers to experience agency?

How does a teacher experience agency within the formal school structures?

How does a teacher experience agency as going beyond the prescribed teaching roles?

How is agency experienced within interaction with students in a teacher's practice?

**Novelty of the research**

The current research result is a reflection about teacher everyday practices which contributes to a better understanding of teacher professional agency by incorporating the authentic experiences of practicing teachers. The phenomenological approach allows to cognize lived experience on how teachers experience their professional agency, make professional choices, and take stances. The lived experiences of professional agency represent the most significant aspects of the lived everyday world of teachers when they experienced a sense of agency. The research results demonstrate a structure of teacher professional agency as it was experienced by diverse teachers from different schools and regions of Lithuania. The structure shows the essences of the teacher lived professional agency phenomenon. The phenomenon is viewed inseparably from the surrounding social and cultural context; thus, the research reveals the issue of interaction between school structure and teacher professional agency. The research results might be useful for practicing teachers, educational authorities and policymakers who are interested in enhancing teacher autonomy and empowering their agency.

**Structure of this thesis**

The thesis consists of four main chapters. The first chapter introduces a theoretical framework of agency-structure interaction based on Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration. The notion of human agency is viewed generally from the position of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), postructuralism (Foucault, 1979; Buttler, 1990), phenomenology (Nida-Rumelin, 2018; Coole, 2005), and Bourdieu's (1990) sociology of culture. The second chapter is aimed at exploring the concept of teacher professional agency and focuses on its notion and different approaches of its conceptualization; the issues of school as a structure, sedimentation, crystallization and ritualization of teaching and school practices are described. The third chapter describes a research methodology based on the phenomenological research approach; the stages of conducting empirical research, research parameters, way of conducting empirical research and ethical issues are described. The fourth chapter represents the research findings of two stages of the research. It demonstrates contextual issues faced by teachers and teachers' lived experience of professional agency, and provides a scheme of essences of the phenomenon. The last chapter involves a discussion where the essential components of teacher agency are analyzed in relation to a broader school structure. The thesis ends with concluding remarks, acknowledgements, and list of references.

# 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 1.1. Phenomenon of agency and structure within the framework of the theory of structuration

The current chapter presents the philosophical and theoretical background of the research. The problem of agency is analyzed in terms of its relation to the existing social structures. The issues of agency and power are analyzed from the perspective of Giddens' theory of structuration, critical theories, poststructuralist, and phenomenological perspectives. The issue of duality of agency and structure is discussed.

### 1.1.1. Duality of agency and structure in Giddens' structuration theory

Agency is seen in terms of its comparing to and confronting the existing structure, which may be seen differently depending on the leading theory. The discussion about agency-structure relationship usually includes two opposite approaches: voluntaristic, where agents are viewed as free individuals, and deterministic, which underlines the priority of depersonalized structures (Coole, 2005). Giddens (1984) offered a theory of structuration which emphasizes a duality of structure and individual actions of its actors. This theory was chosen as a theoretical framework because it is interactive in nature and recognizes the mutual impact of structure and human agents, referring to structures as both constraining and enabling the human agents to act, therefore, allowing to speak about teacher professional agency as acting within the school environment. The theory of structuration refers to the human as agent, and explains the links with existing social structure. Giddens explains how actions of individuals interact with social structures and shows the duality of their relationship. Thus, teachers, as members of the school community, may be influenced by the school structures while at the same time teachers influence the school structures by their actions (Burridge, 2014). In addition, the current theory explains the relationship between human intentionality and action.

The key point of Giddens' theory of structuration implies that human agents and existing structures cannot be separated and exist independently, but rather exist in *duality* (Burridge, 2014). The duality implies that the "structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the recurrently organized social practices" (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). Giddens argues against the common opinion about the structure as a certain external factor, which inhibits the desires and initiatives of independent actors and rejects the idea that structures and agents are independent phenomena. The structure is not considered as a constraint, but rather both constraining and enabling at the same time. On one hand, human agents exist within the structures, which may limit their actions, however, on the other hand, human agents may influence the structures by changing

existing practices. Such approach was criticized for its voluntaristic ontology, meaning that Giddens put much more emphasis on the will of agents and enabling aspects of structure, rather than on constraints it causes (Kort & Gharbi, 2013).

In order to understand the term "agent" we need to make a clear definition of "structure". Structures are sets of transformation relations, out of time and space, characterized by the absence of the subject and replicated in the social system (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). The social system refers to activities and relations of human agents or collectivities, arranged as regular social practices which reoccur over time and space (p. 25). Importantly, structures exist over time and space, before and after a human being is born, and thus create a context where action may take place (Musolf, 2003; Burridge, 2014). The existence of structures is caused by human activity in the form of social practices which are maintained and reoccur across time and space, creating cultural norms, laws and codes of conduct (Burridge, 2014). Mtika (2021) defines cognitive, cultural, and social structures. Cognitive structures involve the possession and arrangement of knowledge, skills, talents, and awareness of one's surrounding socio-cultural structures (Mtika, 2021). Cultural structures comprise patterns of habits, attitudes, beliefs, traditions, and rituals of the socio-cultural environment (Hall, 2000). Musolf (2003) argues that structures are countless social facts that people cannot escape and cannot control. Social facts, according to him, refer to race, social classes, groups, generations, families, organizational and institutional hierarchy, rules, and social roles. The school and its order may be viewed as a social structure which has its own social practices which are being continuously maintained and reoccurring. For instance, lesson structure, teacher-student relationships, and even school dress code may be viewed as continuously maintained and reproduced social practices. However, if we follow Giddens' understanding of agency, social practices may be changed by the activity of human agents who interact with surrounding structures. In other words, a teacher chooses to shape the existing practices, he/she may take certain actions and change them, and in this way his/her agency manifests.

Mtika (2021) argues that at individual level human agency is informed by the individual's cognitive structure, which may be constrained or enabled by the resources and environment, conditioned by an individual's abilities and willingness to act in accordance with personal beliefs and attitudes. Mtika states that, in addition to social structures, human agents reproduce cognitive and cultural structures collectively; however, they are able to shape those practices at individual levels by applying their creative efforts.

Individuals are seen as agents, who are able to reflect on their practice: "To be a human being is to be a purposive agent, who both has reasons for his or her activities and is able, if asked, to elaborate discursively upon those reasons" (Giddens, 1984, p. 3). Human conduct is described through the stratification model of the acting self, which implies reflexive monitoring,

rationalization and motivation of action as embedded into the process of acting. Figure 1 represents the stratification model of human agent.

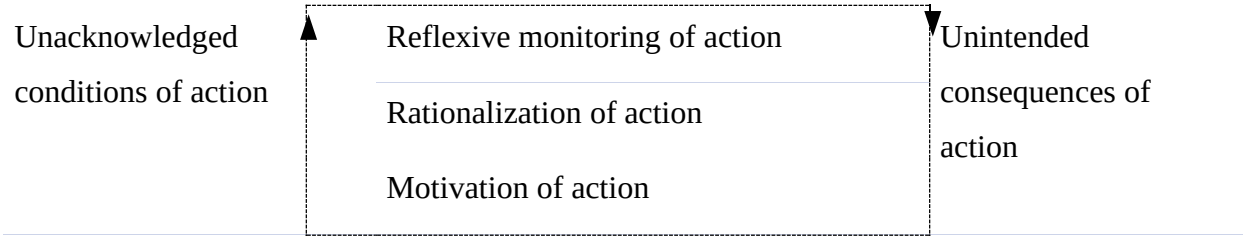



**Figure 1.** Stratification model of human agent (Giddens, 1984)

Humans as actors, according to Giddens, constantly monitor their activities and expect others to behave in the same way. The rationalization of action implies an ability of individuals to explain their actions, if asked. Giddens distinguishes reflexive monitoring and rationalization from motivation for action. Motivation refers to its potential for action, plans or projects which cause the action. However, actions may not occur because of motives, as many routine activities are not motivated directly. Thus, Giddens (1984) distinguishes three levels of reasoning for the action: unconscious, practical, and discursive consciousness. Practical consciousness is regarded as "pre-consciousness", and serves as a mode to interpret the actions of others. Discursive consciousness implies the ability to rationalize one's motivation for action and elaborate on it, if needed. Everyday life is seen by Giddens as a "flow of intentional action" (1984, p. 8), defining human agency in terms of intentions. However, action is not considered as an application of pre-determined intentions, but rather as having multiple impetus (Joas, 1987). Human actions derive from intentions to behave in a certain way, or else the behavior is regarded as a reactive response. The author states that intentional action with explanation for its motives is a key characteristic of human agency, even if the motives are mistaken. Sometimes people act intentionally having clear purposes, however, thinking mistakenly, their actions and effort may lead to harmful consequences. However, the actions may have unintended consequences, which, in turn, become the unacknowledged prerequisites for further actions.

The instance of human agency in the theory of structuration counts only if action is conducted under some description. Human agency "refers not to the intentions of doing things, but to capabilities to do those things in the first place" (Giddens, 1984, p. 9). Hence, agency presumes power, and concerns those events where a person is a "perpetrator", meaning that he or she controls the action, which would not have happened without the individual's intervention. Giddens (1984) distinguishes what the agent does from intended aspects of conduct. For Giddens

(1984), the ability to "act otherwise" is seen as the ability to conduct an intervention or to refrain from intervention, affecting a specific process or situation. Thus, being agent implies an ability to "deploy a range of causal powers" (p. 14) in everyday life, having a capability "to make a difference" in a current situation or event. The capability to impact is essential for human agency, otherwise a person ceases to be an agent. Giddens introduced the dual nature of structure and agency: those who are in subordinate positions can influence the decisions of their subordinates, as all kinds of dependence offer room for action. Thus, power relations in social systems imply autonomy and interdependence between actors. Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration links human actors with social structures, meaning that the actions of those people who make up the school community will be influenced by school structures, and these same people will in turn influence the school structures through their actions (Burridge, 2014).

### 1.1.2. Agency within the structuration and critical structural theories

Combination of the insights of both Giddens' and Bourdieu's works enables greater understanding of teachers' actions around pedagogy (Burridge, 2014). The theory of social action was introduced by Bourdieu (1977) and offered a new way of analyzing society (Ozturk, 2011). It introduces a concept of "habitus", and offers a dual understanding of the social system (Kort & Gharbi, 2013). Habitus is a "structuring mechanism" that enables individuals to cope with uncertainty and changes (Mtaki, 2021, p. 17). Bourdieu examines people's actions, way of life, behavior and communication in terms of practices which can be modified by a combination of habitus and capital (accumulated social and cultural resources) as applied to a social context (Bourdieu, 1985). For Bourdieu (1990), the notion of social action is seen as praxis, a human activity of production and reproduction of social practices, cultures and economic wealth. He developed a dialectical theory of social development, which is based on the idea that praxis is the mediatory link between individual and collective action and social structure (social organization of the production and reproduction of society) (Ozturk, 2005). Thus, Giddens views individuals as reflective, "knowledgeable" agents, while for Bourdieu the individuals' actions are primarily driven by habitus. Both theories consider the notion of praxis. For Giddens, the rules are procedures of action as aspects of praxis (Giddens, 1984, p. 21), while for Bourdieu the praxis is seen as a central category, the core of human action. Rules, according to Giddens, presume "methodical procedures" or "techniques" applied in the reproduction of social interactions, relating to the composition of meaning on the one hand, and sanctioning of the ways of conduct on the other. Rules and resources are means of the system reproduction and at the same time are dependent on the production and reproduction of social action (p. 19).

Both theories view human practices as recursive within time and space. There is neither totality nor hierarchy of social systems over the human social activities, but rather humans reproduce the social systems through continuous recurrence of social practices across space and time (Giddens, 1984). For Bourdieu, the individuals also reproduce the social structures, and, at the same time, shape them (Morrison, 2005). Thus, society is understood as "complex of recurrent practices" which change or shape social practices. For both authors, the practices are determined by habits and ways of life which people adopt. The individuals are not simply "borrowing" and using the recurrent practices in their activities, but rather those practices constitute individuals' activities (Giddens & Pierson, 1998). At the same time, the constraining nature of practices (or structures) enable individuals to creatively shape them (Morrison, 2005).

The agency of individuals is seen differently in the theory of structuration and Bourdieu's theory: reflexivity versus habitus (Decoteau, 2015), individual ability to reflect versus social determinism (Evans, 2007). Both authors were seeking a conceptualizing agency-structure problematic, although in different ways. Bourdieu distinguishes structural models and practical models which are applied by the social agents in their daily routines and reproduction of social practices (Lizardo, 2010). Unlike Giddens, Bourdieu distinguishes structures from social practice and links them with habitus. Habitus is seen as a set of acquired patterns of thought, behavior, and taste, which has a mediatory role between society and individual (Ozturk, 2011). Habitus comprises past experiences, "acting as a system of cognitive and motivating structures … a path to follow" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). For Bourdieu, habitus is the primary source of human action, as human acts or works in the world, and reflection remains in second place (Ozturk, 2011). In other words, action, according to Bourdieu, prevails over thought. Giddens, however, views the human actors as primarily reflecting agents, who act intentionally and are able to elaborate and reflect upon their actions. The reflexivity is stressed, as human beings, according to Giddens, are knowledgeable agents who are aware of the rules and apply them to produce and reproduce in their daily encounters. The rules can be discursively formulated and formally codified (e.g., official laws). The codified rules are the most influential for social activity structuring, while discursively formulated rules may be interpreted differently (Giddens, 1984).

Bourdieu takes the relationship between class habitus and current capital as realized within the specific logic of a given field as basic in the analysis of social practice. The agent's social and cultural capital itself is the product of habitus, which is pervasive, because agents act and interact by sharing identical stories (Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus is self-reflexive and animated in practice each time, and encounters itself both as embodied and as objectified history. Thus, Bourdieu refers to habitus as some given trajectory, conditioned by the past and inevitably influencing the present actions of social actors. For him, human agency is seen as "the corrections and adjustments the

agents themselves consciously carry", which presuppose the "mastery of a common code" (p. 59). Social action cannot succeed without a minimum of consistency between the "habitus of the mobilizing agents (prophet, leader, etc.) and the dispositions of those who recognize themselves in their practices or words, and, above all, without the inclination towards grouping that comes from the "spontaneous orchestration of dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 59). For Bourdieu, human agency is only possible within the given habitus, which is conditioned by the social structures, therefore, it is determined and does not show any possibility for a person's emancipation. In Bourdieu's view, we may refer to the notion of available cultural repertoires, when the action is possible under certain permeable conditions within the given structure (Lamont, Silva, Warde, 2010). While Giddens (1984) views human agency as an emancipatory path, referring to the structures as both constraining and enabling entities. While for Bourdieu, the human agency is something executed through repetition of existing practices, and those practices inhibit alternative action, rather than contribute to its appearing.

As a critique of Giddens' and Bourdieu's notions on nature of agency and structure, Morrison (2005) states that both theories are focused on a "vicious circle", when in the case of interaction of schools, as structures, and teachers, as agents, the teachers may be constrained by the school system and may create the constraining conditions themselves. Teachers may voluntarily choose to reproduce the existing system (practices) evoking their agency, and deliberately choose the course which limits them. The author critiques Giddens' notion of routinization of social practices, and calls this a "circularity of agency and structure" and the "circularity of causality" (p. 312). However, the author omits the notion of duality in the theory of structuration, which supposes the emancipating nature of interaction between an individual's agency and structure. The schoolteacher may be constrained by the school system, although the system simultaneously enables him/her. Thus, teacher agency and external school structures are seen as interrelated, mutually connected and dependent.

### 1.1.3. Poststructuralists' view on agency and structure

Ideas of poststructuralists challenged the Cartesian dualism which separates mind from body, and view agency as an individualistic capacity (Coole, 2005). In works of Foucault (1990) the relation between structure and agency is seen in terms of resistance between oppressing external power and the extent of human subjugation. For him, power, not agency seems predominant and pervasive (Coole, 2005). Foucault introduces the term "critical agent", which is characterized as a subject's capacities to render sensible and to critique the norms underlying any social, political, moral, aesthetic, or other practices or institutions that subjugate rather than liberate people; to imagine, if not initiate, new norms that would transform the practices or

institutions so they de-subjugate and liberate people. Foucault recognizes that liberation carries its own forms of subjection, and structures are aimed to sustain this rendering, critiquing, and imagining as a permanent ethos (Foucault, 1990, pp. 154–155).

Foucault considers power in terms of, above all, property of society or the social community, while Giddens, in contrast, defines power as human intent or will, a capacity to achieve the desired or intended outcomes (Giddens, 1984, p. 15). For Giddens power is not a resource, but rather a possibility of action, while resources are viewed as properties of social systems, based on and reproduced by agents in a process of continuous interaction. Giddens views the structure not in terms of a "skeleton" (1984, p. 16), a framework which holds other organs, not something exclusively external for individuals, but rather internal to their activities. Structure is seen as something that limits and, at the same time, allows action to happen, while for Foucault, the individual is not a carrier of power, but rather someone who is subjected to power (Kort & Gharbi, 2013). Foucault emphasizes an oppressive nature of structures.

In the structuration theory, everyday practices are treated as a routine and executed through practical consciousness (non-consciously), and routinization itself is not considered by Giddens in terms of negative impact on a person. It rather leads the action of the individual and helps to save resources. While for Foucault, the routine is viewed in terms of habitual daily bodily practices, when individuals themselves engage in oppression and self-surveillance (Pylypa, 1998). This notion is close to the notion of "magic consciousness" introduced by Paolo Freire (1970), when those who are oppressed perceive their surrounding conditions as natural and unquestionable. Foucault views these oppressive practices in terms of examination, surveillance, and different kinds of penalties applied by institutions, and therefore, producing a discourse which informs and directs a person's thoughts and actions (Mauri, 2018). In the context of school and teaching, the Foucauldian understanding of discipline maintenance and surveillance may be applied to teaching. School itself may be regarded as a structure possessing all the elements criticized by Foucault: discipline, surveillance, and punishment. Schooling can be viewed through his concept of panopticon, where actors are surveilled, controlled, and disciplined. Instead of evident punishment, the school engages in latent and hidden practices, when punishment influences soul rather than body, through specialists who judge and assess a teacher's work (Mauri, 2018). For instance, a school audit may be considered as this kind of observation; teachers themselves may engage in practices of judgement and labeling of colleagues. The internalization of such oppressive practices leads to accepting hierarchy, discipline, and control as normal (Foucault, 1990).

For Foucault, human agency is rather emancipation through recognition of oppressive practices and declining to engage in them, while the structuration theory views human agency

through the individual's conscious action that shapes the structure. Foucault and Buttler (1990) claim that structures are soft and can be shifted by the human. However, the action is possible on meso and micro levels, which is called a "revolution from the bottom". Buttler (1990) emphasizes habitus on undoing gender when a human does not need to act in a way that is prescribed by society. Undoing may be linked to unlearning certain things, which were prescribed and determined from structures. For instance, a teacher can unlearn a sedimented view on teaching professional prestige or unlearn repeating the same patterns of behavior he/she acquired before.

### 1.1.4. Phenomenological approach to agency and structure

Phenomenology explores the structures of consciousness personally experienced by humans (Gallagher, 2012), and is one of the main foundations of structuration theory (Pozzebon, 2013). Giddens (1991) distinguishes three levels of human consciousness: practical, discursive, and unconscious. The agent can elaborate on and explain the ways and reasons of his/her actions and behavior ("practical consciousness"). However, practical consciousness is non-conscious (not unconscious), and actions are conducted according to commonly accepted patterns of behavior, which allow agents to act according to understandable and common patterns. This phenomenon is called a "routinization". The routinization provides a sense of ontological security when the agent is able to assess and trust the events occurring around, thus having a sense of control and autonomy over one's life and helping to manage anxiety (Burridge, 2014). The ontological security appears in a process of interaction with others. While the knowledge of day-to-day practices (practical consciousness) remains tacit and performed almost automatically, discursive consciousness implies that a person is able to elaborate and justify one's own actions explicitly (Giddens, 1984). Using practical or discursive consciousness, the agent is able to rationalize his/her actions. The unconscious refers to knowledge that agents absorbed from past experiences (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, norms) and are not able to elaborate on (Burridge, 2014), often developed in early childhood; a sense of trust towards attitudes of parents and family, which again, form a sense of ontological security and identity (Giddens, 1991).

However, Nida-Rumelin (2018) states that human agency refers to "the experience of self as source" in the way we experience our own behavior as actively brought about by ourselves. The term "active behavior" means that the behavior is not conditioned by the previous events, which contrasts with Giddens' notion of unconscious motives of human agency, who views agency as not exclusively a rational action, as it may be caused by certain irrational motives. Nevertheless, Nida-Rumelin, (2018) states that some actions may be brought about by the person, yet they may be executed undeliberately or "popping" as sudden suggestions, movements, or quick reactions. Or a human's actions may be executed for some reasons and be actively brought

about (for instance, decisions and actions made in a situation of danger); however, these are rather responses to external threats. Unconsciously or automatically executed actions (dancing, gestures, etc.) also have an unintentional nature (Nida-Rumelin, 2018). Thus, the author contrasts conscious and unconscious actions, arguing that agency is consciously controlled and actively brought to action by the actor. Experiencing one's behavior as active is the veridicality condition of agentive experiences (of oneself as active) and of perceptual experiences (of others as active). Thus, agency is viewed in terms of an intentional action when the person experiences one's behavior (action) as actively conducted by him/herself (Nida-Rumelin, 2018). However, for Giddens, all three levels of consciousness lead to human agency (Burridge, 2014). Coole and Frost (2013) critique the understanding of human agency in terms of "enchanted materialism" (p. 9), when agency is perceived as an "inorganic" thing, like electricity, which challenges humanity. Thus, Coole (2005) describes agency in terms of contingency which embraces several aspects: non-cognitive bodily processes, intersubjective world and agents themselves (individual or collective). In other words, agency is viewed through its relation to the human body as well.

*Agency and embodiment.* Following the ideas of Husserl (1970) and Merleau Ponty (1964), Coole (2005) states that agency is embodied and brings the body of thinkers at the first stage, recognizing their corporeality. This notion corresponds to Giddens' (1984) view that action is not merely a combination of different acts and cannot be considered separately from bodily experiences. The body is seen as a mediator which ensures the coherence of acting with the surrounding world, practically experiencing external situations and events. Merleau-Ponty (1962) defines human beings as embodied *in* the world, meaning that we perceive the world primarily through our bodies (Matthews, 2006). The somatic experiences of the body (pain, anxiety, fear, joy) are primary rather than reasons (Coole, 2005). The author emphasizes such qualities of the phenomenological human body as *bodily knowing* (body as knowing subject, pre-reflective experience), *intentionality and motivation* in relation to world (human body is able to choose; however, the choices are limited by the existing structures and sedimented norms) and the core issue she posits refers to somatic bodily experiences of agency. Humans routinely control their bodies, and bodily discipline is one of the essential components of the social agent. However, according to Giddens, a person's "I" and body may appear to be in dissonance, when the person executes routine actions which do not correspond to his/her internal beliefs or aspirations. Giddens calls it "false I", when the body becomes an instrument, manipulated by "I", and the anxiety appears when disassociation happens (Giddens, 1991). The person experiences anxiety when he/she lacks the sense of ontological security and faces the need to think about the future, estimate opposite future possibilities and link them to the present activity. Giddens (1984) states that the

agency and structure exist in social systems across dimensions of time and space. Moreover, the structures exist before and after the lifespan of the agent.

Human agency has been viewed from the different philosophical perspectives. The most significant elements of human agency, which were distinguished, are intentionality of individual, level of consciousness, relation to the surrounding structures and the extent to which a person (individually or collectively) is able to shape those structures. Thus, human agency is a capacity of an individual to act consciously within the surrounding structures, and to shape them.

### 1.2. Teacher professional agency: structure, components and context

#### 1.2.1. Conceptualization of teacher professional agency

A group of Finnish researchers developed a notion of "professional agency", which is not presented in Giddens' explanations of human agency. Professional agency is related to the individual's activities within one's professional field and focused on the professional self (Eteläpelto et al., 2013), meaning that professional agency is oriented towards working practices, surrounding and conditions, and, as a result, toward a person's professional identity (Vähäsantanen, Räikkönen, Paloniemi, Hökkä, & Eteläpelto, 2018). The individual is not merely observing and reacting to the external world, but rather acting within a certain context and transforming existing practices (Hadar & Benish-Weisma, 2019). Professional agency is viewed as an action-based phenomenon manifested through actions rather than individual properties or character traits (Vähäsantanen et al., 2018). The action is intentional in nature and the agency is seen as a combination of intention and action (Hadar & Benish-Weisma, 2019), when teachers make active choices in professional practice (Sang, 2020). Professional agency refers to professional actors (employees and leaders) who are able to exercise control and make an impact on their work and working environment (Calvert, 2016; Hökkä, Rautiainen, Silander, & Eteläpelto, 2019). Professional agency is manifested in making choices and decisions, by influencing, negotiating, and taking stances in the professional environment (Vähäsantanen et al., 2018). Thus, the general notion of agency implies an intentional professional action manifested in employees' ability to exert influence within a certain professional environment. Professional agency is closely intertwined with subjects' professional identities, competencies, knowledge, and experience, but is always temporally realized within sociocultural conditions. The latter encompass resources and constraints such as material and physical conditions, cultures, power relations, and discursive structures (Hökkä et al., 2019). Agency has to be understood as a dynamic and relational process that unfolds and develops over time, shaped by interactions between a developing individual and a changing social context, and thus, strongly embedded in diverse and changing social and historical contexts (Schoon, 2017).

Accordingly, teacher professional agency is related to a teacher's professional identity, expertise and experience, and depends on sociocultural conditions of a certain period of time and availability of resources. The resources may encompass a school's material conditions, relationships within the school community, and attitudes and beliefs of teachers. The notion of teacher agency emerged to conceptualize teacher efforts to make choices and conduct intentional actions that have significant impact within their professional environments (Toom, Pyhältö, & O'Connell Rust, 2015). Teachers are required to make professional decisions, implement innovations, negotiate personal, professional and social requirements and cope with different situations and challenging environments in their daily practices, and, as a result, provide better learning environments for their students (Toom et al., 2015), and lead their own learning and personal development (Frost, 2006).

Professional agency is something that people do in practice (Biesta et al., 2015). However, this does not imply that teacher behavior can be used as a criterion for professional agency. Rather, it is teacher behaviors combined with internal processes such as attitudes, emotions and cognitive processes which constitute the complexity of professional agency (Toom et al., 2015). Thus, agency is an intentional action, and teachers are able to elaborate on reasons behind their actions, led by certain self-encompassing values and self-determined goals through planning and execution of strategic actions (Frost, 2006). Thus, teacher professional agency can be manifested through a teacher's actions which correspond to one's professional goals and values. Accordingly, actions performed accidentally or without any purpose cannot be perceived as teacher professional agency, due to their unintentional nature.

Teacher professional agency can be manifested individually or collectively, and practiced when professional subjects and/or communities make choices, take stances, and have an influence on their work and/or professional identities (Billet, 2008). Teacher agency is viewed as professional actions teacher take within working contexts, which condition, allow and determine those actions (Buchanan, 2015). The emphasis on pedagogical action is a core characteristic of teachers' professional agency (Toom et al., 2015; Imants & Van der Wal, 2020). Sense of agency is reflected in the internal locus of control, taking responsibility for the situation as well as making suggestions, pedagogical choices and conscious decisions based on their own professional goals and reflection (Buchanan, 2015; Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

Within the construct of agency, the notion of professional identity is crucial. Identity is formed through the particular interaction of the individual and the context, and so is unique for each individual teacher (Beijaard et al., 2004). The impact of the policy environment with increased accountability, international comparisons and policy emulation on teachers' work can challenge teachers' understanding of what it means to be a teacher and their identity as a teacher

(Buchanan, 2015). Therefore, teachers compare their own pre-existing beliefs and expectations of what it means to be a teacher to interpret, evaluate and appropriate the conditions of professional environment (Frost, 2006). The author states that this is the way teacher professional agency is manifested.

Teacher professional agency is seen from two perspectives: "stepping up" and "pushing back" (Buchanan, 2015). Stepping up was a way of exhibiting agency in which a teacher sought to go above and beyond the perceived expectations of her role. When a teacher's identity fits with their local school culture and practices, their agency can be viewed as stepping up. Stepping up resembles the practice of mid-career teachers engaging in cycles of experimentation or activism. The author sees it as a grassroot of teacher leadership. Pushing back appears as a form of teacher resistance: teachers reject, negotiate, or reconfigure particular school and district policies with which they do not agree (Buchanan, 2015). Accordingly, agentic teachers are able to act in new and creative ways, or they are able to resist external norms or restrictions when they conflict with a teacher's professional beliefs (Toom et al., 2015; Brodie, 2019).

Agentic action can also come from a teacher's curiosity (Van der Herijden et al., 2015). In this there seems to be something related to teachers as generators of changed practice. Van der Herijden et al.'s study identified four characteristics of agency from the literature: mastery, entrepreneurship, collaboration and lifelong learning. Mastery is seen through being skilled and competent to execute professional duties. Entrepreneurship is manifested in being engaged in innovative professional practices, which is linked to the collaboration culture in a certain professional environment. The characteristic of lifelong learning is manifested through readiness to learn and seek to increase one's own professional qualification and skills.

Here we need to clarify what is a profession – and the teaching profession – when we speak about professional agency. The term "profession" involves not only formal qualifications and occupation, but also training, knowledge and, what is important, elements of professional ethics (Tapper & Millet, 2015). Buhai (2012) states that profession implies provision of service and a certain kind of altruism, when the person sometimes must put the interests of others foremost (e.g., the interests of employer or customers), based on trust and occupational self-regulation. The teaching profession also involves occupational knowledge, teaching skills, didactics, and possession of certain personality traits in order to accomplish their professional mission (Hotaman, 2010). Thus, profession involves certain formal requirements, standards, sets of required skills and personal predisposition, commitment and personal traits. Teachers perceive their profession in one way or another, and this perception highly depends on a teacher's personal identity and recognition of professional status (Fuller, Goodwyn, & Francis-Brophy, 2013). The

identity of a teacher creates pre-conditions for further learning and professional development, and so is crucial for agency in a professional field.

*Subject-centered socio-cultural approach*

Teacher professional agency is seen through lenses of different approaches which provide opportunities for a deeper and wider understanding of this concept. A subject-centred sociocultural approach to teacher agency was introduced by Hökkä, Rautiainen, Silander, & Eteläpelto (2019), aimed at explaining how agency is practiced within social-cultural practices and discourses. The researchers state that the way people think, act and learn is always inspired, resourced and constrained by their socio-cultural contexts. In such an approach, professional agency is seen as manifested in and resourced by a relational interaction between social conditions (including certain cultural and material resources and constraints) and individual subjects with their professional identities and competencies. There is a mutually constitutive relationship between the socio-cultural context and individual learning and identity construction. The authors underline the importance of agency for the transformation of work practices and cultures. The authors state that agency can manifest itself in various kinds of actions encompassing discursive, practical and embodied relations with the world. Hence, teacher professional agency should be analyzed by focusing on:

- manifestations of agency in the socio-cultural and discursive reality of teaching and schooling (language, social norms, hegemonic discourses, and related official and unofficial power relations).
- teachers' interpretations, meanings, and purposes in relation to their agentic actions, and how these are intertwined with their identity commitments and personal values.
- agency can vary over time and across the individual's life course (Billett, 2006; Vahasantanen et al., 2009).

In accordance with the socio-cultural approach, agency is always exercised and manifested within certain socio-cultural and material constraints and resources. Furthermore, in addition to subjects' discursive relations with the world, one needs to take into account the subject's practical and embodied relations with the world, while looking at their professional agency from a subject-centered life-course perspective (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013). Authors argue that professional agency should be conceptualized from a subject-centered socio-cultural and life-long learning perspective, turning attention to subjects' construction of their identity position at work, and focusing on how they negotiate agency in education and working life in order to construct meaningful careers and life courses.

There are three dimensions of teacher professional agency, distinguished by Vähäsantanen et al. (2018), who were aiming to create a quantitative conceptual framework of teacher agency.

The dimensions encompass different spheres of a teacher's work: influencing at work, developing work practices, and negotiating professional identity (Vähäsantanen et al., 2018). *Influencing at work* implies making decisions and being heard at work. Teachers are able to influence their work by making decisions in terms of the ways of working, contents of work, shared work practices and culture, resource availability, etc. Teachers are able to exert their school practice by expressing their opinions and ideas, sharing knowledge and practices, thus supporting development of their schools. They need to be heard in the workplace in order to perceive themselves as recognized and appreciated. *Developing work practices* refers to participation in shared work practices and transforming work practices. The participation in shared work practices assumes that teachers engage in professional learning and participate in shared activities, thus bringing their own endeavor into shared knowledge, expressing their own opinions and cooperating with colleagues. This leads to exercising agency in the form of engagement in collective participative action. Transforming work practices refers to "transformative agency", manifested through activities that involve critical consideration and re-evaluation of working practices. Teachers can question existing work practices, create new ways, bring new ideas or improve existing practices. The authors call this type of agency "change-oriented" agency, and relate it to innovativeness at work. The third dimension, *negotiating professional identity*, encompasses constructing a professional career. The researchers associate professional identity with an employee's aims, interests and values at work, as well as his/her perceptions of relations with the work and vision of future perspectives. The employees are able to make career-related decisions, and agency is seen in terms of exercising a professional commitment and making decisions about one's professional direction (Vähäsantanen et al., 2018). Thus, teacher professional agency is manifested in different ways and corresponds to one's internal beliefs and values, changing over time and across one's professional career; hence, it is a temporal phenomenon.

*Sociocognitive theory*

Neumann and Cowley (2013) explain the origin of human agency by referring to the anthropological and social roots of humanity. The authors state that although biological factors are significant, their role, however, is to enable the social, cognitive and linguistic skills of humans. Through language learning and practicing linguistically, humans "become rational actors" (p. 3). Authors draw their conclusions from Durkheim's claim that only social can ground the social (Neumann & Cowley, 2013, p. 3), by explaining how humans (sapiens) develop the dimensions of social agency. From early childhood, humans interact with other society members and learn cultural settings, their brains absorb information through norms, verbal patterns, social institutions and artifacts. Authors give attention to language learning and usage, because language

is a mediator between people and a means of interaction. As the interactivity links increase, human agency is enacted. There are artificial constraints associated with artifacts, institutions and languages, and human agents develop skills needed to operate within them.

*Social cognitive theory and teacher agency*

Bandura (1989) describes three ways in which human agency can be determined. The first, *autonomous agency* concept, implies a notion that humans are entirely autonomous agents. The second, *mechanical approach* to human agency, assumes that external factors and environmental forces influence the human action, which itself is not reflective or self-determined. People are considered as physiological machines rather than self-determined actors able to impact their own motivation and actions. Bandura (1989) admits that these two approaches fail to explain the impact of self-determined factors. Thus, his social cognitive theory views human agency in terms of an *emergent interactive model*, which implies that people are neither autonomous actors, nor physiological machines reflecting the influences of environmental forces. Rather, human agency is seen as a system of triadic reciprocal causation: interaction of personal factors and environmental forces, with a special significance of self-generated influences.

Bandura (1989) views agency in terms of a person's beliefs about their own capacities to exercise control over factors or events that influence one's life. Thus, he states that human agency can be exercised through self-efficacy. People with a high level of efficacious beliefs express more positive judgements about one's capabilities to cope with obstacles and achieve success, while people with lower self-efficacy beliefs are more inclined to think in terms of failure and imagine failure scenarios. In addition, people with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more persistent and persevere in their efforts. People who believe they are capable of overcoming difficulties and cope with threats are more likely to succeed, compared with those who cannot imagine the positive scenarios, which may cause anxiety and stress arousal. Another distinctive feature of human agency, according to Bandura, is the capacity of forethought, anticipating the consequences of one's own purposive behavior and activities. Similar to Giddens, Bandura refers to "self-directive capabilities", which are determined by person's inner processes and reflection.

The agentic properties of self-motivation, according to Bandura (1989, p. 1180) include several aspects:

- predictive anticipatory control of effort, which implies setting goals, planning actions and anticipation of desired outcomes. People project and foresee the consequences of their own efforts, control thoughts, actions, and thus exercise self-regulation.
- affective self-evaluative reactions to one's performance rooted in a value system which implies self-appraisal of personal efficacy for goal attainment.

- self-reflective metacognitive activity concerning the adequacy of one's efficacy appraisals and the suitability of one's standard setting.

Analogically, teacher professional agency is linked to teacher self-efficacy beliefs and manifests itself through constant reflection and evaluation of a teacher's anticipated outcomes and their results, and whether the desired goals and outcomes were achieved and correspond to the person's value system. This notion corresponds to Giddens' understanding of agency as an ability to reflect on one's own actions and make them meaningful. The capacity of self-regulation and ability to control one's own thoughts, actions and make decisions are significant agentic properties reflecting a person-centered approach, while for Bourdieu human agency is seen through habitus in the first place, not personal reflection.

*Ecological approach to teacher agency*

The ecological approach was introduced by Priestley et al. (2015), who treated teacher agency in terms of capacity that may be achieved under certain environmental conditions (Leijen et al., 2020). Figure 2 demonstrates three key dimensions of teacher agency: iterational, projective and practical-evaluative.

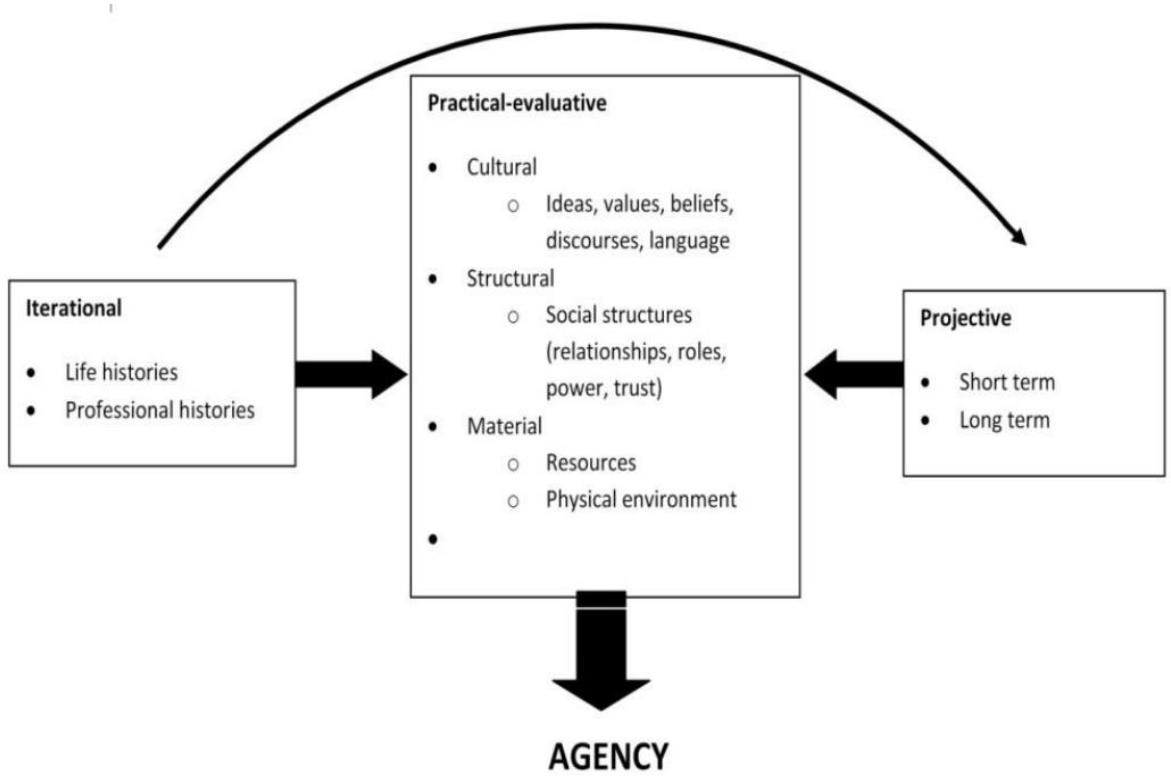



**Figure 2.** Model of the formation of agency (Priestley et al., 2015)

The *iterational* dimension relates to reflection on patterns of action accumulated in the past. The authors state that people do not always act according to habit and routinized patterns of behavior, but are able to recognize, re-evaluate and reshape their understandings and patterns of behavior seeking "to *manoeuvre* among repertoires" (p. 4) when dealing with certain professional

issues (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). This view is similar to Giddens' (1985) understanding of routinization – practical and discursive consciousness when actors are able to elaborate on their practical experiences, recognize and refashion certain patterns of behavior. The iterational dimension involves a teacher's personal and professional knowledge, beliefs, values, and competency (Leijen et al., 2020). The *projective* dimension involves aspirations for the future, expressed in short or long-term orientations, when teachers shape their actions in accordance with future perspectives and goals. This dimension involves a temporal aspect of personal and professional purposes. The aspirations and orientations may be optimistic (Lasky, 2005), or aimed to resist change within the professional environment (Bucharan, 2015). A teacher's aspirations are inevitably linked to the iterational dimension, deriving from one's biography, prior experiences and beliefs. The *practical-evaluative* dimension of teacher agency implies the ability of teachers to make evaluative judgements about possible ways of action in response to external demands, uncertainties, and dilemmas (Priestley et al., 2015). In other words, it is the teacher's ability to make a conscious choice among alternative paths of action under certain cultural, material conditions (Leijen et al., 2020). The conditions (context) may enable, constrain or empower the teacher for agentive behavior. These contexts are organized both collectively and materially (Priestley et al., 2015). Teacher agency depends on social action in the collectively organized environment, and, at the same time, is based on availability of material resources needed for action. Similarly, Giddens' notion of structure as enabling and constraining human agency, and Priestley et al. (2015), refer to social environment as shaping decision-making, constraining, or enabling it. Therefore, the current model views teacher agency in terms of past-present-future action. Thus, teacher professional agency is viewed as a capability to act and exercise control over one's professional environment, experienced under a certain temporal and social context.

### 1.2.2. Teacher professional agency within the school as a structure: habitualized practices and sedimented norms

Structure is out of time and space, characterized by the absence of the subject and replicated in a social system, which refers to activities and relations of human agents or collectivities, arranged as regular social practices which reoccur over time and space (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). Schools are institutional organizations whose structures are formed by societal rules and beliefs (Dornbusch & Glasgow, 1996) and relationships of its employees (Bozkus, 2014).

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), an individual's identity is influenced by and constructed within the surrounding social structures. Identity, according to Berger and Luckmann (ibid.) is a phenomenon "that emerges from the dialectic between an individual and society" (p. 195).

Teacher identity formation is seen in terms of secondary socialization, which happens within the context of educational institutions (school and university) and is inevitably linked to the person's socialization and agency. According to Berger and Luckmann (ibid.), the process of identity formation of any individual includes two steps of socialization: primary and secondary socialization, which take place within a certain context of social structure. Primary socialization is the most important for an individual and happens immediately after the individual was born. All individuals learn and internalize certain norms, perspectives, and cultural practices (e.g., language) from significant others (adults), gaining emotional attachment to certain things. During this process, the objective external reality is being crystallized and internalized, and becomes internal subjective reality. In other words, the primary socialization becomes a first world where an individual absorbs and reproduces the attitudes and norms of the society he/she lives in.

While primary socialization is taken for granted, secondary socialization is a conscious internalization of institution-based role-specific knowledge and norms. This process is intensified by the application of certain techniques, which aim to evoke an individual's sense of commitment to the reality which is being internalized. For instance, the university may be assumed to be a social context of secondary socialization, where individuals internalize certain norms and perspectives, and, as a result, gain a certain type of identity, inherent to their future profession. Significant others play crucial role in this process. According to Berger and Luckmann (ibid.), the significant others are extremely important for approval of a person's identity, not only tacit, but explicit, apparent and emotionally charged confirmation through casual contacts and everyday events. During the process of education and professional practice, teachers encounter university academics, school mentors, colleagues, school administration, and principals, who become the significant others, directing, maintaining and approving a certain type of teacher identity. Teacher identity may be influenced, positively and negatively, by different experiences, such as classroom teaching, organizational culture and other specific events which may challenge existing norms and practices (Day, 2006). According to Berger and Luckmann (1966) the process of secondary socialization is more artificial and standardized, compared with primary socialization.

Social reality is presented by habitualized practices, which are being repeated and sedimented, and become institutionalized. The institutions produce and reproduce certain patterns of behaviors and norms, and control human conduct, thus exercising power. School, as an institution, is able to produce and reproduce certain patterns of management, hierarchy or social distance. Teachers themselves may apply practices which they absorbed during their secondary socialization and never questioned. This notion corresponds to the Foucauldian understanding of human normalization (1990), or Bourdieu's habitus, when the continuously repetitive interactions

and activities, enhanced and preserved by the hierarchical structures, are perceived as normal and accepted without question by people.

### 1.2.3. Teacher professional everyday practice as a ritualized activity

According to McLaren (1982), the contemporary school is based on rituals which are inherited and deeply sedimented in the consciousness and actions of members of a school community. Rituals ensure intrinsic processes of a school's life at institutional and relational levels and comprise the culture of the school. Rituals symbolically transmit societal and cultural ideologies, transfer beliefs and attitudes, and may be understood in terms of hidden curriculum. Rituals should not be narrowed down to religious rituals but examined in the context of cultural codes and modes of accepted behavior which people practice in their everyday life. McLaren (1982) states that rituals are the "grammar of school life", as they carry gestural and cognitive information and shape students' ways of understanding. However, teachers may be also influenced by the school rituals, as they absorb sedimented ways of professional conduct (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

The "ritual" may be also understood in terms of symbolic meaning transferred to students by society or school, produced by the dominant culture legitimated by the existing social order (tastes, attitudes, norms, values, etc.). McLaren (1982) refers to term "routinization" as a substitute for ritual, a type of hidden curriculum, which socializes students into the dominant order. At the same time, rituals are the center of human organization, helping people to interpret and negotiate events of everyday life. Based on Durkheimian structural-functional theory, which states that rituals bind groups and society together, creating a kind of primordial unity, McLaren states that the power of rituals may be seen as a process in which rituals, as cultural forms, are objectified into a symbolic medium which supports an existing social order.

Teachers need to be aware of how rituals operate in everyday life and what rituals they execute daily. Teachers are able to modify those cultural rules which impose hegemonic patterns of professional conduct, teaching routines and relationships with students and colleagues. Reflecting on these, teachers are able to improve existing interactions and contribute to general school improvement (McLaren, 1982). The classroom may be seen as an institution, and daily teaching rituals may be linked to praying (in Catholic or religious schools), peculiarities of teaching instruction, organization of teacher-student relations and "teaching style", which are perceived as being natural and intrinsic.

In contemporary school practice, McLaren (1982) distinguishes certain types of rituals, depending on their length (micro and macro rituals) and function (revitalization, intensification, resistance). Accordingly, the micro rituals take place in daily activities in the classroom. For

instance, greetings, the structure of the lesson, writing in front of a blackboard, using textbooks, etc. Macro rituals include periods immediately before and after lessons and aggregate the lessons observed during the school day. The rituals of revitalization may be described as processual events that function to inject a renewal of commitment to the motivations and values of the ritual participants. For instance, staff meetings frequently served as revitalization during which time authority figures such as the principal or vice-principal would attempt to boost staff morale and strengthen commitment to the values, emotional discussions between teacher and students which revolved around the importance of mastering course work and school objectives (McLaren, 1982). Another example refers to the conduct of "classroom hours", when the classroom teacher has conversations with students, attempts to figure out current situations, motivates students to learn and enquires about challenges they face. Rituals of intensification comprise a subtype of revitalization and focus on recharging the teachers and students emotionally, by reinforcing values and goals of participants. The situations of discussing learning goals in individual or group conversations with students on different ethical issues may serve as example. Rituals of resistance refer to both subtle and dramatic cultural forms of disobedience to the dominant authoritative tenets and pre-established codes of conduct established by the teacher (McLaren, 1982). An instance could be an act of insubordination or disregard demonstrated by a student as a response to and disagreement with established rules. In most cases, the author describes rituals of resistance from the position of the student, viewing teachers as those who generate and impose the desired order; however, nothing is said about teachers' ability to resist the dominant structures which may be considered as manifestation of teacher professional agency. Here we may refer to Foucault's (1990) notion of normality, the pattern of action offered from an external powerful structure which substitutes a reality. Therefore, he suggests that the person should recognize the everyday unquestioned practices through critical questioning, and then change is possible. In the case of teachers, their agency may be viewed in terms of questioning the everyday taken-for-granted rituals, and shaping or doubting them.

# 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 2.1. Nature of phenomenological research

Phenomenological research is a philosophy and methodology that implies understanding of a phenomenon at the level of subjective perception, and focuses on in-depth comprehension of the phenomenon rooted in the person's views and experiences (Qutoshi, 2018). Phenomenological research is the study of the primordial meaning of an experience, the study of how phenomena or events appear in consciousness, how they show, or give themselves, in human lived experience (Van Manen, 2017), which discerns the essence of experience, which is a higher form of knowledge abstraction and understands the hidden meaning and essence of experience: how a person reacts towards his/her lived experience, what questions arise, how he/she experiences the world. Phenomenological research examines human experience, investigates and develops the essence of phenomena, explaining how people experience certain phenomena in a certain context (Moustakas, 1994). The current research is phenomenological, seeking to investigate how teachers experience agency in everyday life, during their everyday professional activities within usual working conditions. A deep understanding of the subjective experiences of teachers concerning their agency is central to the current study.

There are different traditions of phenomenological research; however, they are rooted in the works of mathematician and philosopher Edmund Husserl (1970), who criticized usage of quantitative methods when dealing with human consciousness. Husserl recognized the importance of individual, subjective, personal consciousness, in its full, living, concrete and dynamic richness (Moran, 1988), and his methodology became an alternative to already-existing research practices. Husserl aimed to conduct research on phenomena which could explain how humans experience different objects and how those objects appear in human consciousness (Žydžiūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017). The focus of Husserl's phenomenology was on the essences of diverse attitudes (perceiving, remembering, imagining, judging, surmising) that constitute the "building blocks" of our rational lives (Moran, 1988). Thus, the lived experience of the human becomes central for investigation of those essences.

Phenomenological study attempts to look at things openly, to eliminate preconceptions and theoretical prejudices of the natural world (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2007) and describes universal *essences* of the phenomenon. The notion of "phenomenon" is central to phenomenology. The everyday experience of the phenomenon, which may be a simple event or object, is central to phenomenological analysis. Notably, phenomenology is concerned about "how" phenomena appear to us, rather than "what" appears (Zahavi, 2019, p. 9). In other words, the appearance of a phenomenon itself is central. However, the research is focused on primary

and significant essences, rather than on accidental and secondary features (Zahavi, 2019). The lived phenomenon can be understood through extracting its main essences from the person's subjective lived experience, eliminating any preconceived notions and prejudices. Therefore, the current research is aimed at extraction of the core essences of the phenomenon of teacher agency, which are embedded in schoolteachers' everyday lived experiences and subjective perceptions.

The issue of the researcher's natural attitude is also central in phenomenological research. Husserl suggested that the prior attitude and certain judgements of the researcher must be "bracketed", relying on the principle of phenomenological reduction, and, therefore, they no longer influence the researcher's attitude and behavior. Phenomenology is the method to break through "taken-for-grantedness and get to the meaning structures of our experiences" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 215). This method, formally called the "reduction", consists of two "opposing moves that complement each other" (p. 215). The first of these moves is called the epoché, or bracketing. The term epoché, a Greek word (ἐποχή) meaning "abstention, to stay away from" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 215), was initially used by Husserl to indicate the specific act of suspending our beliefs, biases, and attitudes. The second move is called the "reduction proper", meaning "to lead back" (Van Manen, 2014). "Bracketing" is seen as an energy consuming activity, holding the researcher back in the past, fighting one's pre-understanding, while "bridling" is treated as a more positive act aimed at directing the researcher's thoughts towards respectful attitude and openness, allowing the phenomenon to present itself (Dahlberg et al., 2008). The researcher must be patient and view the phenomenon as a whole, thus, he/she must not rush and split the phenomenon too quickly, "make definite what is indefinite" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 130).

Phenomenological research in education is usually based on Max van Manen's works. Phenomenology is not simply dealing with human experience. According to Van Manen (2017), phenomenological research must possess several main features and match the main characteristics of phenomenological research. The researcher must be clear with the main research question, aims, procedures and outcomes of phenomenological research. The first issue concerns whether the research question is phenomenological in nature. Van Manen notes that the research question must reflect a phenomenon investigated and to be concerned with what it is like to experience the certain phenomenon (Van Manen, 2017). For investigation of the lived experience of teacher professional agency, the central question is "What is it like for a teacher to experience professional agency in relation to the school surrounding?", implying a deeper understanding of how the phenomenon of professional agency appears in the consciousness of teaching practitioners.

According to Van Manen (2007), the phenomenon of lived experience can be investigated within four different existential domains: corporeality (lived body), spatiality (lived space), temporality (lived time) and relationality (lived other). Corporeality implies that human bodies

are always “in the world”, therefore, various encounters with phenomena happen through our bodies. Spatiality is the existential theme that refers us to the space or surrounding in which human beings move and find themselves. Depending on circumstances, human beings can perceive and interpret the lived space differently. The dimension of temporality implies a human’s relational time perception, meaning that by encountering different situations we are able to perceive time differently. The temporal perception of the past may determine the present and the future perceptions of the world. Relationality is the lived relation individuals maintain with others in the interpersonal space that they share with them (Van Manen, 2007). The analysis of teacher lived experiences of their professional agency within the dimensions of corporeality, spatiality, temporality and relationality is aimed at better understanding of the essences of the current phenomenon.

### 2.2. Reflective lifeworld research principles and features

Reflective lifeworld research is the core methodology for the current study. The methodology was developed by the Swedish scientist Karin Dahlberg. The author states that reflective lifeworld research is not a method in terms of a fixed set of rules and guidelines for research; on the contrary, its essential prerequisite is an open design approach and well-defined phenomenon. The author draws her approach to inquiry on the ideas of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer, utilizing the phenomenological and hermeneutical traditions, and unites their philosophical notions at the point where: “life manifests itself in experience” (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 95). According to Merleau-Ponty, the lifeworld precedes knowledge, therefore, awareness and understanding of the lifeworld is essential for gaining knowledge.

The central question in lifeworld research is whether reality exists independently of our minds, or is it determined by human conception and interpretation, whether there is a shared social reality or multiple, specific ones (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014). In other words, researchers need to take a position regarding their understanding of what is reality and how things really work (Scotland, 2012). Phenomenological research implies an epistemology of human science research where the question of meaning is central. The ontological and epistemological foundations of lifeworld research hold the notion that meanings are endless, continually expanding and extending themselves (Dahlberg et al., 2008). The research epistemology is based on Dahlberg’s idea of consolidating both phenomenological and hermeneutic perspectives, seeking to grasp a meaning of the phenomena. The author argues at the point that “life manifests itself in experience” (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 95). Therefore, lifeworld research is aimed at describing and revealing the lived world in a way that broadens our insights into human beings and human experience. In other words, reflective lifeworld research is aimed at asking how the

world, with its everyday phenomena, is lived, experienced and described by humans. In the current research, the phenomenon of teacher agency in their professional practices has been investigated through understanding of teachers' everyday lived experiences and subjective perspectives.

*The goal* of lifeworld research is to discover, describe, analyze and clarify the essential meaning which is inherent to a certain phenomenon of research interest (Dahlberg et al., 2008). According to the author, every phenomenon possesses a certain set of inherent features *(essences)*, which distinguish it from other related phenomena, and reflective lifeworld research is aimed at disclosing these essences. In other words, lifeworld research aims to seek the essential meaning of the phenomenon, "to make that phenomenon that very phenomenon" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 96). The author appeals to Husserl and states that essences belong to humans' everyday experiencing of the real world. One of the most figurative explanations is provided from the author's everyday life experience, where she illustrates the notion of phenomenon essence describing what she sees through her window: horses and apple trees. The author explains that she can recognize a horse or an apple tree by grasping their essences, distinguishing them from other similar trees or animals (Dahlberg, 2006). The horse is a horse and not a donkey or a cow, its essences are inseparable from the horse itself. "Essences are not the matter of interpretation" (Dahlberg, 2006, p. 12), and the researcher cannot give meaning to the phenomenon, but rather reveal and describe. There are several main principles in the conduct of reflective lifeworld research which involve data gathering, choice of research participants, researcher's attitude and conduct, as well as a bridled approach.

*Data gathering.* The term "data gathering" is being deliberately used by the author instead of "data collection". Dahlberg uses a metaphor of picking flowers and compares it to data gathering. She approaches data gathering as an activity where the researcher attempts to find descriptions, characteristics, narrations or any possible depictions of the phenomenon of interest. The phenomenon is considered as an object that appears to a subject (researcher) and data gathering activity becomes an intersubjective relationship. In addition, this relationship takes place within a lifeworld, which is treated as a context full of different meanings. The goal of the researcher is to see and distinguish the phenomenon, its uniqueness and meanings (Dahlberg et al., 2008).

The data gathering procedure may have several rounds, starting with a smaller number of research participants, when approaching the phenomenon at the beginning of research. After the primary data analysis, certain topics might emerge and the next round of data gathering can be conducted, focusing on both the phenomenon and its newly emerged aspects. In addition, the phenomenon is perceived as infinite and constantly extending in reflective lifeworld research; hence, no data or meaning saturation exists.

There are no strict limitations in terms of data gathering methods, according to Dahlberg (2001). The author states that the human's lifeworld perspective can be investigated applying various methods and techniques such as narratives (diary, critical incidents, biographies), interviews and observations. There are no strict limitations on what should be considered as research data. In addition, other supportive sources of data may be used, for instance, artefact analysis (drawings, informants' visual artworks), poetry, music, drama or other means of human communication, which contribute to acquisition of deeper data and obtaining rich depictions; however, the author recommends limiting the use of questionnaires. While there are no prescribed methods of data gathering, the researcher must have excellent knowledge of research methodology and epistemology. The author allows methodological creativity, varying different kinds of methods at different stages of the research. Nevertheless, data gathering activities must follow the principles of an open and bridled attitude.

*Choosing participants.* The sample size cannot be pre-determined at the very beginning of the lifeworld research. The number of research participants depends on the complexity of the phenomenon investigated: the more complex a phenomenon, the larger the number of informants needed. According to Dahlberg (Dahlberg et al., 2008), the data gathering may start with a smaller number of informants, which increases later. For the author, the issue of sample diversity is more essential than the issue of number. Reflective lifeworld research is aimed at gathering rich and variable data, therefore, inclusion of informants of diverse background and age, gender, and geographical location is crucial.

*"Meeting with the phenomenon".* Notably, according to Dahlberg, the phenomenon itself "says" to the researcher how it is best studied, instead of the researcher's imposing prejudices and pre-understandings. The term of "dwelling with phenomenon" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 177) is used to underline the slow process of finding the best ways to study the phenomenon, named "an active waiting" (p. 177). The author explains that sometimes it is difficult to plan the research design in advance and only the first step may be estimated. She encourages refusal of the prescribed scientific rules and notions that the method comes first. Instead, the researcher must give priority to searching a broad research question, holding an open and bridled attitude and being sensitive to the phenomenon.

*Openness.* The phenomenological approach requires the researcher's engagement in an open attitude to the phenomenon. According to Dahlberg (Dahlberg et al., 2008), the openness requires two basic components: phenomenological turn to the phenomenon being studied, and researcher sensitivity. An open position towards the phenomenon means a true willingness of the researcher to understand, see and view, having the capacity to be surprised and sensitive in

revealing something unexpected. The researcher must approach phenomena without any pre-determined ideas or imposing any hypotheses.

In reflective lifeworld research, the principle of openness requires the researcher's awareness about his/her assumptions and relation to the phenomenon. The researcher must consider his/her own contribution to the research, recognize their own personality and style in order to estimate possible impact on the research results. In the process of conversation with an informant, the researcher must hold back his/her notions or own experience of the phenomenon, restraining oneself from influencing the informant's point of view. The researcher is understood as being "a flesh of the world", meaning that he/she is a part of the surrounding world, participating in the creation of the relationship between themselves and the world, being in a position of "active contributors" to the world (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 96). Therefore, researchers must be aware of their role and contribution, and need to be informed about their connection to the phenomenon.

The researcher must be able to engage with others, to be trustworthy, making the informant relaxed and willing to share experiences. According to Dahlberg (2008) there is no equality between researcher and informant in lifeworld research; there is an imbalance between them. The researcher has the power to decide about the place, duration, questions to be asked and answers to be legitimated. Consequently, informants may feel uncomfortable or even nervous, unwilling to disclose their lifeworld. Therefore, the openness of the researcher is crucial in conducting lifeworld research. Dialogical openness refers to conversations with other researchers or scholars about the matter of inquiry. Dahlberg (2008) states that openness is one of the means to reach objectivity in the research. The author suggests that the researcher must think about him/herself as being a tourist in their home city, and, despite everything being well-known, he/she must view things in a new, unexpected way, as if it were the very first time visiting the city.

The researcher must always be aware of his/her position, despite having another professional identity (being a teacher in the case of the current research). Such a setting contributes to the utilization of openness and a bridled approach when conducting the research. Moreover, the professional knowledge of the researcher is beneficial and can be viewed as an advantage in terms of a better understanding of interviewees' descriptions and the possibility to generate thoughtful follow-up questions during the interview process. Dahlberg admits that the researcher approaches the phenomenon with certain pre-conceptions, which is inevitable. At the same time, possessing some knowledge and understanding of the field may help the researcher to expand their own perspective. However, it is not recommended to read "too much of existing literature" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 174), as it inhibits the open approach and complicates the process of bridling; thus, the researcher might find nothing new.

*Bridling.* The principle of bridling can be called "waiting for the phenomenon to show up", when instead of quick decisions of what the phenomenon is, the researcher needs to carefully examine and scrutinize their own decisions and conclusions. Dahlberg (2008) disapproves of the principle of reduction, arguing that the bracketed judgements are still presented. The author admits the importance of phenomenological reduction and suggests the term "bridling", which is taken from her own experience of horse riding, and means the "restraining of one's pre-understanding in the form of personal beliefs, theories, and other assumptions" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 130) that limits the researcher's openness. Bridling implies the researcher's awareness about one's own pre-understanding, including any negative attitudes.

### 2.3. Research phases

The initial idea of the research process implied several stages: case study and reflective lifeworld research (Table 1). In the *first* phase, initial interviews were supposed to reveal the basic attitudes and beliefs of teachers about their professional experiences, values, attitudes and challenges within the given professional context. The *second* phase was caused by the insufficiency of the focus group interview information, as the research participants were not willing to fully disclose their attitudes and peculiarities in relationships with students and other members of the school community. In addition, some research participants remained silent during the whole conversation, and researchers had to support their activity by imposing questions and somehow insist on a response. Thus, the need for an individual approach emerged, as the researcher believed that teachers would reveal their private experience in more confidential research settings.

**Table 1.** Data collection process

| Phase/ duration | Activities | Goals | Sample | Outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Phase I** Case study (2018–2019) | Qualitative research (focus group interview) | Explore teachers' everyday professional experiences, values, attitudes and challenges within the given professional context. Analyze the qualitative data applying *thematic analysis*. | 5 focus group interviews, 10–12 participants | The themes and subthemes of teachers' everyday experiences are formulated. |
| **Phase II** Reflective lifeworld research (2020) | Qualitative research (individual in-depth interviews) | Answer the research questions: what does it mean for a teacher to experience agency within a professional environment? Analyze the qualitative data applying reflective lifeworld research methodology. | 24 interviews with 24 research participants | The themes and subthemes of teachers' agency experiences are formulated. The essences of teacher agency experiences are formulated. |

The aim of the second phase was to gather data containing teachers' deeper insights and experiences related to teacher everyday agentic experiences. Therefore, the research process included three main phases: the initial interview (case study) and two phases of the reflective lifeworld research (in-depth interviews).

**Phase 1. Researching for institutional context**

*Research parameters.* The first phase was aimed at exploring the basic attitudes and beliefs of teachers about their professional experiences, values, attitudes and challenges within the given professional context and the general opinions and beliefs of teachers about their teaching practices, attitudes towards students, teaching and well-being within the classroom environment. In addition, the first stage was aimed at familiarizing the researcher with the current issues and challenges faced by teachers in terms of their relationships with students and other members of the professional environment.

Case study methodology was applied in order to embrace the contextual conditions, which are relevant for studying the phenomenon of teacher professional agency. According to Yin (2018), case study research is aimed at profound empirical investigation of the current phenomenon within the real-life context, in particular when the boundaries between a phenomenon and its context are not clearly visible and distinguished. In other words, the case study is needed when the researcher is aiming for investigation of the real-world case and assumes certain contextual conditions of its occurrence (Yin, 2018). Thus, the current research sought to define the contextual conditions, which are important and relevant for the phenomenon of teacher professional agency; to define the boundaries and interrelations between experiences of teachers and the phenomenon of teacher agency.

Case study methodology requires a certain bounded system in order to establish the clear frame and focus of the study (Harrison et al., 2017). The procedure of bounding requires being selective and clearly defining the research parameters, participants, procedure and location of the study. The unit of study is not equal to the topic of study, but rather it refers to a certain setting, person, group of people, program or community (Merriam, 2009). Thus, for the current research, the unit of analysis was the community of teachers working at the same school.

In general, the case study methodology is aimed at conducting an in-depth analysis of an issue within the certain context in order to comprehend the issue from the participants' point of view (Harrison et al., 2017). In other words, the researcher seeks to explore the perspectives of participants in their natural setting. The case study is used to gain an understanding of "how", "why" and sometimes "what" questions (Harrison et al., 2017). At the same time, interaction and collaboration between the researcher and participants allows to obtain rich data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Thus, the in-depth interview was conducted in order to collect the research data.

The design of the case study may be characterized as fixed or flexible (Runeson & Host, 2009). The fixed research design implies a determined set of key parameters (e.g., experiments, surveys), while for flexible design, the parameters may be slightly changed. The case studies typically imply flexible research design (Runeson & Host, 2009). The phenomenon of teacher professional agency is complex and multifaceted, thus there was a need to highlight its aspects from the teachers' perspective. For this reason, the focus group interview method of data collection was applied, and five interviews were conducted with the same group of teachers.

Four main steps must be included when implementing a case study (Runeson & Host, 2009):

1. Designing: define the objectives and plan the case study.
2. Preparing for data collection: define the procedures and protocols of data collection.
3. Gathering evidence: collect the data on the defined case.
4. Analyzing: the collected data is analyzed.

*Step 1.* Designing: define the objectives and plan the case study. While the case study design is flexible, thorough planning is needed for achievement of success. The main features of the current case study are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Essential elements and descriptors of the case study (acc. to Harrison et al., 2017)

| Elements | Description |
|---|---|
| Objectives (Research questions) | Object: defining the contextual conditions, which are important and relevant for the phenomenon of teacher agency.<br>Research question: What contextual factors influence teacher agency? |
| Selecting the case | Case: the Kaunas Private Primary school; teacher professional agency experiences.<br>The case was selected based on the purpose of study: to investigate general notion of teacher professional agency within their professional context. Therefore, the purposive selection technique was applied. The employees of the current school were seen as progressive and active professionals. Thus, the judgement to conduct research in the current Kaunas Private Primary school was made.<br>Scope: single case |
| Bounded system | Participants: the community of teachers-practitioners<br>The participants are employed at the same school and share the mutual professional culture.<br>The participants are practicing teachers who do not execute any formal administrative duties.<br>Place: the research happens within the participants' working environment.<br>Time: the research happens during one school year. |
| Case study design | Design: flexible (new parameters may be added); exploratory (exploring the context of teacher professional agency); holistic case study (examine one organization). |
| Context of the study | Contextual variables include organizational, economic and social factors. |
| Sources of evidence | Methods: focus group interview; multiple perspectives of participants, observation.<br>Reflective techniques for research credibility.<br>Methods of data analysis: phenomenological thematic analysis |

*Step 2*. Preparing for data collection. The procedures of data collection were clearly defined at the planning stage of the research. The research logic, key questions and duration were defined. Obtaining agreements from research participants was a crucial goal of the preparatory stage of the current research.

*Research participants*

The research took place in one of the private schools in Kaunas city. The staff of the current school has a reputation of being innovative, committed, enthusiastic and creating a learner-friendly environment. Employees are selected for such highly valued and appreciated professional qualities as leadership, creativity and professional commitment. Hence, the assumption that teacher professional agency is being practiced by the practitioners resulted in the selection of the current school as a relevant case and choice for the research implementation.

The initial step of the research process involved contacting the gatekeepers (school administration), establishing a trustful relationship and getting permission to execute the research at the school they manage. The members of the school administration received introductory material, which included a letter of agreement and explanatory letter, where the core aspects of the research were explained in detail. The explanatory letter contained information about the main goals, topics and stages of the research. In addition, it included information about benefits for the school and potential research participants. The members of the school administration were mediators in the teacher recruitment, as they managed to obtain agreement from their staff members to participate in the research. The recruitment of participants also included the distribution of introductory material for teachers.

The research participants had to be employed as teachers, not executing any formal administrative roles. This condition was applied in order to avoid possible tension and ensure teachers' openness and willingness to talk about their real-life experiences. Moreover, the topic of teacher professional agency implied an informal leading position within the classroom, while performing a formal administration role could bring bias into a research participant's story.

The participants of the focus group were 12 teachers employed at the same private primary school. The research participants were aged from 24 to 45, working as primary classroom teachers, in physical education, religion, arts and English language. There were ten female and two male research participants. The length of teaching experience ranged from 1 to 10 years. The research took place in the teachers' workplace at a time free from professional duties. In order to ensure greater confidentiality, researchers did not collect personal information from any participant.

*Data gathering*

The interview method is crucial for data collection in the case study (Runeson & Host, 2009). The procedure of data gathering involved conducting five meetings (sessions) with

research participants (focus group). The number of meetings was determined by the time frames and the most convenient frequency. The members of the focus group assembled after their working hours once per month over a period of six months (from December to May). The duration of every meeting was determined by the participants (1–1.5 hours each). The first two meetings were held by the three researchers, where I was a scribe and observer. The other three meetings were held by me, as a facilitator. During the first two meetings the level of engagement of participants was high, although they were quite suspicious. However, during the last two meetings teachers were able to open up and talk freely, and a sense of mutual trust was established. I tried to create an atmosphere of informal and relaxed conversation, and it really worked. The participants were grateful after every focus group meeting for having an opportunity to give their voice.

The topics of sessions varied depending on research questions (Table 3). There were five sessions in total and each interview included several open-ended questions, allowing the participants to elaborate on their experiences. The interviews were semi-structured, thus enabling the researcher to improvise and ask additional questions if needed. The interview session was divided into three parts: introductory, main part and summarizing. During the introductory part, the participants were familiarized with the objectives of the session. Then, the discussion began with a set of initial questions, which were simple to answer, aimed at making the participants feel more comfortable and evoke a sense of openness and trust. The concluding part included brief reflections and answering the questions of research participants. The focus group interviews were recorded using audio equipment (voice recorder).

The initial interview was aimed at familiarizing the participants with the goals, tasks and methodology of the research. The general rules and procedures were agreed and established, such as duration, frequency, time of the interviews, as well as behavior during interviews (being participative, avoiding distraction by smartphone, etc.). The opening question was aimed at making the participants feel comfortable when sharing knowledge or experiences with other members of the focus group. The topic “How and why did you decide to become a teacher?” was an “icebreaker”, as the participants could express their experiences without any sense of disapproval from around them and elaborate on their professional identity beliefs.

The second, third and fourth interviews were aimed at collecting information about how teachers experienced themselves working within their professional field in relation to the concepts of authority, respect, dignity and professional development. The focus of the research was on the empowering factors and experiences of “powerfulness” within the school and classroom environment. In addition, the last, finalizing interview, was aimed at getting feedback from the research participants, to clarify certain issues and doubts concerning the research.

**Table 3.** Focus group questions

| Research Question | Related Interview Questions |
|---|---|
| *Interview 1*<br>R1. What made an impact on the decisions of research participants to become teachers? (identity) | Could you think about an incident when you have decided to become a teacher?<br>Why did you decide to become a teacher?<br>What does it mean for you to be a teacher? |
| *Interview 2*<br>R2. How do research participants view their strengths of being teachers? | What are your strengths of being a teacher?<br>What successful strategies have you used to support student learning?<br>What personal/professional qualities help you to cope with professional challenges? |
| *Interview 3*<br>R3. How do research participants experience their professional authority? | Have you experienced being an authority for your students?<br>How do you understand that you are authority for your students?<br>What empowers/disempowers you to be authority for students? |
| *Interview 4*<br>R4. How do research participants experience their professional dignity? | How do you experience your professional dignity?<br>What is the role of school community/society in maintaining your professional dignity?<br>How do you maintain the dignity of your students? |
| *Interview 5*<br>R5. How do research participants maintain their professional development? | What is your attitude towards professional development?<br>How the school community impacts your professional development?<br>How do you develop your professional skills and competencies? |

The verbal prompting, such as "What do you mean by …?" or "Could you provide any real-life example?" and non-verbal prompting, such as nodding, common hand gestures and smiling, helped to encourage the teachers to elaborate on their experiences.

*Data analysis.* Qualitative data analysis is commonly used in case studies, aimed at gaining clear conclusions and maintaining clear evidence (Runeson & Host, 2009). The data was collected, recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed applying a thematic analysis. The data analysis included several steps (acc. to Braun & Clarke, 2012): familiarizing with texts, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report.

In order to familiarize with data, the transcribed texts were read carefully. The focus group interviews were quite difficult to transcribe as there were many voices, laughing, emotional speeches that sometimes were delivered at the same time. Therefore, some words were impossible to hear, so those pieces of record were not considered for the final analysis. The main goal of this stage was to comprehend the data and grasp its meaning. The reading was accompanied by listening to audio records and reading the notes from observation protocols. Additional notes were made during the process of listening and reading the data. The initial notes included: *"Teachers experience recognition from students", "School culture influences teacher well-being",*

*"Collegial solidarity insures authority of teachers"* and others. The whole data set was read twice, and the notes helped to distinguish the most important topics.

Generating initial codes involving paragraph-to-paragraph coding was applied. The pieces of data were read carefully, and the most meaningful pieces of data were chosen for coding. Later the codes were revisited and some were changed, as new ideas and understandings appeared.

After the coding procedure was completed, the next step required a search for themes. Themes represent certain important aspects of the data and a set of meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The procedure of the theme search included review of the coded data and a search of overlapping and similarities between codes. The codes were clustered or grouped in accordance with their meaning, so that they reflect some unique and coherent piece of data. The codes were grouped in relation to the research question. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), the relationships between themes must be revealed and highlighted, and together they must show a full picture of the phenomenon of research interest. As a result of this step, 37 themes were produced.

Later, the themes were revisited and reorganized in order to check their sustainability and whether they are consistent with the data. Some themes were recognized as being too "thin", providing a small amount of information and lacking coherence. Thus, they were split and joined with other, more sustainable themes. Some themes overlapped with others, so there was a need to combine them as well. Hence, 32 themes remained after more careful analysis and comparison. Then, certain extracts (quotes) were chosen to illustrate each theme. Every quote was analyzed and interpreted in order to reveal its deeper meaning. In order to avoid a potential bias, the results of the analysis were verified by several researchers.

**Phase 2. Reflective lifeworld research**

The current phase was aimed at investigating how teachers experience the phenomenon of professional agency.

*Research participant selection.* Phenomenology aims to describe lived experiences of a phenomenon or concept by several individuals focusing on their common understanding (Cresswell, 2007). In phenomenological research, potential research participants are required to possess a certain kind of experience needed to produce knowledge (Žydžiūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017). Based on the assumption that all teachers experience professional agency in certain ways, and agency is an inherent feature of the teaching profession, the selection of the research participants was mainly guided by the principle of sample diversity and research participants' teaching experience. The criteria of informant selection for the individual in-depth interviews were the following:

- *Diversity.* The research participants were selected in order to ensure the diversity of sample in terms of their gender, age, years of teaching experience, geographical location and age groups of pupils they work with.
- *Employment.* The research participants were required to be employed as teachers at the time of their participation in the research. In addition, teaching had to constitute the bigger part of teacher's workload, rather than formal administrative duties.
- *Teaching experience.* The research participants were required to have at least one year of teaching experience. The assumption is that teachers who have already passed through the stressful period of their first year of teaching, possess more relevant experience.

Based on the assumption that all teachers, as all humans, practice agency, the selection of the research participants was mainly guided by the principle of sample diversity and research participants' relevant experience. The research participants were selected considering the diverse demographical characteristics, such as age, teaching experience, type of school, geographical location, etc. Selection of research participants according to their gender was aimed at sustaining the proportions of gender balance, inherent to the Lithuanian context, where the majority of teachers are women.

The sample size was not pre-determined at the beginning of the data collection as the question of sample variety is more important than the number of responses (Dahlberg et al., 2008). The research participants were selected considering such diverse demographical characteristics as gender, age, teaching experience, type of school, geographical location, etc. Therefore, the participants were purposefully selected to satisfy these conditions as much as possible.

Potential research participants were required to possess different kinds of lived experience, which contributes to greater variations in data. In order to ensure that the potential research participants possessed relevant experience, the invitation letter (Appendix A) contained a brief explanation of the main goals and scope of the research. In addition, participants were encouraged to ask or write their feedback. Some of them called back or wrote letters asking whether they were relevant participants, or wanted to know precisely what the questions would be about. After it was explained that the research is aimed at studying how teachers act within the school environment and how they experience agency, the potential research participants usually gave their consent to participate.

*Research participants recruitment.* Several sampling strategies were applied for research participant recruitment: convenience, purposive and snowball sampling. About a half of research participants were enrolled applying convenience sampling, allowing to approach the easily available research participants. The purposive sampling technique was applied in order to diversify the sample and recruit research informants from different cities of the country. The

snowball sampling technique was used in order to recruit participants from the surrounding of research informants, who were usually from the same school, school district, graduates of the same university, etc.

The recruitment procedure was organized in two ways. The first option included sending an invitation letter to the potential informant and gaining his/her confirmation of participation. The current variant was effective for convenience and purposive sampling techniques. The second option involved obtaining the phone number of potential informant and gaining the confirmation of participation through a phone conversation. This strategy was used for enrolment of teachers whose phone numbers were obtained in a process of snowball sampling technique implementation. In general, teachers were more willing to participate in the research after they received some invitation or recommendation from their colleagues. In three cases, the potential research participants declined participation, referring to enormous workload at the beginning of the school year, or ignored the invitation letters.

*Research participants.* In general, 29 letters with invitation to participate in the research were sent to potential research participants. As a result, 24 teachers agreed to participate in the research (about 85% of the total number of invitations). Thus, 24 individual in-depth interviews were conducted. Table 4 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample of teachers.

**Table 4.** Demographics of the sample

| N | Name | Gender | Age | Years of teaching experience | Age of pupils | Type of activities | Region/city |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ALB | Male | 52 | 30 | 11–17 | Teacher of technologies (Arts) | Kaunas district |
| | POV | Male | 29 | 1 | 7–10 | Primary Education | Vilnius district |
| | GIN | Female | 27 | 1 | 7–10 | Moral Education | Vilnius district |
| | ROM | Female | 52 | 31 | 7(6)–10 | Lithuanian language | Vilnius district |
| | IE | Female | 46 | 22 | 7(6)–10 | Primary Education | Kaunas |
| | ART | Male | 36 | 1 | 13–15 | Physical Education, Geography, Private school | Kaunas |
| | LIN 1 | Female | 28 | 2 | 11–16 | Lithuanian language | Vilnius |
| | IEV | Female | 56 | 36 | 7–10 | Primary Education | Kaunas |
| | GNT | Female | 39 | 1 | 10–12 | Mathematics | Kaunas |
| | GOD | Female | 33 | 1 | 10–12 | Biology | Klaipeda |

| N | Name | Gender | Age | Years of teaching experience | Age of pupils | Type of activities | Region/city |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MRS | Male | 41 | 20 | 7(6)–17 | Religion, Ethics | Vilnius |
| | ZAN | Female | 35 | | | Primary Education | Kaunas |
| | VYT | Female | 42 | 19 | 10–16 | English language, classroom teacher | Kaunas |
| | ING | Female | 28 | 2 | 12–18 | English language, classroom teacher | Kaunas |
| | IGN | Male | 33 | 5 | 12–19 | History, ethics, classroom teacher | Kaunas |
| | VAL | Male | 50 | 30 | 11–18 | Arts | Alytus |
| | LIN 2 | Female | 38 | 18 | 11–18 | English language, classroom teacher | Vilnius |
| | VAI | Female | 32 | 10 | 6(7)–18 | Arts (Theatre, Painting) | Klaipeda |
| | RUT | Female | 50 | 25 | 3–10 | Music | Kaunas |
| | GEN | Female | 51 | 34 | 15–18 | Geography and Economics | Vilnius |
| | MIN | Male | 56 | 4 | 11–14 | Physical Education | Kaunas district |
| | MID | Male | 31 | 6 | 10–16 | Geography | Kaunas |
| | AUD | Female | 27 | 3 | 7–10 | Primary Education | Vilnius |
| | SER | Male | 34 | 4 | 7–18 | Russian language teacher, National Security, classroom teacher | Kaunas |

The sample consists of 9 male and 15 female participants, aged from 27 to 56 having from 1 to 36 years of teaching experience. The majority of research participants were from urban areas, from the biggest cities of Lithuania (n=18), and several participants were representatives of the countryside (n=6). The participants reported teaching different subjects and represent different spheres of science: Natural sciences (Biology), Philology (English, Russian language), Humanities (History, National Security, Economics), Arts (Music, Theatre, Painting), Primary and Preschool subjects. Some participants were classroom teachers (n=7). Thus, various participants were selected, and the sample meets a criterion of diversity.

*Data gathering*

The data was gathered applying semi-structured in-depth interview method with open-ended questions (Table 5). The demographic data collection (name, age, level of education, teaching experience, school type, region (city) of Lithuania) usually took place at the beginning of each interview.

Then teachers were asked to describe in detail a certain situation or event from their professional practice when they experienced themselves being agents at school. The opening question followed in order to make the research participants more comfortable and start speaking: *What does it mean to be a teacher?* The strategy worked well, allowing the researcher to connect the following questions to the response. The next question asked: *"Have you ever gone beyond your prescribed role as a teacher?"; "Could you elaborate and provide an example from your professional practice?"* Hence, the research participants could elaborate on their experiences and reinforce them with instances or describe certain events from their professional teaching practice. Additional questions were asked in order to go deeper into the meaning of the research participant's experience, obtain their detailed description and gain a better understanding of the situation: *"What does it mean for you to exercise agency? When and where was it? How did you feel that moment? What did you think? How do you think, why did that happen? How did your students react?"* Each interview was recorded using a smartphone after obtaining permission from the research participant.

**Table 5.** A structure of phenomenological interviewing (acc. to Bevan, 2014)

| **Phenomenological attitude** | **Researcher Approach** | **Interview Structure** | **Method** | **Example Question** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Phenomenological reduction (Epoché) | Acceptance of Natural Attitude of Participants | Contextualization (Eliciting the Lifeworld in Natural Attitude) | Descriptive/ Narrative Context Questions | "Tell me about becoming a teacher" or "Tell me how you came to be a teacher?" "Have you ever done something differently in your teaching practice?" "What were the situations?" |
| | Reflexive Critical Dialogue With Self | Apprehending the Phenomenon (Modes of Appearing in Natural Attitude) | Descriptive and Structural Questions of Modes of Appearing | "Tell me about the situation when you did things differently". Describe the reaction of your students; your own; colleagues. "Tell me what you do to work differently as a teacher?" "What makes you to do things differently?" Additional questions: "How did you feel that time? When and where it was? "What emotions did you experience?" "What do you mean by saying …?" "What does it mean for you to make things differently?" |
| | Active Listening | Clarifying the Phenomenon (Meaning Through Imaginative Variation) | Imaginative Variation: Varying of Structure Questions | "Describe how the unit experience would change if you felt resistance of school administration or student parents?" |

Due to the pandemic situation, there was no possibility to organize interviews in the form of a real meeting, thus they were held online, using diverse communication systems: Zoom, Google Meet and Teams, depending on the preferences of research participants. At the beginning of every meeting, participants were asked for permission to record their interviews on the voice

recorder app on a smartphone. It was a conscious decision not to record a video of the talk, as this process might constrain and prevent the research participant from expressing their genuine emotions and opinions. Therefore, only research participants' voices were recorded. In order to avoid any disturbances during the recording process, the "airplane mode" was turned on. The informants were informed about data recording, and they could choose to stop the interview and cease participation, as it was voluntary.

Technical issues during data gathering: in some cases, there were technical problems during interviews due to hindrances on internet speed, which lowered the quality of responses recorded. Therefore, some interview episodes were difficult to comprehend and transcribe properly. The majority of research participants participated from home, and some distractions were caused by the presence of their family members. Nevertheless, almost all conversations were recorded at good quality.

*Data analysis*

Giorgi (1997) suggests four main steps of data analysis. The first step involves reading the data, when the researcher familiarizes him/herself with the interview material by reading several times. The second step is dividing the data into meaning units by distinguishing the points of meaning transition. Then the meaning units are re-examined, probed and described, and the researcher organizes the data into parts. The last step involves expressing the structure of phenomenon combining the meaning units and forming a coherent structure.

*Organization of the research data.* The interview records were transferred to the computer and the copies of records were made in order to avoid the possible loss of data. Then, every interview was carefully transcribed verbatim using the voice transcribing function and traditional text typing by listening to the audio. The non-verbal language (pauses, laughing, joking) was also included in the transcribed text. In addition, other supportive information, such as the researcher's notes, observations and memos were added.

*Initial reading keeping the whole-part-whole principle.* According to Dahlberg (2008), data analysis is a movement from the whole text to its parts and from the parts to the whole, named "the hermeneutical rule". The researcher must understand the whole text in terms of its elements and comprehend the elements in terms of the whole text. The author does not recommend starting the analysis immediately, but the researcher must familiarize him/herself with the data. That principle was the main guideline in text analysis, mainly reading the whole data, then returning to its pieces and going back to the whole text, when new understanding emerges. The data analysis started with familiarizing the researcher with the raw transcribed text by reading it. The transcribed texts were read several times and carefully analyzed. The process of analysis included

a multiple reading of the text in order to explore and discover the places where the research question was highlighted the best. At this point it was especially difficult to follow Dahlberg's advice to restrain oneself from "quick decisions", because certain thoughts of informants were so obvious and corresponded to researcher's personal experiences. Data analysis was based on the researcher's attitude, which is required to be "bridled", meaning that the researcher must avoid applying own pre-conceptions or pre-understandings. The data analysis must be accompanied by an open-minded attitude of the researcher, and acceptance of ambiguity and uncertainty of research participants. Furthermore, the process of reading was accompanied by the sense of the researcher's openness to the text in order to discover something unique, rather than support what was known before (Dahlberg et al., 2008).

*Meaning units*. Later, after rigorous reading and listening to records, the text was divided into smaller parts, called meaning units. Dahlberg prevents the researchers from dividing the text into segments too rapidly, at the early stage of familiarization with data. The researcher's conclusions may appear superficial and biased, while the parts will not reflect the whole. The whole text of every interview was placed into a table, and then divided into segments with respect to their meaning.

*Clusters of meaning*. The clusters of meaning are an important intermediate step of conducting the pattern of data and help the researcher to view the structure of the data (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Basically, the meaning units are put together in accordance with their sense. Simultaneously, the researcher thought about the whole text as a sum of smaller elements. Afterwards, the clustered meanings were grouped together in order to describe the phenomenon in focus and reveal the essences. According to Dahlberg, the essences appear as a result of interaction between researcher and phenomenon. In other words, the phenomenon shows its meaning (p. 248). In order to systematize the data and reveal the diversity of aspects and attributes of teacher professional agency experience and enrich the descriptiveness of the study, the themes were analyzed, and the initial blueprint of a concept map was created. Later, the map was re-organized, reviewed and reduced to the essential components of teacher professional agency.

### 2.4. Research ethics

The protection of informants' rights is the main issue in research ethics (Ryan, Coughan, & Cronin, 2009). The guiding principles of the research ethics were participants' confidentiality, anonymity, avoidance of any potential harm and scientific responsibility.

*Invitation letter.* The invitation letter can be understood as a dialogue approach between researcher and informant, maintaining the mutuality of interests and efforts in shaping the research (Kvale, 1996). The main ethical factors include informed consent, confidentiality, handling of

sensitive results, and providing feedback. The letters of invitation were sent to all potential participants before the research took place. The letter contained an invitation to participate in the focus group and information about main goals, objectives, research procedure and guarantee of confidential participation. The research participants were asked for permission to audio-record their answers and later use for research purposes only. The letters contained the information about the general purpose of the research and features of its design, and explained the possible benefits of participation. Informants were assured about their confidentiality, anonymity, and personal data protection. In addition, the letter contained information about voluntary participation in the research, and informed the potential research participants about the possibility to cancel their participation and withdraw at any time (Appendix A).

*Confidentiality.* Confidentiality in research implies that private data will be kept secret (Kvale, 1996). Confidentiality of participation was guaranteed and assured by the anonymity of participants; the researcher did not ask for names or other personal data. While handling sensitive data (memories from the past, personal insights or critique of school administration's actions, which are not normally spoken of), the recorded data was not presented to the school managers, as the voices of employees could be recognized. At the beginning of every focus group meeting, brief feedback from the previous round was given. In order to protect the potentially recognizable data and keep it secret, the actual names of participants were changed, and coding was applied. Every participant had an opportunity to choose any name they wanted to participate with. Confidentiality was essential for this study, because the researcher obtained information about different negative issues associated with certain educational organizations, which could be harmful for the organization/school's reputation. Therefore, the promise of confidentiality was extremely important for maintaining trustworthy relationships with participants and to ensure their further involvement and consent. Confidentiality was kept while analyzing the data and discussing the research results with other scientists during the process of validation.

*Relationship with participants.* The development of a research schedule is an important step in conducting the research (Ryan et al., 2009). The time and place of interviews were scheduled based on the availability of the research participant, and priority was given to their choice. At the beginning of the research, the purposes of study and data usage were introduced to research participants. The principles of openness and bridling were applied while conducting the interviews and communicating with the research participants. I provide some more information about research process in my postscript reflection (Appendix B).

*Appropriate usage of scientific literature.* The scientific literature was cited and represented according to the American Psychological Association [APA] requirements (2017, 6$^{th}$ ed.). All literature used in the thesis is specified in the list of references. All scientists who

contributed to the writing of this thesis through their advice, insights, consultations or any other valuable effort are acknowledged and mentioned in the thesis. The research ethics corresponds to all requirements approved by the American Educational Research Association (2011), including author's professional competence, professional, scientific and scholar responsibility, respect for peoples' rights, dignity and diversity, avoidance of potential harm, misuse of data, plagiarism, data falsification or fabrication.

*Research credibility and trustworthiness*

Further, the transcription of interviews itself is being recognized as a shortcoming in Dahlberg's methodology. The author states that the transcribed text cannot transmit the fullness of the original lifeworld event when the interview took place. In order to mitigate the consequences of this limitation, all the interviews were transcribed by the researcher herself, in order to save the primary meaning and nuances of the speech. In addition, the interviews were transcribed verbatim shortly after the conversations took place in order to retain their authenticity and reliability.

## 3. FINDINGS

### Phase 1. Researching the institutional context

Findings highlight essential aspects of the institutional context which surrounds teachers and influences their perception of professional well-being and identity. In order to present the findings in a more appropriate way, the themes and subthemes were grouped in accordance with different levels (micro, meso, and macro) when teachers are dealing with members of school community.

**Table 6.** Teacher-self (micro-level) results analysis

| Level | Theme | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher-self (micro level) | CONTRIBUTING | Seeking meaning<br>Being a starting point<br>Sacrificing |
| | BEING AUTHENTIC | Desiring to be treated as human being<br>Sustaining own well-being |
| | DEMARCATING | Dividing personal and professional<br>Confronting personal and professional selves |

**THEME: CONTRIBUTING**

**Seeking meaning**

Teachers give meaning to their professional effort and direct their hopes to the future. They view themselves as mediators who care about their learners and aspire for future benefit of this effort.

> *"Perhaps we, who are the intermediaries, who are now sacrificing their lives that other teachers, those young people sitting here in the classrooms, whom we love and care for so much, that when they come to power they can evaluate teachers differently than just within aspect of money. Here, Landsberg's thought is: 'We are just a stair in the lives of students. Just a small stair!'" (N4)*

The research participants associate mediation with stairs, and a single teacher with just one step in the life of his/her student. Teachers believe their contribution to students' understanding and re-imagining of teaching profession will be seen in the future perspective.

**Being a starting point**

> *"But I think that's the prestige and that's what those teachers are creating, because sometime that generation grows up and they keep going, whether they're*

*managers or researchers. That's all here and it starts with the teacher, all that prestige." (N4)*

Teachers view their own endeavor into professional prestige, and this is the way they perceive themselves as influential. At the same time, the influence is viewed through a future perspective. Teachers put themselves in the center, as a main cause of their professional prestige.

**Sacrificing**

*"Every day we work sincerely and sacrifice really a lot, even at our family and health account. Every day we just try to work as well as we can." (N3)*

Excellent execution of professional duties is accompanied by a sense of sacrificing own family or health. Everyday teaching activities require a strong sense of professional commitment, and teachers "give themselves" in order to accomplish all objectives.

**THEME: BEING AUTHENTIC**

**Desiring to be treated as a human being**

Teachers recognize their social position, although they underline their desire to be treated as human beings first. Teachers are willing to display their humanity by demonstrating their real emotions rather than concealing their true feelings.

*"That means I am a human being too, and at the same time a teacher, but I am also a human. I can be in a bad mood at times, and I don't represent the position that I'm really a Mistress teacher."*

Teachers enact the way of behavior that reflects their personal beliefs and identity. The research participants refer to the existential aspects of being a human, rather than the social role of teacher: *"I am a human being too, and at the same time a teacher, but I am also a human".* Teachers believe that this kind of self-disclosure decreases a power distance between them and their students, weakening the image of the unapproachable teacher: *"I don't represent the position that I'm really a Mistress teacher."* Teachers' self-disclosure involves allowing themselves to make mistakes, or fail to remember something, or show certain weaknesses.

*"I am not afraid to admit that I don't know something, and I am also imperfect. I am exactly the same person, I have my weaknesses, but not necessarily all of them I have to tell about. And it doesn't look like I'm some Goddess here coming down from heaven and I know the sacred mysteries and now I'll show you some of them, but that I'm just human. I think the valuable thing is not to pretend to be who we are not. Why would I have a crown if I am not king?" (N3)*

This is the way they shatter the mysterious icon of a perfect teacher who possesses all the knowledge and knows the truth: "*... it doesn't look like I'm some Goddess here coming down*

*from heaven and I know the sacred mysteries*." On the contrary, the research participants believe that it is more comfortable to be treated as a human being, to be at the same level as their students: "*I am exactly the same person*".

**Sustaining own well-being**

Teachers admit that students feel their inner energy, attitudes, or well-being. They perceive the teacher as a personality who "radiates" a positive energy, and notice when the teacher is exhausted or "blurred".

> *"... the child views teacher's personality, the energy that comes from it. The child feels whether teacher is energetic, positive and versatile, or the teacher is already blurred. We need to invest in our happiness." (N3)*

The research participants stress that teachers must increase the level of their own mental well-being and a sense of happiness: "*We need to invest in our happiness*." The word "invest" shows that a teacher's positive feelings about their own well-being will positively influence their students in the future.

**THEME: DEMARCATING**

**Dividing personal and professional**

Teachers emphasize that the division of their personal and professional selves is important when they think about their work. Especially they underline distribution of time, and that a teacher is able to *"close the school's door"* and enjoy his/her personal life.

> *"But as a teacher, you cannot be a teacher for 24 hours a day, because you also have a personal life, and you don't have to invest in them [students] all day. You are here just for some time." (N5)*

Teachers stress the perception of the teaching profession in terms of any other working duty, similar to work in manufacturing (*"You also have to understand that this is your job, just like in any factory"*). Again, they emphasize the demarcation of time for work and for leisure. Interestingly, teachers distinguish personal and professional behaviors (*"... you end up your work, close the door and that's it, you can be another person"*). They explain that at school a teacher must obey the rules of professional conduct and *"close the door*", meaning the teacher's right to set the boundary between work and personal life (*"you allow yourself to live your own life, not just the lives of students"*). Teachers underline the importance of making personal decisions in their private lives (*"in my personal life I can choose my personal decisions"*).

**Confronting personal and professional selves**

The areas of the personal and the professional are seen as opposite and overlapping. Teachers express their concern about the future of their personalities, experience lack of time for

private life and, thus, view their job as a threat to identity, and a source of depersonalization: *"I have been working at school for two years, and I am still coming here as a person. And I think how I am going to look like in ten years, because I have a little time for leisure, everything is dedicated for work, I cannot afford to go to the theater or cinema". (N3)* Teachers stress drawbacks of their profession, financial and temporal aspects. On one hand, they recognize professional growth and development (*"perhaps, you feel that you are improving"*), however, on the other hand, the work is seen as a direct opposite to personal well-being.

Another aspect relates to conflict between personal opinions and requirements of professional conduct: *"Perhaps, you, as a person, would react in one way or another, but we must be understandable, remain dignified, and then all these things confront."* Teachers admit that often their personal attitudes and values differ from the prescribed rules and requirements accepted at school (*"because you have a different position, different values")*.

**Teacher and others**

Another important sphere of teacher lived professional experience was related to being with others and interacting with others: learners, colleagues, school administration and learners' parents.

**Table 7.** Teacher-learners results analysis

| Level | Theme | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher-learners (micro-level) | BEING INFLUENTIAL | Being trustworthy<br>Assimilating attributes<br>Approving achievement<br>Being positively disposed |
| | EMPOWERING | Dignifying learner<br>Discovering positive features<br>Being empathetic<br>Dignifying through attention<br>Dignifying through compliance with the rules |
| | RESPECTING | Communicating carefully<br>Nurturing personality |
| | ENSURING EQUALITY | Acknowledging learner's contribution<br>Being impartial |
| | CONTRIBUTING | Persevering<br>Evoking interest<br>Avoiding routine |

**THEME: BEING INFLUENTIAL**

**Being trustworthy**

Pupils' acknowledgement is recognized by teachers as an expression of their trust.

*"And from my experience, student respect means when the student comes to me and asks, 'Teacher, can I talk to you in person?' And then he/she starts to talk about some events from personal life." (N3)*

Pupils demonstrate their trust by initiating conversations or asking for help or advice in specific difficult life situations they face, especially when they request some personal advice. As a result, teachers believe they are trustworthy and serve as an exemplar for students. Teachers view their role in leading without imposing a certain type of behavior or decisions. In contrast, the teacher is viewed as a person, who stays around offering suggestions, evoking thoughts and encouraging students to make decisions on their own.

*"… You don't go for that person, but you go next, to be nearby. Maybe only a listening is needed, and a person comes to certain decisions by oneself." (N3)*

Moreover, teachers view this process as participative listening and understanding, when students can talk about their situation and come to the solution by themselves. In other words, active listening, but not a superficial hearing of what students say.

**Approving achievement**

The teacher is seen as being an important actor, viewed as a source of approval. Students expect the teacher to notice their achievements, admire or compliment them.

*"And yet the child does not have the mature intrinsic motivation to learn that 'I need it'. Anyway, the child often thinks that the teacher will praise him[her], notice how he[she] is doing well, strives for this." (N3)*

This kind of teacher's external impact enhances students' motivation to learn and strive for further achievement. Teachers perceive themselves as important, influential figures when students refer for their approval.

*"Sometimes children may surprise you with their behavior, which demonstrates that teacher is an authority. Once my X student took part in a swimming competition and he came second best from our team. He came to the coach and said, 'Please, be sure to tell my teacher how well I swam.' Not parents, not mom, not dad, but to teacher. It means, it is important what you think about them [students], and it is important for teacher to know how you [student] are trying, what you have achieved, what you are doing. It is very important that the class teacher is informed. To know, to praise, to encourage." (N3)*

Teachers feel being validated and recognized by experiencing students' acknowledgement. They admit that the teacher's judgement on students' efficiency and recognition of students' success is very crucial: *"... it is important what you think about them [students], and it is important for teacher to know how you [student] are trying, what you have achieved, what you are doing."*. Students desire the teacher's appraisal and encouragement; thus, the teacher becomes a significant person, whose opinion and judgement are important for students.

**Assimilating attributes**

Reflecting on influence, teachers mention assimilation of attributes by children. Teachers view their impact on students through a retrospective view of "then and now". In other words, they compare how children reacted to the teacher's instructions at the beginning of learning and after students have spent some time with the teacher.

> *"And I feel a difference, for example, when children come in September, you teach and say, 'This letter is written like this ...' and it often happens to me that children say: 'And my mother taught me in another way.' And that [parents'] authority is against you. But after some time, the parents start saying that children contradict them using my words. Well, such a change." (N5)*

The students accept a teacher's views and take the teacher's side when it comes to choosing between a teacher's and parents' opinion. Namely, taking the teacher's side becomes an apparent demonstration of a teacher's impact. Moreover, not only students but their parents and new colleagues are believed to assimilate the attributes of certain teachers, *"... for kids who learn, they assimilate ... and new employees [laughs]. And for parents – it is exactly the same, because they learn, they are interested, watch, try to do the same ..."* The research participants view themselves as a source of knowledge, a certain example to emulate. Some research participants even copy their colleagues' behavior and teaching methods to deal with different classes of students.

Teachers recognize that they appear to be an example of appropriate behavior, an example of an adult that children encounter during the whole school day. Despite teachers trying to control the information they provide to students, still, they never know what exactly the child will absorb.

> *"You never know what you put in and what the child takes from you, and you can't measure that. But anyway, manners or understanding of how to behave properly comes from the example of an adult. Students see the teachers during a greater part of the day, it affects a lot." (N3)*

One of the teachers provided a more tangible example, when she came to school with her nails varnished with black nail polish and the next day all girls painted their nails black: "*One day I painted my nails with black nail polish, the next day I come – all girls had their nails painted*

*black with a felt-tip pen. Then you notice the impact you make."* This example shows a very small part of a teacher's and students' daily life; however, it demonstrates how certain insignificant things or events, hardly worth consideration, impact students.

> *"I noticed, students choose me as their authority, because sometimes they come and say, 'Teacher, I want to be like you.' And then I ask 'Why?' They say: 'Because you're beautiful,' 'Because you're nice', 'Because you are able to do everything', 'You know everything'." (N3)*

Teachers admit that students admire certain of their qualities and recognize their authority. The qualities include physical appearance *("... you are beautiful"),* traits of character *("... you are nice"),* knowledgeability ("… *you are able to do everything"*) and expertise *("You know everything"*). Teachers notice when students express their desire to emulate him/her.

**Being positively disposed**

Teachers admit that a positive disposition in executing professional activities is an advantageous strategy to impact students' behavior, establish relationships with colleagues or create atmosphere in the classroom.

> *"... positivity in creating a class atmosphere, in relationships with colleagues, in self-motivation. For the example: There was a situation where student's mother and grandmother in the dressing room were trying very hard to get the child to tie the shoes on his own. And the child behaved very harsh against that anger and didn't want to do it. And I told him: 'Yesterday I saw you tied those shoes just in three seconds.' He says: 'Really?' And immediately tied his shoes. Mom and grandma were obviously shocked, but well, the positivity did its job." (N2)*

In this situation, the teacher was able to affect the student by referring to his previous success, while his relatives were using force. The teacher underlined that a positive disposition in relationships with students or colleagues created favorable circumstances and class atmosphere. Students are more willing to agree and behave when the teacher regards them in positive manner. The research participant named it "positivity" and contrasts it to force.

**THEME: EMPOWERING**

**Dignifying the learner**

Teachers view their support in terms of being on the learner's side when they have a choice to inform parents or not. The research participants recognized that sometimes it is better to support a child, showing the parents a better picture of their son's or daughter's success, even though it does not correspond to the real situation.

*"The most revealing to me is when the parents come at the end of the day and ask, 'How is he doing today?' And you think: 'So badly, so badly'. But you say: 'Everything is fine, we are in agreement' [Others laugh: 'From a hundred for the first time']. And I made that child dignified because he does not end up feeling like some kind of rag [laughs]." (N3)*

Teachers believe such a solution dignifies the learner, elevates his/her qualities, and evokes a sense of worthiness, *"I made that child dignified because he doesn't end up feeling like some kind of rag".* Notably, teachers believe that learners may feel hurt when in the end of a day their parents receive negative feedback and associate this feeling with being a "*rag*", a worthless piece of cloth. Thus, to avoid this harm, teachers tend to support a learner, elevating them in the eyes of their parents.

*"Another thing, there is no difference whether families have money or not. But there are children who are disadvantaged and socially neglected. They come here and receive that goodness, they are treated with attention, we speak to them, demonstrate interest, and they begin to believe that they are important too ... if they are constantly undervalued at home: 'You are nothing, you will learn nothing ...'. This is our attempt to lift them." (N4)*

Teachers acknowledge learners' social background which impacts their emotional well-being. Learners from disadvantaged social backgrounds need additional attention and care. *"They come here and receive that goodness"*, and "goodness" is seen as additional attention and interest. Learners are encouraged to believe in their importance and learning capabilities, believe they are as much valued as their peers (*"believe that they are important too"*). Teachers believe they lift learners' dignity with such kind of treatment. The research participants view the rules not only in terms of established norms of behavior, but as a means to ensure students' dignity.

*"The rules are one of the ways of maintaining dignity ...Because rules help both the child and the teacher stay dignified. When we tell children to follow the rules, and do not follow them ourselves – that undermines students' dignity ... or let's say, the child doesn't know how to behave – it's hard for him to stay dignified ..." (N4)*

Knowing the rule and following it in certain situations makes students and teachers feel dignified. At the same time, teachers underline that they must follow the same rules, because teachers' disobedience undermines students' dignity. The common established rules are viewed as a borderline between comfortable and uncomfortable co-existence at school: *"It's the borderline when everyone knows the rules, that I am not right or might be uncomfortable, but that*

*a friend might be uncomfortable, simply don't think. You just have to work on it all the time. I often try to say: And how do you feel, would you like to feel in that child's place?" (N4)*

Teachers admit that sometimes students do not think about other students' comfort when they break the rule. For this reason, teachers try to make the student place him/herself in the other child's situation. Teachers believe that empowering students to make self-sustained decisions is the way to increase their dignity.

> *"We enable children who really have behavioral difficulties to solve problems themselves through demonstration of appropriate behavior. It dignifies them, because sometimes it seems obvious to us that kicking a friend is not right, but unfortunately, this is not a norm for everybody, and some children do not know that it is a misbehavior. Especially for the younger students – we show the way, allowing them to search for ways to fix their misbehavior, or think how they could behave next time. We empower the child to feel dignified next time, because he knows the solution on how to behave in such a situation one way or another. I think that the ability to make decisions on one's own, empowerment to correct child's behavior incredibly boosts their dignity." (N4)*

Teachers recognize that students might not be aware of "appropriate" norms of behavior, and therefore, enable them with this "tool". Students are being shown the ways of appropriate behavior and later they get an opportunity to apply this behavior in a certain situation. Teachers believe that their students become more dignified when they are empowered to make decisions on their own.

Teachers underline that reminding about the rules and making students think about others is a constant effort.

> *"First, children need to feel good. This is very important, so the child not to feel any fear. [Teacher] is by no means a punisher, not an autocrat, but there is a person who sets the boundaries, children want to feel safe in this age." "... the teacher is an authority… because students feel safe with her as she has drawn boundaries." (N4)*

The research participants underlined that teachers need to provide comfort for students, so *"… the child not to feel any fear."* In order to ensure a comfortable environment, the teacher must "set the boundaries". Here, boundaries are regarded as rules and codes of conduct, which help teacher and students to manage their relationship. The boundaries provide comfort, because the students and teacher are aware of the line that marks a limit.

**Discovering positive features**

*"Another ability is to see the best qualities of child. It's not a secret, it's hard to say something good about certain learners, you just overstep yourself emotionally. But at some point, you may notice a good thing and say something minimally good to child, and then you see what miracles happen, how that child changes and how much of that minimal thing means. And when you discover something, not necessarily about learning, to say loud and then such big things happen that may surprise you. And then you approach that child differently." (N3)*

The research participants agree that language is a very powerful tool used by a teacher, "*… You may notice a good thing and say something minimally good to child, and then you see what miracles happen …*".

Teachers discover certain positive features of the learner, even though research participants confess it may be difficult (*"It's not a secret, it's hard to say something good about certain learners").* For that, a teacher needs to find strength and "overstep oneself emotionally", meaning that the teacher needs to overcome their own negative prejudice and emotions. The research participants associate the impact on a learner's behavior with a "*miracle"* and change *"that may surprise you*". At the same time, discovering positive features of learners enables teachers to change their point of view and attitude towards a certain learner (*"And then you approach that child differently"*).

Learners having behavioral problems are empowered by getting teacher's approval, *"... the best examples are when you praise students having more misbehavior."* Praising learners for progress evokes a sense of accomplishment and releases them from anxiety or frustration: *"It seems like they are feeling relieved, thinking 'I did something right'."*

**THEME: RESPECTING**

**Communicating carefully**

*"... Every time I try to express my thoughts respectfully on both proper and inappropriate behavior: 'I am very glad that you have read this book and presented it so well.' I can say the same about bad behavior: 'You may have been angry, but this action is not very pleasant and suitable for expressing your anger.' What we try to do every time is to express in a respectful tone through such small examples, not in some angry way, without evoking our negative emotions. In fact, our linguistic examples influence children a lot. The things that make up that respectful relationship are completely elementary and simple." (N3)*

Teachers expressed their awareness about being an example for their learners, especially regarding linguistic expression. The teachers agree that teachers may express their approval or disapproval of students' behavior in different ways. As a result, students learn through these examples of communication and absorb certain ways of linguistic expression. Teachers believe that a respectful tone of speech and avoiding negative ways of emotional expression contribute to the establishment of trustful and respectful relationships with their students.

**Nurturing personality**

Teachers view the equality between teacher and learner in terms of acceptance of a learner's personality, recognition of his/her interests, abilities, inclinations, and the right to choose a vocation.

> *"You respect the personality of the child, because, for example, sometimes it happens to me that you teach, you teach, and they still don't follow, they still don't succeed, and I ask inside 'Why?!' But then you think that the person's choice of a profession depends not only on abilities, but also on inability to do something, because we choose what we know best and do not go where we don't know something and thus, choose our vocation. It seems, well, you try to accept and respect this too, well the student can't do this, but maybe he is able to do something else. It even goes to personal things when you accept that child as a personality, as absolutely equal." (N4)*

For this reason, teachers try to put themselves in the learner's place and recognize that *"… we choose what we know best and do not go where we don't know something and, thus, choose our vocation"*. The teachers admit that recognition of and respect for students' non-interests is a key to discovering their educational interests. Thus, accepting a student as a personality, as a person having rights to like or dislike something, ensures greater equality between student and teacher: *"We nurture values, nurture children as personalities, not humiliate them solely because of their misbehavior, we do not compare each other, we distinguish certain essential strengths and nurture them. This is what the teacher does." (N3)* The teachers viewed their contribution in terms of development of learners' personalities, nurturing common values and the individual child's strengths. Teachers underline that they never humiliate students because of misbehavior, and avoid comparisons. The teachers view all these things as attributes of a teacher's professional persona.

**THEME: ENSURING EQUALITY**

**Acknowledging the learner's contribution**

The research participants admit that learner involvement in knowledge sharing puts them at the center of learning process.

> *"When planning a lesson, you can stand up, transfer all the information, submit assignments and that's it. Or you can start asking the students – and what do you know, what can you tell me about it? And they immediately expand, they are very happy with possibility to share their knowledge." (N4)*

Recognition of learners' expertise and ability to generate knowledge brings change into the learning process, making it less teacher-centered. Empowered learners bring more knowledge and observations, and feel engaged by having an opportunity to express their opinion or share certain experiences in the classroom. Moreover, student empowerment increases positive emotions and a sense of learning satisfaction (*"they are very happy with possibility to share their knowledge"*). Teachers recognize the contribution of students in the learning process. They confess that sometimes teachers make mistakes or might not know something.

> *"We maintain equality, that we are together and learn from each other, that teachers may also make mistakes and consider children's opinions, observations and suggestions. And in general, we do a lot together. And you show that even being a teacher and older person, you can also learn together. You ask, you listen, may be the wrong answer, but you must be able to ask, listen and hear. For example, a student comes to me and says: 'You know, the brain consists of 83 percent of water?' I knew that fact, but there are some you don't know and say, 'Seriously?! And will you show me?' And for student the sense that he can teach and transfer his knowledge. And it benefits me at the same time because I learn from it." (N4)*

Thus, affording students an opportunity to share their knowledge elevates them, and, at the same time, ensures a greater equality between teacher and learners, "demonopolizes" knowledge, making it common property. Mutual sharing of knowledge changes the role of student from passive receiver to active participant, providing a *"sense that he can teach"*. Teachers admit that this kind of cooperation is beneficial, as it brings additional knowledge for teachers.

**Being impartial**

The research participants admit that ensuring equality is an important rule at their school. For this reason, they never discuss imperfections or failure of other students publicly, never comparing learners.

*"The important rule is not to discuss with each other about others' progress or some imperfections. We try not to compare children with each other ..." "... we all have uniforms. It doesn't matter to us what kind of sweaters or shoes we have, what is inside of you is important to us." (N3)*

In addition, teachers avoid comparing the physical appearance of their learners. For this reason, the school uniform is very helpful. The research participants stressed the inner world of the child. Moreover, teachers themselves wear uniforms in order to ensure equality with their learners: *"In general, that we do not apply power in our relationships. Yes, we make decisions, but we always argue why. It must be clear to every student why the things are done in this way and not otherwise. And most of the time those decisions are based on general accepted values and rules of the school. They are not personally created." (N3)* Teachers underline that the application of power or force in relationship with students is not possible. Instead, teachers make sure that decisions are clear and acceptable for students: *"… we make decisions, but we always argue why."* The explanation of decisions ensures a greater equality between teacher and students.

**THEME: CONTRIBUTING**

**Persevering**

In order to achieve the learning results and pursue the desired learning outcomes, teachers admit that their perseverance is an essential trait.

*"... perseverance – the pursuit of results in working with a child [student], when it is necessary to achieve the result, so that they could read, write, be able to do certain things. And the best example, when teacher strives to teach the student to read, stays for an hour longer, devotes more time to such a persistent pursuit, both to encourage the student's perseverance, and to persevere for student's achievement." (N2)*

Perseverance is accompanied by persistence in pursuing the result ("… *teacher strives to teach the student to read*"), devoting more time and evoking the student's desire to achieve certain learning goals ("… *encourage the student's perseverance*"). The teacher shared a story from her practice, when she demonstrated perseverance and did not give up in teaching a student to read.

*"We had a learner who had difficulty with reading, so we suggested a help of specialist, offered some solutions, but the parents refused. I could give up… But the goal is that learner must read at the end of the school year. So, you dedicate your personal time to that learner, stay after school on certain days. Despite nothing, you stick to your goal and do not give up, even if there are circumstances for giving up. Even that motivation drops sometimes, but again, you are looking*

*for ways to stand up and move on. We got positive results, we found the ways, and the parents work hard at home, I make sure they work at home, they read, and then I devote my time during the lesson, and other students get involved and help." (N3)*

The student's parents refused the help of a specialist, and the teacher, nevertheless, accepted the challenge and helped the learner. The teacher had a mindset that she is able to make a change in the student's achievement and help him to achieve the common goal by the end of the school year. The research participants underlined that professional commitment and dedication are crucial in order to achieve the goal: *"In spite of nothing, you stick to your goal and do not give up, even if there are circumstances for giving up."* The teacher admitted that the level of commitment varies and "*motivation drops sometimes*" when pursuing the goal. The process is accompanied by failing, trying and improving. However, self-motivation helps in *"… looking for ways to stand up and move on".* Working in tandem with parents also required a dedication of time and effort, because the teacher had to monitor their homework. Parents play an important role in maintaining a teacher's perseverance. Such professional commitment required a dedication of both personal time and lesson time in order to create the ways to involve other students and encourage them to help.

*"If I tell someone, they say, 'Wow! What kind of patience do you have to have?' And patience is very important here, because when communicating with children, sometimes there are situations that you would not even think about when you are adult. Your heart just has to be big and hard enough, so you don't break." (N4)*

Teachers associate their patience with tolerating uncertainty when facing students' behavior: *"when communicating with children, sometimes there are situations that you would not even think about when you are adult".* Speaking about the teaching profession in general, the research participants admit the admiration of other people from their social surrounding, in particular, regarding the teacher's ability to cope with their own emotions and be patient: *"Wow! What kind of patience do you have to have?".* When explaining this ability, the teacher refers to their inner qualities: *"Your heart just has to be big and hard enough, so you don't break"*. A teacher's patience is related to persistence, as there is a need to remind the students about different rules and codes of conduct, which they constantly forget: *"But still need to remind constantly ... It is just a constant work. We repeat, repeat, and repeat again. Because they know the rules and restrictions perfectly, but they say, 'Oh, I forgot'." (N2)* Patience requires constant work, which is embedded into a teacher's duties and daily routine. At the same time, the research participants did not express any negative sense as regards the need to remind and repeat the rules to students.

**Evoking interest**

Teachers admit that sometimes they face difficulties when explaining certain concepts to their learners. Therefore, there is a need to seek alternative ways of explanation. One of the teachers provided an example: she described a situation when her learners faced difficulty in memorizing names of months and days of the week in English.

> *"[Creativity] is a certain process when you can't explain in one way, so you try to show, use your fingers, classmates … I knew that learners face difficulties when learn about months and days of the week [in English], so I created short songs and every morning with a guitar I used to play and sing for them. I think it is an effective way to remember. And songs bring more fun to the morning circle." (N2)*

She found a solution when involving singing in the language learning process. The teacher used her ability to play the guitar and managed to make her subject content more attractive and satisfying to learn. The criteria of success relate to the increased performativity of learners, effectiveness for memorizing the content and inducement of positive emotions.

> *"… we were reading a book and learner involvement was poor, I just couldn't get them into. Then I included learners' names into the story. When they are personally involved into that story, they are more interested and more involved. They made creative drawings, illustrating where they are here, what someone is doing, imagine themselves and then get involved." (N1)*

In order to involve students and motivate them to participate in some activities, teachers need to evoke their interest. In the current situation, the teacher increased student involvement by including students' names in the plot and making the story personally significant for every student. Thus, students were encouraged to imagine themselves as characters of the story and started active participation in other related activities. The idea of such involvement was not planned by the teacher, it was rather a spontaneous decision to cope with the current situation.

**Avoiding routine**

Teachers recognize that creativity is an important feature of their teaching in terms of dealing with learners, planning, and organizing activities and avoiding routines: *"… a creativity in planning, teaching, approaching learners, organizing events, trips, avoiding routines, etc. At each step, you need to think creatively to avoid that routine, so it would be fun for you and for the learners." (N1)* The teachers associate avoiding routine with "thinking creatively" and searching for an alternative approach, so the learning would be *"fun for you and for the learners"*. Notably, when working creatively, teachers also think about their own interests, working not only to respond to students' interests or curiosity, but ensure their own involvement.

**Teacher-parents**

**Table 8**. Teacher-parents results analysis

| Level | Theme | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher-parents (micro-level) | BEING ACKNOWLEDGED | Experiencing recognition<br>Being trustworthy |
| | EXPERIENCING RESENTMENT | Dividing personal and professional<br>Blaming |
| | BEING CONDEMNED | Being involved in commerce-based relationships |

**THEME: BEING ACKNOWLEDGED**

**Experiencing recognition**

Students' parents directly influence a teacher's perception of their own professional identity and sense of accomplishment. Teachers experience an impact through direct communication with pupils' parents.

> *"But we need to look to the other side, where our dignity is greatly emphasized: there are certain parents who write very wonderful, respectful letters, ask: 'How do you think, we don't know how to behave here ...'. And there is a feeling that you are a very dignified person in their eyes – that the teacher will behave the best way, the most honorable, be 'the mother of all the values' and so on. If there are parents who communicate, so do the children." (N3)*

Teachers feel recognized as professionals when they receive polite requests for some advice, where parents recognize the importance of the teacher's opinion in matters of the child's education. Teachers feel dignified when they are listened to *("you are a very dignified person in their eyes"*), and involved in the child's education in cooperation with parents. At the same time, they feel trust and high expectations to possess moral qualities *("the most honorable, be 'the mother of all the values'")* and behavior (*"teacher will behave the best way*"). Recognition of a teacher's expertise and relying on a teacher's professional knowledge by pupils' parents strengthens a sense of teachers' dignity and inclusion.

Not only the request for some advice, but implementation of teacher recommendations evokes a sense of being trusted, and as a result, acknowledged: *"... a teacher whose opinion is trusted. If teacher gives any advice or insights, they are considered."*

**Being trustworthy**

Therefore, realization of teacher advice demonstrates trust and recognition of teacher authority.

*"In fact, it happens that the parents come and ask, 'How to teach my child? Because I teach one way and {the child} says "No, the teacher said it was necessary to do differently."' And parents come, ask and clarify. And this also shows that the teacher is still an authority for the child." (N4)*

On the other hand, acknowledgement of teachers happens through students' commitment to teachers' authority, the way of teaching. It is especially noticeable through a certain kind of resistance of students towards their parents' attempts to teach them in their own way. The students say, *"No, the teacher said it was necessary to do differently,"* and the parents search for a common approach with the teacher, asking for advice and assimilating the teacher's way of teaching.

**THEME: EXPERIENCING RESENTMENT**

**Dividing personal and professional**

During conflict situations, teachers expressed their desire to be treated as human beings, rather than a teacher with prescribed codes of conduct.

*"And when we talk to [students'] parents … well, they have all those emotions and so on, but we say, 'Wait, I'm a human and I feel uncomfortable when you are talking to me like that. And no matter what the situation is, I am a human in the first place and a teacher in the second'." (N3)*

Teachers experience unpleasant emotions when dealing with students' parents in conflict situations, when parents speak emotionally or even rudely. Teachers emphasize the need to be treated as humans first, and only after that to be treated as a teacher.

**Blaming**

Another aspect which teachers noticed is parents' unwillingness to take responsibility for a child's learning.

*"... there is a very old view when we fail to take responsibility for our own lives: doctors are responsible for our health, teachers are responsible for our education, politicians are responsible for our good salaries – in that sense, everyone is responsible for something." (N3)*

Teachers admit that they face parents' unwillingness to make efforts to work with their children at home.

*"There are situations here where I don't want to work from home and want relief, but I still want the highest results." (N2)*

Teachers believe that parents must be involved in their child's learning process, be active contributors.

*"Parents do not say: 'Please, provide us some easier tasks, it'll be enough for me that my child will have lower [level of] skills, but a calmer emotional background. It is ok if he gains about thirty percent of [learning] material'. But no. Parents want one hundred percent, but they don't want to do anything extra, and still require easier tasks for their children, without challenges. To be honest, such situations are not very rare. And it really decreases child's personal dignity, when the parents communicate in this way and have such an attitude towards the child." (N2)*

However, some parents are reluctant to help their children, instead, they ask the teacher to decrease the number and difficulty of tasks and still achieve the highest level of knowledge. Teachers argue that these situations happen quite often, and such a view held by parents diminishes the learner's dignity.

**THEME: BEING CONDEMNED**

**Being involved in commerce-based relationships**

Teachers claim that they often are subjected to a client-customer relationship with parents, which diminishes the teachers' sense of dignity.

*"Or simply, there are people [parents] who are engaged into a buy-sell relationship. I dropped [the child for] you – you must take care of him [her] <…> I have been told several times, 'What am I paying for?'" (N5)*

From another perspective, teachers claim that this is a way for parents to avoid responsibility for their child's education. Instead, they reproach and blame the teacher for the learner's failure.

**Teacher-other teachers (colleagues)**

**Table 9**. Teacher-other teachers (colleagues) results analysis

| Level | Theme | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher-colleagues (micro-level) | BEING ACKNOWLEDGED | Assimilating attributes |

**Assimilating attributes**

The assimilation of colleagues' behavior happens through direct observation and co-teaching, based on the desire to learn.

*"I observe lessons, participate and teach part of a lesson, at the end of the day I notice that I assimilate with that teacher, because I learn from her different knowledge, I then I use similar methods, and similarly discipline other classes." (N3)*

Teachers admit that time spent with colleagues, observing and participating in colleagues' lessons, familiarizes them with methods and ways of teaching which are later applied in personal professional practice.

**Teacher-school administration**

**Table 10**. Teacher-school administration (micro-level) results analysis

| Level | Theme | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher- school administration (micro-level) | BEING ACKNOWLEDGED | Being involved |
| | FEELING RESENTMENT | Desiring employer's endeavor<br>Facing discrepancy |

**THEME: BEING ACKNOWLEDGED**

**Being involved**

Teacher involvement in decision making is viewed as a means of demonstrating respect by the school administration.

*"Concerning the [school] administration, I would add that decisions that affect us must be made with our involvement, not something which is led top-down. I think such things show respect, when searching for compromises." (N3)*

However, teachers emphasized *"decisions that affect us"*, meaning that teachers feel acknowledged when they can participate in the creation of solutions which influence their situation at the workplace. *"Top-down"* instructions are opposed to a mutual search for compromise which enables teachers to perceive themselves as equal members of the school community.

**THEME: FEELING RESENTMENT**

**Desiring employer's endeavor**

A sense of acknowledgement by the employer is measured by the employer's endeavor, efforts or aspiration to do something good for teachers.

*"Salary does not mean so much here, but the relationship. If you feel that someone do their best for you at work, because you are a great person here, then I feel dignified and enjoy it. Then I feel good." (N3)*

Teachers perceive these efforts as a manifestation of valuing their personalities, which dignifies them and makes feel good at work. The research participants underline that this kind of relationship is more significant than the amount of salary they receive.

**Facing discrepancy**

Teachers emphasize the discrepancy between the attitudes of the private and public sectors, where private business is known for investing in employees' professional development.

*"And ... what I hear from the administration ... are opinions circulating ... that you [teacher] have to engage in self-education. In that sense, you have to read books, mostly purchase them from your salary, you have to go to conferences that are funded for you, but let's admit, a large portion of those conferences are fruitless. <...> It happens that [someone from administration] brings a book from abroad and you need to translate and read it, or search online, because it is your responsibility to educate yourself." (N3)*

However, teachers claim that their administration encourages them to invest their personal funds, instead of providing teachers with material to support and sustain their learning.

*"Yes, it is my responsibility, but keep in mind that in the private sector, in other fields [other than education], the managers are interested to motivate you. And what about us? For example, let's say there is some conference for teachers in London. What are they [administration] telling me? 'We can fund about 10% or pay for the trip, but first you must write such a motivation letter, and show your desire, which we will evaluate. But I will probably say that there is no money and you know that knowledge is needed for your job. And why don't you want to invest in yourself?' That is why there is a view in the education system that the teacher needs to invest in himself [herself], but the private sector rises and invests in a person as a specialist." (N3)*

Teachers see the unwillingness of the employer (school administration) to invest in their development and blame the view that in the education sector employees must gain knowledge exclusively on their own.

**Teacher-school**

**Table 11**. Teacher-school (meso-level) results analysis

| Level | Theme | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher-school (meso-level) | REPRESENTING | Negotiating professional and personal values |
| | BEING CONDEMNED | Being manipulated |
| | EXPERIENCING ANXIETY | Being under risk of replacement<br>Lacking career perspective |

**REPRESENTING**

**Negotiating professional and personal values**

However, attainment of complete equality seems difficult when it comes to teachers' personal values, which may differ from professional ones.

> *"We have to live the way we tell our learners to do. For example, we sometimes may be different, but you demonstrate an example. We don't eat sweets here, but I can't live without sweets. So, I tell students that we don't eat sweets, we just drink water. But why should I not to eat sweets? No, I do. I just keep the rules that are required here." (N2)*

Despite teachers being in a role that they must tell learners what to do, demonstrate an "appropriate example", and follow the same prescribed rules, they may behave differently in their private life. There is a dissonance between the professional requirements and personal agreement to follow them in private life. Thus, equality is supported in the school environment by the established common rules; however, they are not applicable beyond the school walls.

**THEME: BEING CONDEMNED**

**Being manipulated**

Discussing the clichés faced in their professional field, teachers emphasized the vocation and suitability for the profession. They are being manipulated with the issue of whether one fits the profession, based on the following of a certain set of external rules and requirements, rather than having personal qualities and the ability to sustain relationship with others.

> *"For me there is another very interesting cliché, when it is being manipulated with the cliché of a teacher's vocation. The word vocation means first and foremost that you are able to feel people and you have the right qualities. But for some reason it comes that the vocation is prescribed, that you have to behave this way, not another, and if you make a mistake, they say that you are no longer a vocation teacher. <...> We cultivate personalities, but we cannot be personalities ourselves. Because there are clichés about what you should to be. That is where we should start." (N4)*

Teachers believe that the system does not allow any mistakes and blames people for "not fitting" the notion of "teacher vocation". Instead, they are pushed to obey and match the prescribed norm. Speaking about own individuality, they emphasize that *"... we cultivate personalities, but we cannot be personalities ourselves".* Thus, the school's externally prescribed rules and expectations are perceived as constraining rather than guiding. In teachers' view there is a similar issue when their material needs are being condemned.

*"But there is a prevailing opinion that if you want a higher salary, then you are not a vocation teacher. If you slam the school's door at 4 o'clock, then you are not a vocation teacher." (N5)*

Memo fragment (13.05.2018)

The research participants were employed at a private school, where the vocation to teach is one of the employee selection criteria. Interestingly, the employees experience manipulation and misuse of the term. Perhaps they face anxiety and burnout when working under tension.

**THEME: EXPERIENCING ANXIETY**

**Being under risk of replacement**

Teachers view the possibility of being easily replaced should the quality of their work suffer due to some external issues.

*"But you know that if you will get tired or something will go wrong in your life, you will no longer be needed. But here you need to smile and be happy. <…> Here's the problem these days: if something is wrong – go away, there will be another [at your place]. <…> And you never know when your moment will come." (N3)*

Teachers admit that they make a great effort when executing their professional duties and teaching students, especially during their apprenticeship. That is why they might be tired and subject to professional burnout.

*"And the same with the young teachers, when they come "on fire", their eyes are shining. They see some elephants and rainbows [rose-colored glasses on]. They are being simply consumed in a couple of years. And when they are already at the bottom and their eyes fade, they are being told, 'Thank you, you are no longer a vocational educator, you have lost your motivation.' And they know that the next young one will come and replace [previous teacher]. And no one is interested in educating that teacher. They will work for a couple of years, then get tired and finally replaced by someone else. And if the teacher goes to work in another field, it is considered that he[she] never had that vocation ... but the person was simply broken." (N4)*

The possibility of replacement by someone young and enthusiastic is emphasized. Teachers express their regret because of the employer's unwillingness to organize professional support and help those teachers who are in trouble or tired. They call it "consuming teachers", and blame the school for lack of effort to help teachers.

**Lacking career perspective**

A teacher's career is viewed as flat, without any prospect of promotion, thus discouraging improvement of one's practice. Consequently, teachers underline the absence of financial motivation when increasing a degree of professionalism

> *"And what are the career opportunities in the work of teachers? Let's speak about that when you increase the level of your official qualification, how much does the salary increase? ... if you do something, you want to see the perspective that you are improving as a person. Everyone thinks what one is doing in this work, how one may get promoted, how much one can earn. But you realize that you can't earn much, you can't achieve a career. The teacher's salary is just like that and that's it. Even such a financial motivation is absent ..." (N5)*

Thus, teachers emphasize the lack of career prospects and financial motivation, and argue that every person needs to strive for higher achievement and success, but the teaching profession is viewed as without promise. Teachers lack the opportunity to be promoted at work, and view the teaching career as flat. They blame an attitude towards a teacher's salary as being a fixed norm, which is hardly to be changed ("The teacher's salary is just like that and that's it").

**Teacher-social surrounding**

**Table 12.** Teacher-social surrounding results analysis

| Level | Theme | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|
| Teacher - social surrounding (macro-level) | BEING ACKNOWLEDGED | Creating input |
| | BEING CONDEMNED | Being blamed for a learner's failure<br>Being judged<br>Confronting overestimated external expectations |
| | BEING CONSTRAINED | Being financially exposed |

Teachers live and work within a certain social surrounding and experience its influence. On the one hand, they experience a positive impact of being acknowledged, recognized, and valued. However, on the other hand, they experience tension when they encounter opposing views on the teaching profession, which sometimes overestimate teacher's opportunities and the boundaries of their professional duties.

**Creating input**

Teachers admit that they gain positive feedback and appreciation of their social role from their social surrounding; however, without specifying speakers. *"They"* becomes a cumulative word for a circle of teacher's social environment (parents, friends, spouses, partners, etc.).

*"Although, recently, I've got a lot of positive [feedback] here. They say, 'You're a good person, probably, because you have chosen [teaching profession]' or 'You create ... your work differs from others because you create an added value. You develop a personality. And you're like changing that society and everything is in your hands'." (N3)*

Such social persuasion contributes to the enhancement of teachers professional and personal self-esteem (*"you are a good person*", *"you create an added value*"), increases teachers' awareness about society's aspirations *("you are changing the society")* and importance of the teachers' mission (*"everything is in your hands"; "you are developing a personality"*). Teachers perceive this kind of feedback as a positive evaluation of input they bring to pupils and society.

**THEME: BEING CONDEMNED**

**Being blamed for a learner's failure**

Teachers agree that they take responsibility for their learners' success and failure. However, they view themselves as having *"tied hands"*, and blamed for learners' failure despite their efforts.

*"... we have ... tied hands ... you must work with that child ... and if he does not work or tired – perhaps, you did not prepare this child, you put too little effort* [speaking with irony]. *You must accept that ..." (N4)*

Teachers view certain objective factors of a student's low achievement, such as tiredness or absence of motivation to work; however, teachers still perceive themselves judged and blamed for the learner's lack of success. Despite disagreement with this notion, teachers express the need to *"accept that"*, as imposed by the surrounding context.

**Being judged**

At the same time, teachers experience themselves as being condemned due to the existing public opinion that *"teacher must gain small salary",* or *"requiring too much during public demonstrations".* They express disagreement with the views of public people: politicians, university professors, educational specialists, who state that the teacher must obey and not focus on such material things as salary or size of workload.

*"There are those clichés, but so simplified, so material. Again, I face that issue of prestige that arise from issue of respect, what education system this is? And those views of politicians and the views of very respectable educators and professors: what is teacher's job and the teacher him/herself as a personality in society. I've really heard from a lot of very famous people, 'Well, what kind of teacher are you, if you close the school and leave at 5 pm?' It is a great disgrace*

*to you as a teacher. Or: 'You get those 700 euros, and it is still not enough? When you will receive 1000 euros, you will still not be satisfied!'" (N4)*

Teachers experience themselves being condemned and judged by others who pose existing clichés related to the teacher's mission in the educational system. Those judgments refer to the time allocation that a teacher needs to dedicate to professional duties (*"… what kind of teacher are you, if you close the school and leave at 5 pm?").* Another issue is related to teacher's incomes, which are seen by teachers as low; however, they are criticized for striving to increase salaries, because *"you will still not be satisfied!"* Therefore, teachers experience imposed overestimated expectations, which they grasp from the public discourse.

Teachers experience disapproval from others (*"society's attitudes"*) because they are being compared to Scandinavian colleagues. They express concern about the prestige of the teaching profession and view the roots of the problem in political decisions and willingness to emphasize positive features of the Lithuanian national educational system.

*"... talking about the prestige of the teacher profession today, it depends on the attitudes of society. The notion of prestige originated very much from Scandinavia, and suddenly we all became very bad <...> That way we do not notice those good things happening anymore. Every day we try to deny this, but all this is no longer visible, because somewhere in Finland this whole system is very idealized. That is what made us no longer prestigious ..." (N5)*

Teachers stress the need to notice the strengths of the Lithuanian education system, because society *"do[es] not notice those good things happening".* According to teachers' opinion, the idealization of Finnish education diminishes the achievement and effort of Lithuanian teachers.

**Confronting overestimated external expectations**

Teachers confront the overestimated external expectations of their social surrounding and find themselves blamed for certain kinds of behaviors in their personal lives. Teachers feel manipulated and condemned by society's notions of teacher conduct (*"You are a teacher! You must show [an example]"*).

*"By the way, people are very inclined to manipulate when you do something in your personal life. "You are a teacher!", "You are an [example]!" And so on… but you say, "No, I am a human, alike others I have my hobby, inclinations and weaknesses. I can't be perfect and set an example for everyone, even though the public opinion pushes me to be a good example, to be a supernatural human being.*

*But then the public says, "And what are you doing? Are you worth all that money" Even if I did everything at 120% capacity, what would I get for it? Nothing!" (N4)*

Teachers emphasize the requirement to be better than everyone around, to be viewed as exemplary, although society, according to teachers, does not value them so much.

*"We are being asked by [those around us] to be something more than we actually are. We are human beings, alike others, but we come to school, open the door, and that day we must become someone better, to be a model of teacher, who must be the most valued [example] for society, even though society itself does not value him. That is a contradiction. Because we open [the school's door] and that means we can't upload a photo with a glass of wine to Facebook, we can't swear when we are irritated. On the other hand, we keep saying that all emotions are good emotions and so on ... it is OK if someone gets irritated. But the teacher has to be ... SOMEONE supernatural … We have our own value system, but when we come to school, we must elevate it [laughs]." (N4)*

Again, teachers confront personal values and external expectations of their behavior (*"Teacher must be something … supernatural"*), meaning that teachers are supposed to keep their emotions and feelings to themselves, and behave "*appropriately*"; teachers are supposed to hide their private lives, for instance, in social networks, in order to look better than others. Teachers experience themselves condemned by these overestimated expectations and an imposed disharmonious image of a teacher.

**THEME: BEING CONSTRAINED**

**Being financially exposed**

Teachers relate the issue of salary to their dignity. They emphasize that despite a long vacation period, teachers do not view themselves as valued by society.

*"We are teachers and our work is hard, of course not much harder than doctors', and we have a 'month of honor'. The educator has a 40-day vacation, it is a 'month of honor'. It sounds nice, just listen: 'A month of honor'. It can be a month of honor… but you must work very hard every day during all summer, and then you return to school in September ... Personally, after such a 'month of honor', I would probably like another 'month of honor' at the beginning of September. We are told that we have such a month, but I [am]rather eager to spend that month, either with my family or somewhere else, without thinking how to pay taxes after it. I mean spend that time with dignity. But can we do that? No, we can't ..." (N5)*

Teachers claim being forced to work during the summer in order to sustain family, pay bills and maintain other expenditure, so the long period of vacation is seen as a disadvantage. Teachers are supposed to work during the summer and have less time to dedicate to their families and personal development. They express a desire to spend time with their families rather than searching for additional sources of income during summer vacation. They speak about "a month of honor" ironically, arguing that in practice it is a challenging period, when teachers do additional jobs to sustain their own financial incomes. After working during the summer vacation, teachers view themselves as less dignified and more tired when they return to their teaching job in September. Professional dignity is viewed through the lens of financial well-being which ensures both social and mental welfare, allowing for a proper rest and avoiding emotional and physical exhaustion.

**Desiring to be heard**

At the end of the fifth focus group interview, the teachers began to raise questions and talk about possible solutions.

> *"... Or maybe with all this discussion we could appeal to some authorities and discuss what we could do and make a joint decision? <...> Because then everything just stays between the four walls ... we perfectly know it all, we have discussed everything what was said here, we are talking and trying to change something, but everything stays here. And something may start changing, for example, with help of such research." (N5)*

Unexpectedly, they asked the researcher to be their voice in the public discourse. They believed that the current discussion could be brought to the educational authorities (Ministry of Education and the school authorities). Teachers viewed the researcher as a partner, who could help them to trigger change.

**Phase 2. Reflective lifeworld research on teacher professional agency**

The findings show that agency of teachers is manifested within three dimensions: personal, practical and relational (Figure 3). All dimensions are interrelated and mutually penetrating: the wider scheme is presented in Appendix C.

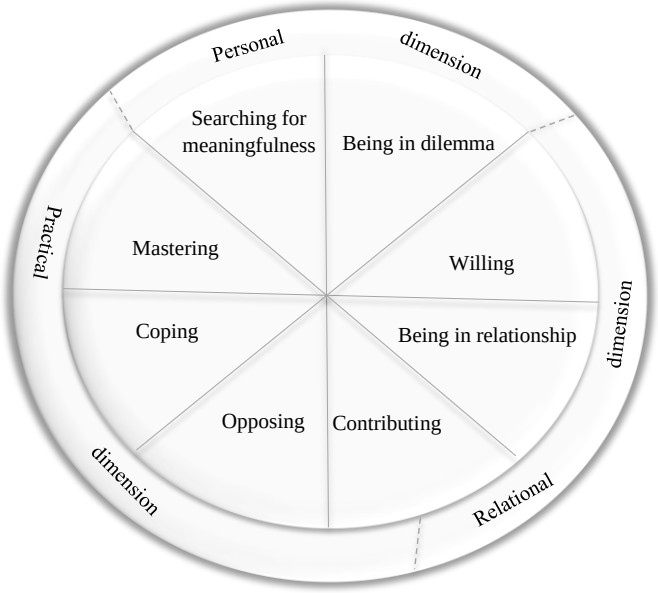



**Figure 3.** Elements of teacher professional agency

**Personal dimension**

**Table 13.** Personal dimension of teacher professional agency

| Dimension | Theme | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|
| Personal dimension | SEARCHING FOR MEANINGFULNESS | Re-evaluation of past experiences<br>Employing personal talents<br>Aspiring for the future |
| | BEING IN A DILEMMA | Being in between system and local interests (meritocratic approach)<br>Experiencing hesitation<br>Experiencing ambiguity<br>Conforming despite personal disagreement<br>Experiencing competition |

**THEME: SEARCHING FOR MEANINGFULNESS**

**Re-evaluation of past experiences as an impetus for action**

Agency as a predisposition of a teacher to act may build upon and originate from past achievements, understandings, and patterns of action. Past experiences from a certain type of identity could impact a course of action. This teacher does not repeat a pattern from the past. On the contrary, she feels empowered and pleased by the new school environment.

*"I used to work in business in field of purchases and I lost my job during quarantine. All the time I had such a feeling that I was suffering doing that work, there was no way to throw myself out of that comfortable position. I thought do I really want to be there? You simply buy a product, bring it to the store, someone*

*takes it out of the store, all logistics – the same circle all the time, someone has to do that ... but I needed a deeper meaning in all that. When you educate a person, it really makes a lot more sense than 'buy-and-sell' relations, when you're just one 'screw' out of many in that system. And if not you, then someone else … I did not feel being useful there. You seem to be working for a boss to make him happy and rich … and for me there was no point at all. I decided to search for what I want to do." <...> Now I feel so happy that I am able to transfer the knowledge, I teach someone, and it is very valuable and useful. And I'm so happy that the job isn't some kind of 'take it-bring it-give it.' I feel useful. I feel more sense in that, I somehow feel ... being in the right place: what you teach, transfer and that value remains, that person stays with the knowledge that you are transferring. And it [knowledge] will not disappear anywhere – it may be forgotten, but anyway it will be a basis for a new person. I love it." (GNT)*

Instead of reproducing previous behavior, the teacher recognizes her patterns of actions in the past *("bring–take away–give it to me")* and reflects on them. She assumes them as constraining *("those requirements …"),* incoherent *("seems like you work for a boss's happiness and wealth")* and meaningless (*"I did not feel like I am useful here").* Changing the field and entering the teaching profession may be seen as agency on her part. The teacher was striving to do a meaningful job and finds herself in teaching, which enables her to experience the joy of transferring knowledge and skills she accumulated, working for a higher purpose. The teacher is eager to transfer her accumulated knowledge to students, and the higher purpose is seen as the education of a "new person", which brings an internal satisfaction and sense of purpose for the teacher (*"you teach, transfer and that value remains, that person stays with the knowledge that you are transferring")*.

Memo fragment (15.05.2020)

Searching for a meaningfulness is a powerful motivation for changing a profession. This teacher desires to transfer her accumulated knowledge and skills, to benefit her students. She agrees to serve to others (her students), but not her bosses, because it gives more meaning and value. The teacher highly values her new job and expresses a sense of enthusiasm in comparison to her past professional experiences. She chooses to serve for higher goals. The teaching profession seems significant and meaningful to her; she speaks with joy and a sense of relief. Quitting an uncomfortable and meaningless job and moving towards a more suitable working field can be seen as a predisposition to professional agency. The first reason for action was quitting a meaningless job and the second was to transfer accumulated knowledge: both reasons are aimed at searching for meaningfulness and may be rooted in the person's identity.

Similarly, another research participant, who entered the teaching profession after quitting working at military school, was asked about imagining alternative possibilities of being constrained at work, and she said:

*"I used to live in accordance with military rules for nineteen years, and it was killing me. I lacked freedom of choice … I couldn't make my own decisions. Here I have freedom to decide, I can do everything myself, no one controls me. As a result, I often invite others to visit my lessons, I organize about two open lessons a month – whoever wants may come. It's so interesting what they tell me. I think I have reached this age and have so much life experience that I really should make a choice. <...> I feel comfortable with things I am doing now. I like it because no one restricts me. So far, I can accept the existing rules <...> But I would not make such a mistake again, because it is detrimental to both mental and physical health – to keep obeying to certain rules that you do not believe at all, and no one listens to you. And in this gymnasium, we discuss a lot, this gymnasium is open. It's not that something is hidden, and we, teachers, don't know something. I really like that openness, I ask for help and no one has ever rejected to help me." (VYT)*

This teacher recognizes that she was forced to obey the external rules in the past workplace. She contrasts her current position at the gymnasium with her previous position at military school. The teacher admits that in a constraining working environment, the need to obey unacceptable rules and the absence of ability to make decisions negatively influenced her physical and mental health ("… *it was killing me"*). She especially emphasizes lacking choice as a main reason to take an action and quit the job (*"... I couldn't make my own decisions"*). While her current workplace enables much more autonomy and freedom to decide (*"... no one controls me"*). Together with absence of external control and pressure these factors empowered the teacher to choose acting more openly and bravely (*"As a result, I often invite others to visit my lessons ..."*). Importantly, the existing rules are acceptable and clear for the teacher, and no one restricts her actions; as a result she feels accomplished (*"I feel comfortable with things I am doing now"*).

Memo fragment (05.03.2021)

The research participant mentioned her age as a reason why she does not want to conform the prescribed unacceptable standards and perform someone's orders. Thus, achieving internal maturity gives a stimulus to make one's own decisions and leave the restraining environment. The teacher's professional agency is seen as a possibility to choose the environment to work in, the surroundings where a teacher can open talents and implement one's professional competencies.

**Employing personal talents**

Another reason for acting in a professional field was expressed by another teacher, and implied an opportunity to implement personal talents and transfer knowledge to students, thus contributing to students' growth. The teacher recognized that she felt satisfied when had an

opportunity to teach differently and bring novelty to her students' learning. According to her, teaching is an opportunity to put her talents into action:

> *"... when I started working at school, I realized that there is such a medium where my talents and abilities can be developed. And I like the fact that I can fully apply some of my skills for a good purpose – through music and through my charisma, perhaps. So, children [students] learn new things and they become interested in religion, faith, church. I really understand that it is good for me that I can use my talents and abilities. The utilization of my talents brings benefits to me, I have fun with the kids, and somehow give them what I know. And at the same time children can [learn] something new and become interested." (GIN)*

The possibility to develop and utilize personal talents and skills brings a sense of satisfaction, fulfillment, and meaningfulness of a job to the teacher (*"I can fully apply some of my skills for a good purpose*"). At the same time, there is a possibility to transfer knowledge to students, evoking their interest in the subject taught. The teacher uses the word "give" when speaking about her teaching (*"give them what I know").* The teacher utilizes her talents (playing musical instruments, singing) and personal attributes (such as charisma), and her action is aimed to benefit her students, bring novelty, and evoke their interest (*"... that I can use my talents and abilities <...> children can [learn] something new and become interested*). The possibility to perform teaching in accordance to own character and personal features empower the teacher for further action – contributing to student learning.

**Aspiring to the future**

Speaking about goals of one's own professional practice, one teacher admits that his decisions and actions may not always bring success. The intentions to act appear even without a clear vision of benefits or immediate success.

> *"It is not always the feeling that what I am going to do will definitely work and it is necessary to do. I think, it is necessary, and I think it is interesting. But there is no guarantee whether it is going to work. And that change in students ... Sometimes I ask myself, 'Why do I do this if I see that my students would prefer to do nothing at all?' <...> And I am convinced that my lessons must bring some change, which, perhaps, will be evaluated in the future and my students will say, 'Ok, that teacher did not took pity for us, did not conformed to our whims, acted in a way he felt was right.' <...> Later students say, 'Thank you, teacher, that you taught us and did not quit on us'." (ART)*

This teacher makes decisions in accordance with his own judgements and beliefs *("I think it is interesting"),* however, without guarantee of success. The criterion of success is change that

happens in students *("I am convinced that my lessons must bring some change")*, which may be seen after some time. The teacher reflects on his actions and analyzes the reasons for pursuing his goals, even when his students decline to comply and act. The actions of the teacher are inspired by imagining future success *("... will be evaluated in the future")*. The teacher imagines a situation when his students will be thankful for his not quitting on them, for being persistent and pursuing his envisaged goals.

Another teacher mentioned a similar reason for his professional action, but he was more focused on student personal development for future success.

> *"I am not only a teacher but educator, and my mission is not only fulfilling my students with knowledge, but development of their personalities. And if I succeed, I will achieve the highest goal of my life. I will understand it if I see that they [students] have heard me, they caught the information I provide." (SER)*

The teacher's actions and professional values are directed towards *"the highest life goal"* which is student personal development. The research participant distinguishes between his role as a *"teacher"* who delivers knowledge, and *"educator",* who evinces values and cherishes personality. The criterion of success is seen in terms of student reaction *("they have heard me")* and understanding, internalizing the teacher's ideas. There are no tangible terms or results claimed by the teacher; the success is rather subjective and intuitive, and at the same time desired to happen in the future. Later, the teacher explains that for him the reason for action is guiding the students' present, and helping them to make decisions for the future.

> *"My goal is to develop [students'] personalities because children are actually unable to find their way, they don't know how to make things right – that's why I have to guide them. I am very happy that one of my students is graduating now, and I was the one who introduced him to political science. I am glad that he was fascinated, he really liked political science, so now he studies Politics and Diplomacy at university. I'm glad I managed to get at least one student interested. I strive to introduce my subject to students, so they can try it out and decide whether they like it. Very often students are afraid of universities when they need to enroll like some kind of monster. This I am trying to show that the university is not a monster, that it is a very good place <...> and it will be one of the brightest places in their lives." (SER)*

The teacher takes action in order to guide his students and ensure their future success. The teacher feels responsible for the future of his students, their ability to choose the right pathway and enter university (*"… they don't know how to make things right – that's why I have to guide them"*). As an example, he tells a story of one of his students, who had chosen to study politics at

university. The teacher feels proud that he managed to evoke the student's interest in the subject taught (*"I am glad that he was fascinated, he really liked political science"*). The teacher guides his students by encouraging them to enter the university he himself graduated from (*"I am trying to show that the university is not a monster"*). These actions are intended to empower students, ensuring their success and giving them the possibility to fulfil their talents in the future.

**THEME: BEING IN A DILEMMA**

**Being in between system and local interests (meritocratic approach)**

One teacher emphasized that despite her implementing different projects, when it comes to teacher evaluation the school administration considers quantitative indicators, such as number of students who participated in a scientific Olympiad. This teacher feels undervalued, with her efforts being unnoticed by important others.

> *"Sometimes I do my work and I think, 'Oh, God, nothing is visible.' Speaking about Olympiad, when the same child participates everywhere, but the name of that teacher is constantly mentioned. And here I emphasize emotional things, which no one values. Although, we listen about social, psychological, emotional, and other competencies, however, we are evaluated by achievement. Sometimes it demotivates. For example, how many children did you prepare for the Olympics? It makes me laugh when I need to fill those annual reports. I seems like I am doing so much ... Everything is assessed in numbers, numbers, numbers, and those qualitative indicators are hidden within quantitative ones. But since I never knew how to compete, I just do what I like and feel good on my way." (VYT).*

Her professional goals are directed towards "local" things: student emotions and psychological well-being, and she finds that quantitative indicators, required by the system, outweigh qualitative ones. The need to strive for quantitative achievement and compete with other teachers slightly demotivates the research participant. Nevertheless, she finds an opportunity to act the way she thinks is the most appropriate and feels she is in the right place *("I just do what I like and feel good on my way"*).

The external official requirements of conducting lessons conflict with the existential and current needs and interests of students as seen by the teacher. The lesson structure is viewed as unmotivating and boring ("*Those official lessons are so boring"*). The teacher expresses unacceptance of this way of teaching and voices personal disagreement (*"Sometimes these things just cut me down*").

> *"Those official lessons are so boring. I make lots of fun for students [while conducting lesson]. When I come every morning to write that lesson goal – there*

*is no attraction. I want to do something that really hooks, not writing the goal which the school audit needs only. These things just kill me sometimes. When audit representatives visit my lessons, they check the whole order – whether the purpose of the lesson announced, the minute it is published, how much time is spent for a certain activity [laughs]. So what?" (ROM)*

The need is to fulfill the requirements of audit and implement routinized rules of an abstract system. The agentive teacher chooses to satisfy students' "local" needs, rather than conform to imposed official demands.

*"I am glad that in this school we do not do unnecessary paperwork, which we throw away shortly after printing, it needed only to show to the principal and administrators – you have papers – it means you work. And how you work [doesn't matter], it is important to have papers. If you do not have the paper, it will be a tragedy. But what is the difference whether you have it or not?! You may write a perfect lesson plan, but a hungry child will come. What to say? 'Wait, my lesson is happening now!' Is this I need to say? No, I need to have some cookie or candy for that child." (ROM)*

Intersubjective, alternative reality (construed through documents and policy obligations) is valued more than actual existential problems. School as an institution creates its own intersubjective reality with its requirements and attributes. The teacher refers rather to the existential needs of her students, viewing requirements as absurd in comparison to existential needs.

**Experiencing hesitation**

The teacher faces a dilemma: whether she needs to follow the prescribed rules and write a negative mark for some students, or give them a chance to resubmit their work. She hesitates because her inner attitudes contrast with the officially approved rule; feeling uncertainty when wanting to treat everyone equally, but at the same time wanting to approach students individually.

*"Grading is very hard for me. Now some students did not submit their tests. What should I do now? Write 'failed' to them? The vice principal said today, 'You need to write "failed",' I think, 'God, I'll write that "failed", their mothers will write to me, some girls will cry. Those kids aren't bad, maybe just the technical connection didn't work?' But our new regulations require to mark 'failed' ... I don't know what to write them now… And that is what my face as a teacher is – should I really be that strict teacher who keeps those regulations? <...> It's my problem that I have to go through myself." (VYT)*

Hence, a discrepancy exists between internal attitudes and official school provisions: a feeling of being compressed between school rules and internal values. Given the need to fill the

documents as a routinized, abstract system, the teacher does not contact students directly, but fills the forms online. There is a need to choose between "local, non-professional" ways of acting and procedures pursued by the abstract systems.

**Experiencing ambiguity**

The effort made by teachers does not always bring the desired change or benefits, so the teacher experiences a variety of emotions: regret, anger, sadness, and sometimes hopelessness. The agentic actions which do not lead to desired outcomes, especially when we speak about the teacher-student relationship, may bring negative experiences.

> *"There were all sorts of emotions, sometimes I was sorry, sometimes sad, sometimes angry. Sometimes a sense of despair encompassed me: I talked to the student, talked and … he broke the window again. It is a natural thing [emotions]. I am not made of iron, not everything goes as I plan … I have received all sorts of remarks from colleagues: 'Maybe someone will pay you for it?' No, no one is going to pay me for it. I worked for the money that state pays me for the class management. Huge money [speaks with irony and laughs]. <...> I had to just accept him as he is and try to help him somehow <...> Well, I gave a lot of myself … a lot … But I think the teacher works that way – you either dedicate yourself or not." (ROM)*

In addition, the comments of colleagues who stressed the financial issues *("Who is going to pay you for that?" "Why are you doing this?")* also caused emotions of regret. The teacher emphasized the issue of salary for extra job activities, however, she stressed the higher goal of student education *("I had to just accept him as he is and try to help him somehow").* Thus, despite the absence of monetary incentives, the teacher did not quit, and remained on the path. Later, she says, the changes started to happen, and her persistence appeared to be useful. So, the teacher concludes that persistence in a teacher's work is crucial *("... you either dedicate yourself or not")*. Agency is seen through giving self to the process *("I gave a lot of myself"),* which may bring results or may not.

**Conforming despite personal disagreement**

The teacher views as disadvantages such routinized activities as filling in the documents related to her classroom teaching. Personally, she rejects the obligation to fill the "*unnecessary*" papers and views them as a constraint and demotivating factor. This duty is perceived as a burden, imposed by the system's rules.

> *"I hate the paperwork, it's nonsense and such a burden for me. <...> I think, I could teach freely and disappear after lessons. But there is a duty that I must accept and that I am not very willing to do. And I don't have much motivation*

*here. I feel to be pressed into the rigid frames, it doesn't motivate me, I don't have that intrinsic motivation. I think, 'Should I do it again?' I delay, delay, delay ... But I know I must do it anyway." (VYT)*

The teacher tries to resist in a way that the implementation of unwanted and unacceptable activity is postponed and pushed away for some time. However, at the same time, she conforms to the rule, despite lack of correspondence with her inner expectations and beliefs.

**Experiencing competition**

The teacher emphasized her concern about the possibility of being replaced by those with better qualities and higher competencies. This concern motivates her to develop professionally, act and participate in activities organized at school.

*"I think if we did not try to teach remotely, we would not understand how life has changed. There are so many platforms and tools – choose and take! And I think that basis is no longer enough, we already need to be advanced. <...> Otherwise, you cannot survive. Because there will be young, skilled, technologically advanced young people who will be able to replace you. I sometimes read articles about young educators, and I think if I was only 30 years old, maybe I could. <...> When you enter your fifties, it's different anyway. There is competition that is knocking behind your back all the time." (VYT)*

The teacher admits that technology-related skills and ability to work remotely during the pandemic situation demonstrated a gap between generations of teachers. The basic knowledge and skills a teacher receives during pre-service training are no longer enough to work properly at school. The teacher compares sustaining her workplace to "surviving", indicating that there is a competition between generations of teachers inside the school community. The teacher's regret is caused by the impossibility to return the past *("if I was only 30 years old")* and have the same cognitive abilities and capacities she had before. Experiencing the risk of replaceability and thus, a sense of regret, caused by competition *("... competition that is knocking behind your back all the time")* motivates the teacher to act and develop her own professional skills.

| Memo fragment (21.01.2020) |
| --- |
| Unexpected comment. Means that one of the stimuli to act is grounded in a fear to be replaced by someone better or more competent. Especially in the field of technologies. During the pandemic, many teachers faced lack of knowledge and skills of how to use ICT. |

**Relational dimension**

**Table 14.** Relational dimension of teacher professional agency

| Dimension | Theme | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|
| Relational dimension | WILLING | Being encouraged<br>Matching internal and external values<br>Experiencing freedom to act |
| | BEING IN RELATIONSHIP | Being influential<br>Being trustworthy |
| | CONTRIBUTING | Choosing to act<br>Empowering others<br>Transferring values<br>Sharing ideas |

**THEME: WILLING**

**Being encouraged**

One's emotional state seems dependent on a person's motivation to act. The teacher admits that the positive emotions of her students and compliments of her colleagues encourage her to further action.

*"I charge myself with good emotions because I see that the students like my lessons. And then colleagues may call me and say, 'Your students are so funny, they ask about everything!' Very good emotions, which encourage further action, because I cannot lower the level down." (VYT)*

The research participant experiences positive emotions, which inspire her to act in a positive way (mastery experience and recognition of important others). The teacher admits that she strives to sustain the achieved level in the eyes of her colleagues.

*"At the beginning there was such an interesting reaction of the students, and they would say, 'You know, our former teacher did not do like that.' They were surprised. I was uncertain whether my students like the way I teach, whether it is appropriate. But later I realized that they were really involved, actively participate in the lessons, ask questions, give answers – they [students] became more active. They used to show interest and make questions, they felt more courageous to ask questions. 'Teacher, what song will we sing today?' <...> It was that very important for me when colleagues-teachers said that the students are very much looking forward having the Religion lesson. Those were teachers who responded that students were waiting for me." (GIN)*

The teacher verifies the efficiency of her methods by observing students' reaction in terms of increased involvement and participation in the lesson. At the beginning, students found the new mode of teaching surprising and unexpected, as they were used to another way of working with the previous teacher. For this reason, the research participant had some doubts about the efficiency of her new approach. Later, she observed increased student participation, involvement and interest which justified the change she made. Increased student interest and courage to ask questions were the most significant indicators of approval of the teacher's effort.

> *"I mostly got [support] from other teachers when they stayed during my class. When the teachers said, 'I was curious to learn those new things, I didn't know them either.' It was very important for me to hear that the teachers were also interested in the topics I was talking about, how I presented, and what methods I used." (GIN)*

This teacher experienced the approval of colleagues through their endorsing her mode of teaching and expressing amazement at the learning material. The teacher felt encouraged and empowered when her colleagues expressed their interest and positive emotions after lesson.

> *"... I think, the evaluation of colleagues and superiors ... They see how you work, they praise, encourage you and then you feel even more satisfied with yourself. And then I realize what I am doing – I am doing well. And so, I continue. The feedback from the colleagues is important, it motivates to work." (GNT)*

The teacher validates her endeavor and correctness of actions by listening to students' parents. The reflections of some parents allow to confirm the way of teaching, which increases the teacher's self-efficacy.

> *"I don't say it out loud, but I have that kind of technique that works. If I feel that [students'] parents, when we met at the community home, and they say, 'Teacher, what did you do? My child fell in love with English!' or 'My child started reading a book', or 'He speaks finally!'. That's what I think, is okay, right? Well, we are preparing for life skills." (VYT)*

Parents' recognition is perceived intuitively through the process of communication (*"I feel that parents ..."*). The contribution of the teacher is seen when the student starts doing things which he/she has never done before, for instance, reading educational literature, evoking interest in subject learning (English in this case). The teacher gets recognition and confirmation of the accuracy of her professional practice and effort by receiving feedback from parents (*"that's what I think, is okay" ...*). The feedback is sometimes expressed verbally in a form of admiration or appreciation of the teacher's professional effort by students' parents.

**Matching internal and external values**

The teacher emphasized that their school administration encourages teachers and expresses this as *"having backbone",* which means standing up for themselves and coping with challenges.

> *"I think that here [at school] we are sufficiently encouraged to have our own 'backbone'. Of course, we must follow the policy school policy. That policy does not change, nothing is hidden, everything is clear – it corresponds to my personality, and I think that's why I've suited to this collective so well. Here I am allowed to manifest myself." (VYT)*

The research participant recognizes the need to represent the school, and to consider the school's internal rules and order. She accepts them because they coincide with her own internal rules and ways of acting: no secrets, everything is open and clear. Noticeably, freedom to act is seen as something given by the school administration (*"I am allowed to manifest myself")*, but not as something inherent to the working environment. The teacher acts in accordance with her beliefs, which coincide with school administration's actions and expectations. As a result, the teacher is motivated to act more despite the high limitations of time and workload. Also, the teacher was asked about factors which motivate her to be creative and act differently:

> *"I think the gymnasium itself, our values, the modern vision. And our leaders. The vice-principal for education is also interested in everything, she is very nice. I feel very strong support from the school administration. The vice-principal is our 'lighthouse', she says, 'We need to do X, so let's do it, girls!' Sure, it brings five of us together, we are full of enthusiasm. Sometimes it seems like we do not have any time, but as you do – and you accomplish everything. Of course, I want to act as well. <...> Internal motivation is produced when you remember how well you did something, you get that energy, and it stimulates you even more. <...> This is both external and internal motivation, they are balanced." (VYT)*

The teacher underlines certain factors that motivate her to act within the school environment. The factors imply both external and internal sources of motivation. The external factors involve the workplace itself, the professional surrounding, its values, and the vision and attitude of school leaders and administration. The teacher especially emphasizes the instance of the school's vice-principal, who made a significant impact and inspired other colleagues to act. Being inspired by like-minded leaders seems to be a very important stimulus for individual and collegial action, even when teachers face shortage of time for certain additional activities. The internal motivation arises from the teacher's reflection on a successfully accomplished professional experience (*"when you remember how well you did something")*. The experience of

success in the past makes the teacher feel satisfied with her results and triggers further actions. In addition, the teacher admits that external and internal sources of motivation are equally important – they balance each other.

Memo fragment (21.01.2020)

External motivation – being led and supported. Being surrounded by like-minded colleagues. Vicarious experiences (observation of others) stimulate the teacher's desire to act differently. External support and example of colleagues. Interestingly, not all colleagues engage, but only five of those who have a predisposition to follow and create. Internal motivation of teacher originates from mastery experienced when the person acts based on previous success.

**Experiencing freedom to act**

The research participant experienced a sense of freedom to act the way she thinks is appropriate and corresponding with her views. The sense of freedom from constraints which could be imposed by the school administration.

> *"I feel quite free to do what I want and how I want. I really feel trust from the [school] administration, they give me the opportunity to act in a way I think would be the best. I am very happy about that. <...> I think it really gives me a lot of freedom as no one even checked and attended the lessons. When there was an annual interview, the principal said, 'We heard that you are teaching in very modern ways.' [laughing]. I feel there is a lot of freedom in that." (GIN)*

Furthermore, the school principal positively assessed her work, indirectly observing the teacher's activities. Recognition by the school administration and the absence of direct control and observation enables the teacher's sense of freedom to act. This makes the teacher feel a sense of happiness and satisfaction in her job, and motivates her for further creative action.

**THEME: BEING IN RELATIONSHIP**

**Being influential**

Informal communication for strengthening a relationship which is maintained distantly. The teacher has a choice not to maintain the relationship, and to narrow communication down to a subject matter during distant learning.

> *"Learning through a relationship, finding a connection, continuing to build learning. The teacher must be a human. Now we have individual conversations in distance education, they are very helpful, so I think when we go back to school, they should remain. Once a month to meet with the teacher, to talk*

*about how the student is doing, or just speak about nothing [laughs]. Sometimes children show clothes they have purchased, show what games they play, or what music they listen. Otherwise, children have no one to tell, they are sitting lonely at home with parents. Perhaps, at school this child wouldn't tell those things because there is a bunch of people. It's that individual conversation that helps build the connection. <...> We rehabilitate a bit, evaluate ourselves, and see how we can improve." (ROM)*

However, the teacher emphasizes that communication is extremely important to sustain the relationship, and therefore, the motivation to learn. The teacher invests effort and dedicates her time to maintain the relationship with her students, encouraging them to speak about informal topics, to open up and share their concerns. Another teacher views agency through the nature of his relationship with students: openness, support, and absence of tensions.

*"My teaching is based on relationship. I cannot go further if there is no relationship. It is not about information transfer, but I seek for a possibility to establish a relationship. After every lesson my students evaluate themselves and evaluate my lesson. They used to tell openly if they did not understand the content or ask additional questions." (MIR)*

This teacher pays attention to the nature of communication with his students and emphasizes openness in conversations, absence of fear in asking additional questions and evaluating the teacher's work. The teacher rejects acting in a "traditional" way and encourages students to self-evaluate and to evaluate the teacher's work (*"... students evaluate themselves and evaluate my lesson"*).

**Being trustworthy**

One teacher views her agency and teaching as a whole through the teacher-student relationship and help. She speaks about a situation when she used to support a student who was in a difficult social situation. The teacher managed to create and maintain a trustful relationship, which allowed her to positively benefit the student.

*"I had such a difficult student, ninth grade, from an antisocial family. I realized that he never had a normal relationship with teachers. For teachers he was like a 'splinter'. I used to speak to him and noticed that he was eager to talk and build a relationship, so during the breaks we used to sit on the bench and talk. <...> None of the teachers talked to him. The other teachers could not manage his inappropriate behavior in the classroom, they used to invite me, and I could calm down the student. Well, I spoke in 'his language' and tried to influence him, so he could change himself. And he started to attend school. <...> He used to come to*

*my cabinet during every break to talk, to tell something, we used to drink tea, eat something, talk in informal settings. And the change happened. <...> Some little things changed – once he washed teacups, then he brought a feast for the birthday party, and some chocolate for me … for that student it was a big shift. <...> He completed ten grades. I don't know what would happen to him if we hadn't been in such communication." (ROM)*

This teacher compares her actions with the attitude and expressions of her colleagues *("Nobody spoke to that student"),* even more *("He was like a 'splinter' to other teachers").* The situation when other members of the pedagogical community declined to accept and help the student, pushed the teacher to act differently, to contribute through the creation of a trustful relationship. She aimed to change the student's behavior and attitude to enable him to learn and to graduate from school. The teacher managed to establish a relationship through talking and listening to the student: *"He used to come to my cabinet during every break to talk, to tell something, we used to drink tea, eat something, talk in informal settings"*. The informal trustful relationship was the way teacher exercised her agency.

**THEME: CONTRIBUTING**

**Choosing to act**

The reason to act and improve one's own teaching, according to one teacher, is observing students' reaction and success. This teacher chooses to go beyond her teaching role and gives *"something more than music lessons"* to her students; thus, she involves additional non-conventional materials and methods in her teaching. Although the teacher strives to improve her teaching, the experiments sometimes fail (*"sometimes it doesn't work out").* Students' success and learning satisfaction motivates teachers to put in more effort, what she calls an *"inner engine".* Metaphorically, this "inner engine", stimulated by the sense of accomplishment, induces further action.

*"I am a kind of person and I want my students could receive something more than music lessons. We have textbooks, but I practically never use them. I keep in mind some guidelines of what they have to learn, but I try to involve a wide range of activities. Clearly that takes time, sometimes it doesn't work out. But, probably, the inner engine turns on when you see how children learn and how happy they are with what they discover, is probably the biggest endeavor. I don't have kids myself, and apparently the students are like my kids to me. I'm really happy for every step they take, when they act, do, try, it's really very nice. The inner engine of that is a joy for others." (LIN)*

The teacher spoke about taking an active role in motivating students and decreasing their anxiety and stress if needed. The teacher is seen as a contributor to the student's success, the supportive person who makes significant effort in order to motivate her students. The teacher speaks about a situation when a student's self-esteem was affected by compulsory remote learning.

> *"Well, the last case, maybe a couple of weeks ago, was that very children are affected by the distance learning. My students are 12-year-olds. One girl had to defend the work of maturity and I told her that there was no way to force herself to sit down and finish a few sentences because she no longer saw the point. It takes such parts, and we talked about that topic for two or three days in a Zoom and I just tried to motivate her. And thanks God, she defended her thesis, but it took a lot of effort to do so, although I could probably put my hands down and say, 'if you don't need it, so let it be.' But I did not really want to give up like that." (VAI)*

It requires a significant effort and different approaches (*"we talked about that topic for two or three days <...> I tried to motivate her").* The teacher imagined a situation *"what if"* she refused to become involved and help. She says: *"I could probably put my hands down and say, 'if you don't need it, so well'."* and so she expresses a probable scenario and possible consequences. However, the teacher says that she did not want to let the situation go, so she remained and helped the student.

**Empowering others**

This teacher actively influences her students, makes suggestions and initiates different activities. She did not get feedback from her students, nor did she see an immediate result of her actions; however, later her students considered and used those suggestions.

> *"There are also guys with whom we have built training companies, and they now have their own businesses. I offered them a business plan and suggested to implement it. They laughed at first, then fell silent and didn't show up at all, and when we met half a year later, they showed up and used my suggestions." (GEN)*

Later, the same teacher says:

> *"Anyway, I involve them very much. There was the Open Lithuania Forum, to the forum of economic knowledge, I encouraged them to participate in conferences, everywhere, and they saw another, non-school life. It is I who also take a little fault here that I pulled them out of the school. But they did not go the wrong way – they work responsibly, they have all kinds of foreign partners, I think that obliges a young person." (GEN)*

The current quote demonstrates the teacher's actions directed towards pushing students outside the school borders. The teacher goes beyond the prescribed roles and involves her students in another environment, where they could get different knowledge and experience. Going beyond school walls, according to the teacher, enables her students to start their business, though it limits their time and shifts priorities. Students get involved in their start-ups and then lack motivation and time for their education. The teacher sees her responsibility here.

**Transferring values**

The teacher acts in order to transfer those values which he/she thinks are important. She distinguished several values which are necessary for students to internalize: accepting every person, despite their differences. Accept the person without any conditions, just as he/she is.

> *"In a wider sense, those values, which I transfer and stress on their importance. Accept every, even different person, in my class there is a child from orphanage. All the time we used to talk that we are all different, but we need to be accepted. Not competition is important but cooperation. And after three years I can say that they [students] paid attention and it is important to them." (AUD)*

The teacher views her impact in terms of internalization and acceptance (*"paid attention and it is important to them")* of those values by her students. This process is seen by the teacher in retrospect, it is not a single short-term occasion (*"... after three years").* Therefore, leadership can be seen through the dimension of time.

**Sharing ideas with colleagues**

This teacher emphasized that she strives to share her new professional findings in the field of language teaching with all her colleagues during meetings. The teacher shares the ideas she personally thinks are worth spreading. Her initiative to share the information about using the breakout rooms function when working with online communication tools may be viewed as intentional agentic activity.

> *"I really like the breakout rooms. I introduced them to colleagues during a meeting of class leaders and tutors, because a lot of colleagues ask: 'How are you doing this?'. And I thought why can't I show them? I made slides and told very briefly what I was doing. Everyone became interested as well and I am consulting them." (VYT)*

Interest expressed by the colleagues motivated the teacher to share her knowledge and skills (*"I thought why I cannot show them?")*. The recognition of the teacher's ideas by the colleagues (*"Everyone became interested")* directly influences the teacher's

perception of her own professional identity and sense of accomplishment. The agentic activity leads to exercising teacher leadership with colleagues.

**Practical dimension**

**Table 15.** Practical dimension of teacher professional agency

| Dimension | Theme | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|
| Practical dimension | CONTRIBUTING | Generating original ideas<br>Initiating change |
| | MASTERING | Being curious<br>Learning from others<br>Seeking help |
| | COPING | Being open to uncertainty<br>Being persistent<br>Experiencing disapproval |
| | OPPOSING | Making self-sustained decisions<br>Acting differently<br>Striving to break stereotypes<br>Contrasting own activity to passiveness of colleagues |

**THEME: CONTRIBUTING**

**Generating original ideas**

When a teacher faced an issue of learning process organization remotely, the creation of new ways of teaching was challenging for her. However, the teacher managed to create a system where students were able to collaborate effectively. The need to generate a new idea was caused by the teacher's high workload and remote learning conditions.

> *"I introduced the idea to my colleagues which I apply for two weeks now, and it works very well. <...> I guide four classes and I have created [virtual] rooms for them. For example, the room 1 is called 'Teacher Consultation', another is called 'Friends Team' where students teach each other. The third room is the 'Room of Silence', where students can chat. The fourth is called 'Individual Room' - where children can work alone. <...> I can be reached in a Teacher's Room. It is so good! I really enjoy it!" (VYT)*

The teacher together with students was able to develop and implement the new approach to remote learning, and the results appeared to be positive. The teacher emphasized that she shared the new idea with her colleagues after successful implementation in her own teaching practice.

**Initiating change**

This teacher emphasizes that curiosity helps her to find new ideas which she shares with students. Moreover, the students are being involved in a process of improving and developing the idea. The teacher states that *"... I never keep the knowledge [to myself]",* meaning that she strives to share the knowledge and enrich others.

> *"Me with my class are developing a social project and I was looking for a way for presentation. Simple saving to PDF looks very ugly. And suddenly I found the Sway program in the Microsoft office. I became wonder, looked around, tried to use it. I could create blogs and newsletters there. And in September, I invited the kids to class for an hour, and said, 'Here, look! What do you think?' It was my curiosity that infected others – now the kids are already writing to me when they can present what they've learned about the Sway program. This is my curiosity, but I also like to share with others, I never hide the knowledge." (VYT)*

The teacher says that she is curious and discovers new ideas, and shares the ideas with others – colleagues and students – rather than keeping the ideas to herself. Instead, she strives to involve others in the process action, to "infect" others, and make like-minded people.

**THEME: OPPOSING**

**Making self-sustained decisions**

This teacher narrated a story which happened more than 30 years ago. She told about a conflict between her personal views and beliefs with the hegemonic ideology and its attributes. The teacher was forced to bring different symbolic items, carry, and use them when hiking with students. Despite taking those things, she never used them.

> *"During the Soviet period, in 1987 I was invited to work at the school as a pioneer guide at summer camp. Within my family there was another attitude, <...> at home, we always been talking about an independent Lithuania. Just because there was no other way, I was a pioneer and a communist youth member. And when I was invited to work as a pioneer guide, I was terribly pondering, it was against my beliefs. Although, I agreed to work and traveled a lot with the kids because there were all sorts of meetings, camps for the pioneers, and I did everything because no one had persecuted me too much. It usually was like that: we go to the camps with backpacks, with tents, and the director taps me: 'Take the drum, flag and trumpets! Did you take it?' [laughs] We took them just for [the sake of appearances], but later put them aside." (GEN)*

The teacher speaks about her resistance to the existing norms and requirements which existed during the Soviet Union era. Her desire to resist comes from her family's biography and tragedy caused by the Soviet regime. Despite being forced to obey, the teacher used to avoid execution of requirements given from above. Thus, the teacher's personal story enabled her to make decisions and resist the existing structures.

**Acting differently**

> *"... we have to work according to the Oxford series textbook. And when I came [to school], I kept thinking, 'Oh God, how can you work with that textbook?' For me now, in the 21st century, it seems like 'mission impossible'. Hey, we work with children who are so advanced in technologies! And I brought that [into student learning]. <...> And I started preparing my lessons applying a completely different principle, I was planning for the future. I considered the program, of course, but the material, such as textbook, was presented differently to my learners. I made Power point slides, and presented that material quite easily, involving students. And my lessons were different." (VYT)*

Another teacher critically evaluates the use of textbooks. She is cautious about their content and its relation to the educational program. She admits that student books are lacking a link with real-time events, so she is forced to seek better materials that fit the current situation.

> *"Relying on textbooks ... are those classic things where so, but in both economics and geography there is a 'here and now': both population movement and economics. This is a constant change, and if you study according to the textbook alone, a lot may not be right." (ING)*

Actors able to draw upon a rich repertoire of experience might be expected to be able to develop more expansive orientations to the future and draw upon a greater range of responses to the dilemmas and problems of the present context, than might be the case with their more experientially impoverished compatriots (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015).

> *"Now I have come up with a new activity to start a student club. When I was in America, I was very impressed that there were people from different countries sitting and talking in all languages, their flags were put on the tables, and you can approach every table and talk to everyone. I thought we are lacking such a club at school. <...> I have just expressed that idea – and suddenly I see that I have been appointed as a curator. It's again some kind of adventure I got into [laughs]." (VYT)*

Based on previous experience, the teacher implements it in the new context:

*"As I understand, I came after a teacher who wanted to retire and could not do that because there was no one to replace her. It was a very big change for the kids, I would say. When there was an older teacher, she still had some different teaching methods ... And here the young teacher comes and starts playing the guitar, singing carols with movements, praying together, and so on." (GIN)*

This teacher reflects on her own work through comparison with the work of the previous teacher. The research participant suspects that previous teacher, being older, used to apply obsolete methods and approaches, while she, in contrast, practices more modern techniques. When asked about a certain example of acting differently, the teacher emphasized her personal interest in music, which she applied while conducting daily prayer with students. She decided to bring her talent into lesson routines, making them more interactive and involving.

*"I would emphasize that in lessons of Religion we have a time to pray, and we always start the lesson with prayer. The former teacher was either praying herself, or it was a calm action. But because I'm so much more into music, I decided that we should include movements into a prayer, that students show some kind of movement and sing together to make the process more interactive. It is some sort of warming up in a lesson, but at the same time it is a prayer." (GIN)*

The usual daily practice remained, however, the way it is taught was changed. At the same time, the teacher compares her way of teaching with the previous teacher's behavior (characterized as "calm"), while she, in contrast, brought some movement and activity into classroom. These actions correspond to the teacher's attitudes and abilities, hence her professional identity. Another teacher opposes the accepted school norm to keep the distance and hierarchy with students.

*"I dedicate more attention to my students. When there is a break time, my door is open. Students go to walk in a corridor and usually sit down and scroll their phones. I sit nearby and ask, 'What game is it?' At first, students were frightened and hide their phones. Then I took my phone and said, 'What is the name of the game? I want to play as well.' I could ask what music they listen and tell what music I personally like. This allowed me to build a communication and [appreciate] my students, it was a mutual [appreciation]. We used to sport together, to make simple things together. Later, it led to discussions." (MIR)*

By developing communication and trustful relationship with students, the teacher is able to initiate fruitful discussions during his lessons. His agency is viewed through dedication of attention to students. At first, such behavior was perceived with caution *("students were frightened and hid their phones")*, but later the teacher's actions and authentic behavior evoked a

sense of trust. The action was intended to appreciate students and let them appreciate the teacher *("it was a mutual [appreciation]")*. By doing everyday simple things together, the teacher managed to build a trustful relationship with students.

**Striving to break stereotypes**

One of the motives to act differently implies this teacher's desire to change the existing way of student thinking and break existing stereotypes, which she believes are present within the school community.

> *"I came from such a background that I work in a church, I work with young people, we organize both youth and children's camps. There is such a well-established norm that the church and religion are very boring and uninteresting, and that here you just kneel and pray, and you can do nothing more, not even move. I am trying to break down those stereotypes at school that the church is boring, that all children must sit like frozen in a Religion lesson. I want to break down such stereotypes and show that it is fun and good at church, it is good to [appreciate] your faith, to learn more, maybe in such unusual ways as acting biblical stories or singing hymns." (GIN)*

The teacher strives to change students' settled attitude towards church and faith, treating them not as a boring pastime but as active and interesting activity. She underlines that this attitude is a sedimented norm transferred from families and surrounding.

**Daring to look differently**

This teacher shared a story when he opposed a school culture of clothing. The story happened after the Soviet Union collapse, and concerns existing notions of a teacher's appearance and way of wearing clothes. Certain codes of teacher appearance existed, which were perceived by the research participant as *"stereotypical man wearing a suit"*. The goal of the teacher was to resist the existing order and encourage his students to act bravely in accordance with their beliefs.

> *"In the spring, I wore classic shorts with a waistcoat which looked like a suit. In the 90s, it was a shock. Moreover, I wore jeans and a jacket, it seemed very scary too. Those were things when I went against the common culture in which teacher had to be some sort of stereotypical man wearing a suit. <...> When I got off the bus and went to school with a backpack, waistcoat, and linen shorts, I had a straw hat and was wearing sandals. My students could not understand what they were seeing. Later I realized that my image shocked them that time. Because the teacher had to wear long pants during all school years. <...> And I encouraged my students. I explained them that there are seasons, there are summer jeans,*

*holiday jeans. Because I received shipments from Canada, I knew all those things. Teacher does not have to have a pair of pants for years." (VA)*

The teacher assumes that his desire to oppose the existing norms of wearing clothes derives from his background, as his mother used to work as a tailor and clothing designer. Shorts, jeans, sandals, backpacks, vests, and straw hats were perceived as inappropriate and *"shocking"* by the school community. However, the teacher persisted and deliberately wore them, aimed at provoking and encouraging his students to act similarly.

**Contrasting own activity to passiveness of colleagues**

Another teacher speaks about her experience acting as a modern teacher, applying technologies in her teaching and contrasting her activity with the passiveness of colleagues, who tended to hold lessons in more conventional and routinized forms.

*"Some teachers say, 'It is easier to work because you are younger.' I don't know how much truth is here, but it's clear that the young teacher is perhaps more concerned with children needs, can be more modern, uses a wider variety of things they don't get in other lessons. In my lessons I apply a Kahoot app. We do tests on a variety of topics when they can use phones. It's that search for a different way of teaching, I think, hooks those kids. Otherwise, we can sit down, conduct lessons, show slides, and fill out the questionnaire in the end. Nobody needs such lessons. The modern teacher, I think is not the one who narrates because children can find information anywhere on the Internet, and certainly the teacher is not the informant who conveys the knowledge. Teacher is a helper who helps to reveal, perhaps, what the children do not fully understand."* (VAI)

This teacher elaborates on her vicarious experience and observation of colleagues' behavior. She emphasizes lack of motivation among colleagues to try new things and innovate in their own teaching. Moreover, colleagues used to impose their opinion and ways of doing things "traditionally", without additional effort.

*"I remember when I started to teach, encouraged by my students, and my colleagues used to come and say, 'What are you going to do here?! Don't work that much because all of us will have to work like that.' And I thought, 'So what?' [laughs] And I continued to work the way I like, while my colleagues just open the book and say, 'page 105–106.', then they listen and read, and answer the questions. I act differently. I give some worksheets and we communicate in separate online rooms. I noticed that my students like it. I think this is the way I'm*

*going against the established system. In that sense, I'm really doing everything according to the program, just it is not a boring textbook reading." (VYT)*

The teacher disagrees with colleagues' opinion and does the opposite, motivated by the success of her learners. On the one hand, the behavior and expressions of colleagues, such as "Do not teach like that, because we all will need to do the same" makes the teacher laugh and notice the efficiency of her own teaching. On the other hand, the passiveness of her colleagues is seen as obsolete and inefficient. Thus, the teacher views herself as opposing the existing sedimented practice.

**THEME: MASTERING**

**Being curious**

Curiosity was considered as one of the main characteristics allowing a teacher to seek new knowledge, acquire skills and improve professional competence. This teacher emphasizes that she looks carefully for new ideas and imagines the possibilities to apply them in her own teaching practice.

*"For instance, the Google meet: I have noticed it for myself. I usually dedicate some time and investigate what people say, how they use certain things. Or I search for ideas online. I saw a video on how to create my own Youtube channel, I thought 'Well, and I need it too.' I am very curious. This work is hard. But I like it." (VYT)*

The ideas are found in the internet space when the teacher has time free from professional duties. The teacher envisages possible difficulties she may face when implementing novelties and adding workload. However, in spite of this risk, she experiences a sense of pleasure when searching for and implementing new approaches in her own practice.

**Learning from others**

The teacher admits that she learns from her students and provides a situation when she was curious about the way her student executed an online task. She was sincerely curious about the algorithm the student used: "*I can ask: 'How do you do that? Could you explain [it to] me, please?'" (VYT)* Curiosity makes the teacher look for knowledge and skills within the school community and learners. The teacher acts in order to develop and improve professionally.

**Seeking help**

Personal disagreement with certain prescribed ways of student assessment (test usage) caused irritation and anger in another teacher. Thus, she acted in order to search for other, more satisfying and acceptable solutions. This teacher referred to her colleague and asked for some help, and here she emphasizes her curiosity and persistence as main factors of her action.

*"And now we are finally including the Moodle training in our plan. I needed to load the test to capture the time. I called the tech teacher and said, 'I need to create a Moodle.' So, I'm curious, and if I need something, I just demand it." (VYT)*

The teacher reflects on her persistence when she aims to learn new things. She refers to knowledgeable others or requests some external support to explain and help. She simply demands those explanations.

**COPING**

**Being open to uncertainty**

This teacher sees some element of adventure in her actions and decisions. She provides an instance when a sudden decision was made and brought successful results, and calls it *"an adventure",* in terms of unexpected and risky activity.

*"And I laugh when I think 'Well, some kind of adventure again'. Just one word – and I'm in action [laughs]. <...> For example, on Facebook I saw that Vytautas Landsbergis could visit lessons [at school]. It was just before Christmas. I wrote him a letter, we agreed, and yesterday I had him in my class. Such an adventure, you know. <...> I say, adventurous situations, but on the other hand I think why not? I organize debates for seventh, eighth, all sixth grades. I am getting to know those kids better than I do now. Because I have a hard time during those first years [of teaching]. And that's how I let myself to be involved into that 'vertep'." (VYT)*

The teacher admits that she initiates certain innovative ways of teaching and learning and perceives them as adventurous. Being open to uncertainty allows trying to find ways of acting, implementing new approaches. Thus, being agent implies taking and tolerating risks, and, at the same time implies teacher's willingness to act *("I think why not?")*. The teacher takes an advantage from the implemented activities as she is better able to understand her students, especially during the first years of teaching at a new workplace. The teacher expresses concern that she has "a hard time", meaning that the process of adaptation to new environment is still ongoing, and, therefore, she is more open to be involved in different activities. She says, *"I let myself to be involved into that 'vertep'"* to express the current situation and action she is involved in. The term "vertep" refers to a traditional Christmas puppet show recreating biblical scenes. The teacher uses this word metaphorically to express her understanding of being involved in rapidly changing action, being led and encouraged by other members of the school community. The teacher makes a conscious decision by allowing herself to participate and actively contribute to the learning process.

**Being persistent**

Another teacher's action is triggered by certain issues, one of which is students' lack of motivation to execute tasks and actively participate in the learning process. The teacher's further action is aimed at coping with this issue; therefore, he chooses to act in a creative way.

> *"My students are not very eager to [engage in] sport, to move. They think, they do not need it at all. But I remained principled. And I suggested to my students to make presentations about sport. At the beginning they were surprised and later made their best. I noticed that my students were quite strong in presentation-making, however, what concerned physical education – they used to come and move somehow. And my innovation here was to speak about theory of physical education, about human physiology, and its importance." (ART)*

Students were reluctant to engage in sport, so the teacher decided to involve them in active work, stressing the things they could do well. He suggested they make presentations about sport instead of actually doing sport. At the beginning, the idea was perceived with skepticism, however, later students managed to do their best. The teacher included theoretical tasks in lessons of physical education and told students about different aspects of the human body and health. The persistence demonstrated by the teacher *("I remained principled")* may be seen as a feature of professional agency.

**Experiencing disapproval**

Another teacher experienced disapproval from other teachers for his unusual ways of teaching, when he incorporated non-formal tea drinking into the lesson. The teacher aimed to create favorable, informal conditions for trustful conversation during the lesson.

> *"I asked my students to bring their favorite books and tell what it means for them. I told them to bring cups and that we will drink tea together. We had an amazing lesson; I have never experienced such deep conversations with my students before. <…> But then I experienced disapproval from my colleagues, kind of a reproach. I could not believe it. <…> There were complaints that we drank tea during the lesson. They stated that it contradicts the norms. They did not ask about my methods and about content of the lesson. It was absurd." (MIR)*

However, he experienced the disapproval of colleagues who judged the informal way of conducting the lesson, which, in their opinion, contradicted the school norms. The clash between the socially accepted school norm and the internal beliefs and aspirations of the teacher made him experience a sense of absurdity and astonishment. He viewed his agency as an opposition to the opinion of the majority, a deviation from the norm rather than subjugation to the accepted norms of action.

# 4. DISCUSSION

The current research aimed to highlight the essential aspects of teacher professional agency based on teachers' everyday experiences. The conduct of the research involved two stages, which allowed investigation of the context which surrounds teachers, as well as delving into individual teachers' lifeworld. The research findings proved that teacher professional agency is highly dependent on a teacher's biography and a professional context, which enables and constrains teacher agency at the same time; teacher professional agency implies the ability of teachers to make decisions and judgements and choose among the possible paths of action. Teacher agency is an intentional and conscious action that manifests in making professional choices directed to future outcomes. Teacher professional agency does not exclusively imply acting differently, but teachers may consciously choose to reproduce social structures (Morrison, 2005). However, the constraints on actions are perceived by teachers as opportunities to engage in action, which shows the dual nature of teacher agency and the surrounding structure, expressed by Giddens (1984). The research results demonstrate that the phenomenon of teacher professional agency involves eight elements (themes), which were the most salient within the research data: searching for meaningfulness, willingness, being in relationship, being in a dilemma, contributing, opposing, coping, and mastering.

The professional agency of a teacher manifests through searching for meaningfulness and making sense of teaching. It includes re-evaluation of past achievements, understandings, and choices, and searching for ways to implement personal talents, aspiring for future success. Teachers usually reflected on their biographies, their past experiences, mainly regarding how they came into the profession. Teachers consider the path towards the teaching profession as a certain expression of their personal position, or disagreement with their current situation. The issue of teacher identity is particularly important here, because reflection on past experiences and modes of action enables teachers to selectively reactivate their further actions. For many research participants the pattern "past-nowadays" was common, when they reflected on personal historical perspectives of becoming a teacher, gaining professional experience, and acting. What is important is that teachers are able to reflect on their experiences and elaborate on their current and future actions consciously, which coincides with Giddens' ideas of practical and discursive consciousness. Teachers tend to search for meaning and view their agency as an opportunity to choose the environment to work in, the surroundings where he/she is able to realize their own talents and implement competencies.

Teacher agency does not necessarily imply exclusively positive emotions or successful accomplishments. The experience of professional agency encompassed facing and coping with

certain dilemmas, and here the link between agency and surrounding structures seems to appear the most salient. Teachers experience some extent of discrepancy between official school requirements and their own professional beliefs, for instance, in questions of student assessment or evaluation of a teacher's performativity. The meritocratic approach, when success and achievement are valued the most, is viewed as constraining for teacher agency. Another dilemma relates to experiencing ambiguity, when a teacher's actions do not lead to desired outcomes; thus, teachers experience a sense of regret, anger, sadness, and sometimes hopelessness. Agency is seen through giving self to the process *("I gave a lot of myself" ROM),* as a sort of sacrifice, rather than a gain. Teachers sacrifice their time, which is often taken from their private lives. The issue of conforming to existing established practices was also highlighted. The paperwork was recognized as an undesirable part of the teaching job, requiring a lot of time and effort; however, fruitless, and perceived as an unnecessary duty. The need to complete different documents may be seen as an institutionalized social practice, regarded as obligation. These institutionalized practices, which became normalized and routinized, however, not accepted by teachers, evoke a sense of disappointment or regret among teachers. The issue of power is important here – how teachers are capable of shaping the school system, and to what extent the system allows to *maneuver* or choose possible ways of action. The research results show that teachers have a wide range of possibilities to choose certain ways of acting and make an impact at the school level.

For this reason, teachers view their agency through opposing the general established norms or rules, coping with them, mastering their abilities, and contributing to students' success and school improvement. The theme of opposing is particularly important, as it shows a range of fields where teachers contradict the existing system and establish their own understandings and ways of doing things. Importantly, teachers make choices to shape the existing practices or beliefs, and act intentionally, demonstrating consciousness, named "reflective" by Giddens. One aspect refers to self-sustained decision-making and making own professional choices by teachers. Teachers choose the ways of teaching, the ways of developing a relationship with students, using resources and materials, not acting by habit, but rather recognizing and refashioning past patterns of behavior and acting differently. Teachers make a conscious choice to act by opposing existing practices, however, not all practices are possible to affect. While some teachers disagree with the need to grade students or fulfill the school documentation, they are still obliged to perform these activities. These established norms are affirmed as the rules and are obligatory for teachers, and here we may notice the parallel with Giddens' (1984) notion of rules as codified (in our case, written and affirmed) and those discursively formulated, which may be interpreted differently by teachers. Therefore, teachers are able to exercise their professional agency when the rules are discursively formulated (symbolic meaning). For instance, by coping with student stereotypical

thinking about lessons of religion teachers are seen as coping with a sedimented school norm, where those lessons are not considered as important; managing one's own physical appearance by wearing clothes that are not socially acceptable due to the norms of a certain historical period; and using unconventional resources and materials when teachers reject using textbooks or following the standardized lesson structure. Teachers avoid following routinized patterns of behavior, but rather "*manoeuvre* among répertoires" when dealing with professional issues (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). The theme of coping appears to be salient in a structure of teacher professional agency, as teachers choose to act and cope with uncertain situations which may appear.

Teachers are able to explain and motivate their actions and choices. At the same time, they monitor not only their own actions, but actions of their colleagues, by comparing the desired and current way of acting. Importantly, early-career teachers do not expect other colleagues to behave the same way, they rather expect support and confirmation of their own professional actions, and recognition from important others (Bandura, 1989). However, they notice a contrast between the level of effort they and colleagues make; in other words, teachers elaborate on the passiveness of their colleagues and their failure to take an action. Following Giddens' statement that human actors expect others to behave the same way, we may conclude that research participants in their reflections expressed their disillusion or even blamed some of their colleagues for absence of desire to help students and contribute to their success. Indeed, teachers expect others to put in a similar amount of teaching effort and to act. Due to teachers being a part of the school community, they inevitably observe the behavior of colleagues (vicarious experience) and juxtapose their own trajectories of action with those exercised by their colleagues. Then the routinized and sedimented ways of teaching become especially visible and widely practiced. These routinized ways relate to lesson planning in a traditional manner, following the same patterns of teaching and learning, and even ways of managing one's own physical appearance. By gaining positive feedback from others (students' parents, school administration, colleagues, friends), teachers experience an increase of their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989) and empowerment to repeat agentive behaviors.

Regarding the relationship with the wider community and interacting with its members, for the teacher, the significant others (authorities, school administration, student, their parents) are a source of external motivation for pedagogical action. Getting approval is highly important, especially during the early stages of a teaching career (Bandura, 1989). When a teacher's actions are praised and affirmed by others, they experience positive emotions and, as a result, gain encouragement for further actions. At this point, the role of school leaders is highly important. Being inspired by like-minded leaders seems to be a very important stimulus for individual and collegial action, even when teachers face a shortage of time for certain additional activities.

Research findings proved that the willingness to act and exercise agency is built on the relationship with other members of the school community (colleagues, students, or school administration). Some teachers experience professional agency in terms of a sacrifice for better futures for students, putting their personal needs in second place. Teachers experience professional agency in a form of opposing the generally accepted norms by acting differently, dressing differently, and applying unconventional teaching methods and approaches.

The data shows that neoliberal discourse, foundations and principles of acting within the school community challenge teachers' existing well-being and identity. The idea of acquisition of cultural human capital by students, expressed by Bourdieu (1998), signals the risk of reproducing inequality by means of public education. Research participants confirmed their disagreement with viewing public education through the lens of a business model. Those school norms that treat teachers' professional practice as a public service focused on a meritocratic approach to teaching and learning, testing, measuring and comparing achievement, inhibit a teacher's motivation to work. As social structures, schools act based on a business model, which is inevitably reflected in the behavior and relationships of the members of the school community. Teachers find themselves being blamed for students' unsuccessful learning, experiencing external pressures and reproach for lack of action and lack of investment in their own human capital. However, these unfavorable conditions create a field for teacher agency where they are able to act and change existing norms, for instance, by raising discussion within the school community, avoiding testing and comparing students, and making their own teaching individualized and meaningful.

*Limitations.* The limitations of the current study may be divided into two categories: those limitations determined by the methodological approach, and issues caused by the researcher herself. The first group of limitations involves research participant selection and sampling. The focus group interviews were conducted in a private school, and, therefore, the data collected from the research participants contained a lot of information inherent to that private school's philosophy. There was a difficulty in distinguishing which opinions and beliefs were inherent to teachers, and which were imposed by the school requirements. Another limitation, intrinsic for focus group data collection strategy, implies the appearance of certain type of opinion to dominate (Smithson, 2000). During the focus group conversations, the research participants were often in agreement discussing certain issues; however, contrasting opinions met with criticism, discouraging participants from expressing different views. In order to encourage the research participants to re-engage in discussion, the researcher had to interrupt the discussion and find a compromise between participants' opinions. The focus group was quite homogeneous, mostly consisting of first- or second-year female teachers, working at the same private primary school.

The homogeneity of the group can be regarded as a limitation, because the phenomenological approach requires diversity within the sample.

The second group of issues is related to the researcher's linguistic skills and interview transcript translation. First, both, researchers' and informants' linguistic skills are crucial for collection of rich data (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Therefore, the first limitation relates to the researcher's linguistic background: the interviews were conducted in Lithuanian, which is a non-native language for the researcher. Therefore, some misinterpretations might take place when participants verbalized their experiences. The second limitation relates to the transcription of the interview records, because the part of meanings (non-verbal information) was not included in analysis. The quotes and expressions of participants' lifeworld experiences were selected to illustrate certain dimensions. The quotes were translated from Lithuanian to English. The translation of the data is seen as a limitation due to the potential loss of original meaning, and the matter of recognition of possible language nuances (Dahlberg et al., 2008). In order to cope with this issue, the native speakers and research participants themselves were involved in the validation of the interview transcripts.

The current research is not focused on the temporality of teacher professional agency and its change during a teacher's professional career. Thus, further research could focus on how teachers experience their agency during their lifespan, and empirically distinguish certain peculiarities or stages of agency development. The current research was mostly focused on teacher professional agency experiences at individual level, without specification of collective action. Thus, in the future there is a need to define the essential features of the individual and collective agency of teachers. In addition, further research needs to focus on investigating how teachers engage in collective participative action, and how they experience collective agency, defining the factors which trigger collective agentic behaviors among groups of teachers.

# CONCLUSIONS

Teacher professional agency is seen as a conscious intentional action which corresponds to a teacher's personal and professional goals, values, and aspirations. Teacher professional agency is a tacit experience, emerging as unconscious, "hidden" in practical consciousness and manifesting discursively through a teacher's critical reflection about their own professional practice. Teachers perceive their agency as normal teaching behavior, grounded in professional commitment, rather than something going beyond their professional duties. The recognition of one's self as an agentic professional requires more in-depth critical reflection by teachers, and discursive verbalization of one's own actions.

Teacher professional agency manifests through following routinized patterns of behavior if they correspond to their professional beliefs. However, non-coincidence of external demands and internal understandings also stimulate action. Teachers recognize crystalized practices when they do not coincide with their internal beliefs and attitudes. The action may be manifested explicitly, through active opposition or engagement in innovative practices, or taken implicitly, by transferring values and building relationships with students. The school, as a structure, enables teacher agency and constrains it at the same time; however, teachers are able to navigate within it and make professional choices.

Teacher professional agency is possible when there is a choice of certain repertoires of action, and teachers are able to choose between taking action or retaining the status quo. The role of the school community is crucial. Teacher professional agency is a social phenomenon, inevitably linked to the surrounding social environment, which has the strongest impact, enabling or constraining the action. Teachers, especially during early career stages, engage in collective participative action by acting differently, initiating change, breaking stereotypes, and thus transforming school culture. At the same time, the strongest stimulus of action is grounded in relationship with others. Teachers engage in innovative practices and lead change in order to influence their students, build better learning environments and sustain stronger relationships.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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| | |
|---|---|
| 2004-2009 | BA, Primary School teacher, Borys Grinchenko university, Kyiv, Ukraine. |
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| 2015-2017 | MA, Management of Education, Vytautas Magnus university. |
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**Professional activity**

| | |
|---|---|
| 2010-2012 | Primary school teacher, Kyiv School N.11 |
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| 2012-2015 | Lecturer, Kyiv Borys Grinchenko university. |
| 2018-2020 | Researcher, project coordinator, Social Innovation Fund. |
| 2019- nowadays | Assistant, Vytautas Magnus university. |

**Academic development**

Articles published on the topic of dissertation

1. Ponomarenko, T. (2020). *"Investigating teacher leadership: fractions of teacher lifeworld experience".* Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference "Society. Integration. Education" http://dx.doi.org/10.17770/sie2020vol3.4961
2. Ponomarenko, T. (2021). Concept of teacher professional agency. *Young Scientist Journal, 1* (89), 267–270.

Presentations at conferences

1. Ponomarenko, T. (October, 2019). *The Phenomenological Construct of Teacher Leadership.* LETA conference "The ideas for future education", 16.10.2019, Kaunas, Lithuania.
2. Ponomarenko, T. (June, 2020). *Investigating teacher leadership: Fractions of teacher lifeworld experience.* Society. Integration. Education. 22–23.05.2020, Rezekne, Latvia.
3. Ponomarenko, T., Norkute, O. Stasiunaitiene, E. (November, 2020). *Action research as a mean of prospective teachers' agency enactment.* International conference „Mokytojų rengimas XXI amžiuje: pokyčiai ir perspektyvos", 27.11.2020, Šiauliai, Lithuania.
4. Ponomarenko, T. (June, 2021). *Phenomenological dimensions of teacher professional agency.* Society. Integration. Education. 28–29.05.2021, Rezekne, Latvia.

Academic development

1. Summer school (11–15.06.2018) "The 3rd International Summer School on Grounded Theory and Qualitative research", 6 ECTS. Lecturers: Antony Bryant, Thaddeus Müller, Andrea Salvini, Krzysztof Tomasz Konecki, Vytautas Magnus university.
2. Internship (01–05.07.2019) "Discourse analysis application methodology and text research" (30 h) and "Application of Ethnographic approach and life stories methodology

in scientific research" (36 h). Lecturers: prof. dr. David Bloom, Klaipeda university, Lithuania.

3. Internship (06–10.05.2019). "Academic Writing and Publishing" (30 h). Lecturer: prof. dr. Audra Skukauskaite. Klaipeda university.
4. Summer school (11–14.06.2019). "Second International Summer School 2019; Variety of assessments and evaluation: research, strengths and challenges. Ethnography research: attractiveness, priorities and entirety" (2 ECTS). Lecturers: Andry Curtis, Liying Cheng, Thaddeus Müller. Vytautas Magnus university, Lithuania.
5. Summer school (01–05.07.2019). Organization and participation in Summer School for Doctoral students "Writing scientific articles" (2 ECTS), Lecturer: prof. dr. Vilma Žydžiūnaitė. Vytautas Magnus university, Lithuania.
6. Summer school (27–31.07.2020). Organization and participation in Summer School for Doctoral students "Writing scientific projects: possibilities and challenges" (2 ECTS), Lecturer: prof. dr. Darius Milčius. Vytautas Magnus university, Lithuania.
7. Summer school (19–23.07.2021). Organization and participation in VMU Summer School for Doctoral students „Public speech: creating and delivering presentations" (2 ECTS), Lecturer: Danguolė Kraskauskienė. Vytautas Magnus university, Lithuania.
8. Internship (October–June, 2021). Academic Course "Discourse Analysis", (6 ECTS). Lecturers: prof. dr. Davis Bloom, Ohio university, prof., dr. Liudmila Rupšienė, prof. dr. Rūta Girdzijauskienė, Klaipeda university.

# APPENDIXES

## APPENDIX A.

Request for teacher's participation

Dear Teacher,

You are being kindly invited to participate in a research aimed to investigate teachers' everyday experiences and perceptions of their professional agency. This study is being conducted by Tetiana Ponomarenko from the Vytautas Magnus University as a part of a PhD thesis.

The research procedure implies conduction of the interview. You will be asked several questions regarding your professional experiences. You may refuse to answer any questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose. The interview conduction will take approximately one hour. The answers will be recorded. The information will be used in research purposes only. The participation in this research is voluntary. You will not be identified by any kind of the personal data. Your information will be kept confidential. The participation in the study does not imply any potential risks. The participation will be kept anonymous.

Your opinions will help to understand the situation of Lithuanian teacher agency, increase society's knowledge and awareness about teachers' experiences. Your answers will make significant contribution into research of teachers' well-being in working environment.

Processed data (anonymized and codified) will be used for academic or educational purposes such as scientific publications, conferences and teaching materials. Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

If any questions related to this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher Tetiana Ponomarenko at tetiana.ponomarenko@vdu.lt

## APPENDIX B.

Researcher's postscript reflection

The postscript reflection is a tool to familiarize an audience with a work done by the researcher in a way of conducting the research, as well as reflect on certain points and turns which accompanied the research process (Alase, 2017). The idea to conduct an inquiry of teacher's being within their professional environment, came because of two reasons. One of them is curiosity and another is researcher's lived experience of working as a teacher. I became curious of what does it mean to be a teacher for others. How confident teachers feel themselves in their professional environment? And after conducting a research on defining level of teacher self-confidence, the results were higher than I expected (Ponomarenko, 2017). On one hand, teachers in Lithuania appreciate their work and feel themselves capable enough to accomplish working tasks; on another hand, they do not feel safe within the classroom. The idea is that in the classroom teachers feel themselves capable and powerful. So, the idea was to investigate qualitatively, what does it mean to be a teacher in the classroom. The term "powerful leader" appeared as an association with person, who has power to act and able to choose acting instead of simply following the flow.

There were many doubts about strategy of the empirical investigation: how to ask teachers whether they are agents? Primary fieldwork and informal conversations showed that teachers often deny using the label "leader", "agent" or any other direct word. After several unsuccessful interviews, when I tried to avoid using term "agent", instead saying "acting for students", and it worked. Teachers simply talked about their everyday teaching. The difficulty was that teachers did not actually divide their role as teacher and agent, because teaching inevitably implies acting. Thus, it was decided to provoke the interviewees and ask directly: "Have you ever acted against certain requirements at school? How?" After so much scepticism, I expected answer "No". Although, the majority of participants answered that they faced issues when they had to choose to act. Later on, the interviews demonstrated that teachers recognize themselves as agents in their classrooms and understand the importance of the topic.

I tried to conduct the interviews being open and not judging the opinions of respondents. Although, I did not agree with all statements I heard, because some of them differ from my believes of what teacher agency is, however, I accepted and valued those responses. There was a question, how to conduct the interview: how to pose myself? Should I be strict and "objective", or friendly and encouraging? How to encourage the person I see at first and dispose him/her to open up and share their private, perhaps, sacral experience with me? The general guidelines on phenomenological research state that the researcher must be opened and "bracket" own experience; although, how should I actually talk and behave? Should I smile or be serious? Should

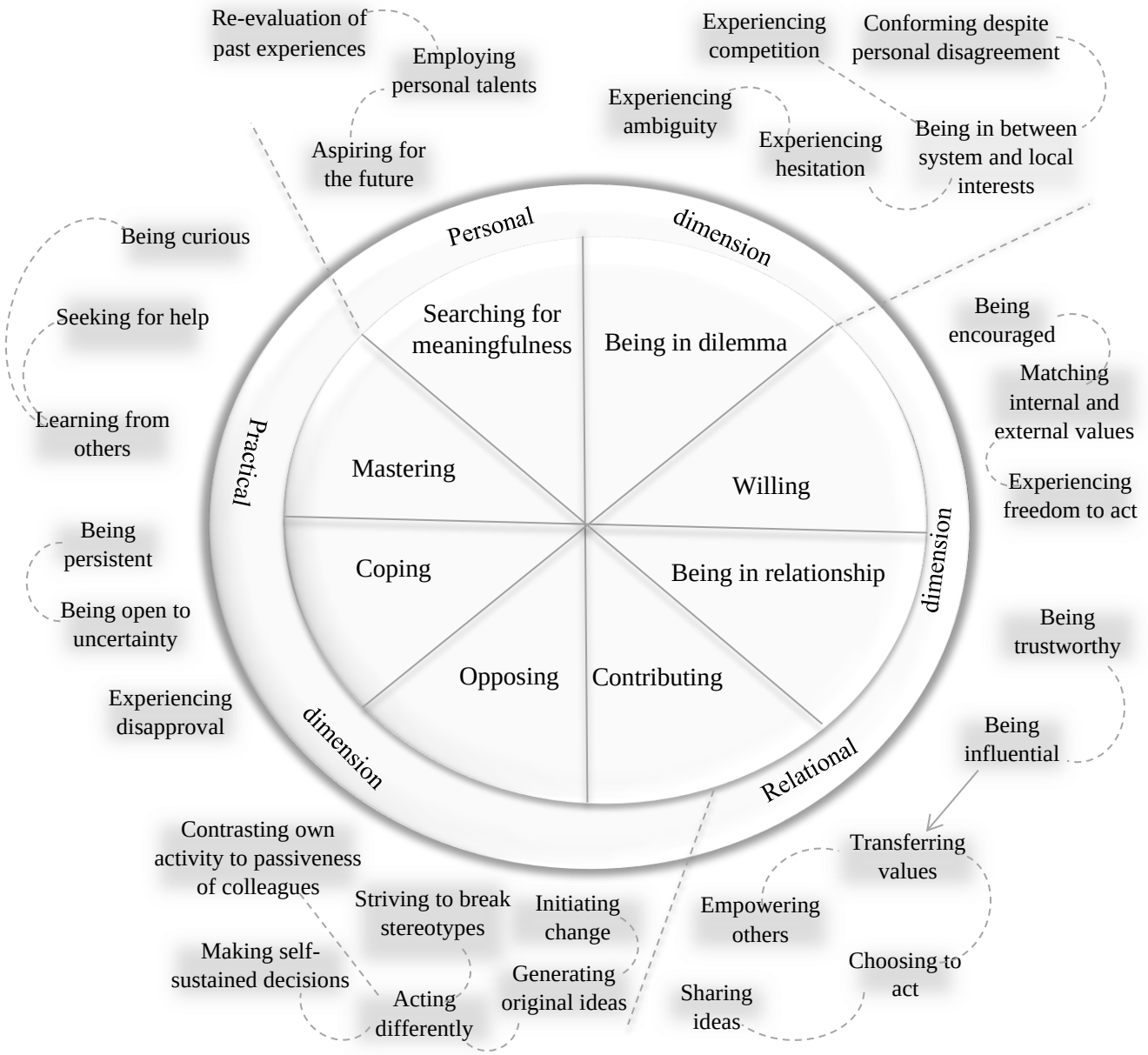
I laugh when respondents make jokes? Can I demonstrate any emotions? Those were the questions I was concerned about and had to answer at the beginning of the research.

When I started to conduct interviews, I decided to be authentic whatever it will cost. And I observed that the respondents were willing to talk about things which were even dangerous for their careers. The answer to the first issue, to be restrained or friendly, was to be authentic. I realized that respondents feel your artificial curiosity or attempts to fascinate them. You need to be yourself, even if it sounds banal. I saw a joy in the eyes of respondents after every interview, even if it lasted longer than planned. After every interview I felt energized, and perhaps, proud that this conversation was helpful for teacher to reflect on their experience. Such feelings helped me to move on. Some respondents expressed their thankfulness for a possibility to "confess" and talk to someone who cares. "… life is noting, but what we make of it as participants in this experiential life journey" (Alase, 2017, p. 18).

The second stage of research, almost all interviews were done using online communication tools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When I realized that the most important stage of my research had to be done online, I was really terrified, I did not know, how to organize this process. That is why, for some time, I postponed starting. But later, after familiarizing myself with e-tools, I managed to conduct interviews. And, surprisingly, I liked conducting individual interviews using online tools. The process was convenient for several reasons: time, location and emotions. I could manage to organize up to three interviews per day sitting in my room and talking to teachers from different corners of Lithuania. There was no need to search for a convenient place (workplace, café, etc.) to meet and talk; no need to spend time for journey. The participants were not so stressful as they usually are when meet strangers; they were sitting at home, talking about issues the experienced being in comfortable, well-known place. I think it created greater opportunities and enriched my research findings.

**APPENDIX C.**

Lived experience of teacher professional agency



# SUMMARY

## Introduction

The current research is a reflection on how teachers experience professional agency in their everyday practices, in relation to their students, colleagues, authorities and other members of the school community. The choice of the topic is not accidental, as it derives from reflecting on my personal professional pedagogical practice. As a former teacher, I wonder how certain teachers manage to develop students, strive for their well-being, improve their own professional skills, and adjust the curriculum in order to achieve the best results, while other teachers decline to make such attempts. For many years I have been talking to teachers and I often heard that educational curricula, initiatives, and rules are "let down from above" (from the Ministry of Education) and they, ordinary teachers, are not able to influence the situation. Thus, I became interested in knowing more about the nature of the interaction between teachers and the existing educational system, and about the role of teachers in modern education. I once read an article written by Professor Lilija Duobliene (2017), where she discusses the confrontation between teacher standardization on the one hand, and pedagogical innovation and creativity on the other. The author states that teachers become trapped, and have to choose whether to conform to the official requirements or act in accordance with their professional beliefs and attitudes. Duobliene (2017) discusses a "bottom-up" approach, when teachers are able to influence the situation in an educational system, and introduces the term "teacher agency", based on the ecological approach of Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015).

The primary idea of the research was to investigate how teachers experience their leadership of students within the professional environment. However, the pilot empirical data gathered through the two stages of the research demonstrated that in speaking about leadership the research participants are more focused on agency. The first stage of the research highlighted tensions between school system, teachers' attitudes and personal values, and distinguished the structures which surround teachers. The second stage demonstrated that pure leadership cannot be fully implemented within structures which oppress actors. Some teachers refused to recognize their leadership role, and additional explanations were needed in order to convince teachers to believe they are leaders in their classrooms. Therefore, at this stage, I saw a need to speak about agency rather than leadership. Thus, I decided to focus on the issue of teacher agency in relation to the existing educational system in Lithuania.

Searching for a theoretical framework and suitable research methodology took a while and did not happen at once. I aimed to conduct qualitative research in order to gain teachers' insights

on how they experience their agency, and what it means to be a teacher who exercises agency. Phenomenology was chosen as it allows delving into people's experiences, mainly how teachers experience their agency and distinguish the essential components of the phenomenon. I have chosen Giddens' structuration theory as a theoretical framework because the empirical results clearly demonstrated a link between surrounding structures and teacher professional agency, when the interaction between agents and structures implies a possibility of emancipation. This approach corresponded to my views on the situation in the system of education, when agents (teachers) are constrained by the system; however, at the same time, they are able to make an impact and contribute to change.

**Topicality**

Teacher professional agency is extensively described in the literature, however, there is a lack of empirical research of the phenomena (Toom et al., 2021). The main questions are what is teacher professional agency and why does it matter? In recent literature the first and most significant aspect of its importance lies in teachers' capacity to make positive changes at school, develop the curriculum, create more favorable conditions for student learning, and so increase student achievement (Priestley, 2015). Teachers are those who not only transfer knowledge, but create a learning environment for students and contribute to general school improvement (Hargreaves, 1998). For more than 30 years in educational research there has been a tendency to view teachers as change agents who are able to lead the process and bring innovations into the school curriculum (Badley, 1986; Hargreaves, 1998; Lane, Lacefield-Parachini, & Isken, 2003; Etelapelto et al., 2013; Buchanan, 2014; Forde & Dickson, 2017). An OECD (2018) report emphasized the need to develop learners' agency and co-agency in order to increase their engagement and responsibility for personal learning and collective achievement, and their ability to initiate actions and act responsibly for shaping the general well-being of humanity in 2030. The authors of the document stress the importance of creating favorable learning conditions and social environment; thus, the role of teachers is crucial. Similar tendencies may be seen in Lithuania, where the significant role of the teaching profession is being discussed in public discourse (Skarbalienė, 2015; Želvys, Dukynaitė, & Vaitekaitis, 2018). The teacher is seen as the most important element of the educational system, an agent of change (Priestley, 2015), who is able to learn constantly and increase her or his own professional competencies (Paruliene, 2013).

In teachers' professional practice, professional agency is realized through competencies, motivation, autonomy, acting, creativity and initiative. However, the notion of agency is a political-social phenomenon, and the capacities of teachers are sometimes over-emphasized (Priestley, 2015). Accordingly, teacher agency may be seen as an individual phenomenon, while over-emphasis on teacher qualities often omits another important condition emerging for teacher

agency – the surrounding environment and social structures which frame a teacher's work (Datnow et al., 2002). Teacher agency exists in terms of interaction with others within the working conditions (Eteläpelto et al., 2013), where teachers collaborate with students and other members of the school community. It implies that teacher agency exists in relation to certain structures and within certain socio-cultural conditions, for instance, policy, institutional traditions, culture, norms, and others.

Some researchers (Hökkä, Rautiainen, Silander, & Eteläpelto, 2019) and theorists (Bandura, 1989) focus on agency in terms of a teacher's inherent capability to influence the professional environment. Others emphasize the socio-cultural and ecological (Priestley et al., 2015) conditions under which teacher agency may be developed. At the same time, agency is not a personal trait, but rather a capacity of an individual or groups of individuals. The supporters of the ecological approach are regarded as "pragmatists", because they view teacher agency as an achievable capacity aimed at investigating the conditions under which teacher agency may be achieved (Leijen et al., 2020).

Although teachers are expected to work in certain ways prescribed in curriculum and educational standards, they face numerous situations which require making professional choices and taking actions. The ability to exercise agency in part depends on teachers' inner beliefs, commitment, and understanding of professional practices (Stillman & Anderson, 2015). Giddens (1984) states that people are able to exercise agency if the system poses some irrelevant requirements which contradict their conceptions. "Action or agency is defined as the stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the on-going process of events in the world" (Giddens, 1976, p. 75). Therefore, teacher agency may be seen as a process caused by interaction with external conditions. Teacher agency may go beyond prescribed teaching roles, or contradict the established order and even resist change (Buchanan, 2015); teacher agency exists within the particular context in which teachers are able to act and interact with other actors (Lane & Sweeny, 2019). Thus, teachers shape and create the educational reality within the given social and cultural context, and their actions shape that context.

**Research problem**

Speaking about teacher agency and existing structures, Morrison (2005) asks a rhetorical question *"Why do teachers perpetuate practices that are, in many ways, anti-educational, rather than change them?"* (p. 312). Indeed, there is an issue when some discredited practices, for instance, over-testing or enhancement of student competition, are being widely implemented. Many complaints are heard from the teachers who blame the existing educational plans and programs and view them as constraining and limiting their creativity. The Concept of Good School (2015), a document which contains a set of guidelines for organizing educational process

in Lithuanian schools, implies autonomy and freedom of choice for educators and all participants of learning process. However, in practice, many teachers blame the educational policymakers for standardization and bureaucratizing the learning process. However, some teachers choose to act differently despite the external restrictions or control (Buchanan, 2015). We may explain their actions by analysing the existing external structures (constraints caused by external social pressure) or self-imposed beliefs and practices (Morrison, 2005). Therefore, the current research will consider theories of structuration and reproduction of social practices as a possible explanation of teacher professional agency (Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1990).

The concept of "professional agency", which is a key concept for the current research, refers to professional actors (employees and leaders) who can exercise control over, or influence their work and work environment (Hökkä, Rautiainen, Silander, & Eteläpelto, 2019). The particular interest of the current research is gaining understanding of how teachers experience agency in relation to school structures. Professional agency is closely intertwined with subjects' professional identities, competencies, knowledge, and experience, but is always temporally realized within sociocultural conditions (Hökkä et al., 2019). The research is focused on analysis of teachers' everyday professional practices, when their experiences are shaped by their sociocultural conditions and professional environment; the teacher's ability to exercise control over one's actions and decisions within the sedimented, habitualized structure of educational system.

The scope of the current research encompasses several issues related to the research:

– Teacher professional agency experiences as going beyond the prescribed teaching roles and/or resistance to the structures.

– Tensions between the normalization (becoming through being subordinate to the structures) and the extent to which a teacher is able to exercise control over one's professional practices and make professional choices.

– The interaction between crystallized school structures and teacher professional agency, when certain aspects of school life are perceived as natural and accepted without question by the members of the school community.

– Continuous interaction between professional agency and leadership in daily teaching practices.

**Research questions**

*Research aim.* The aim of the current research is to identify how teachers experience agency in their professional everyday life. The research is not aimed at searching for a new theory to explain teacher agency, but to investigate teacher-lived existential experiences phenomenologically. According to Dahlberg, the main goal of "lifeworld research" is to reveal and clarify the essential

meaning which is inherent to a certain phenomenon, disclosing the set of inherent features *(essences)*, which distinguish it from other phenomena (Dahlberg et al., 2008). However, according to Dahlberg (ibid.) the number of essences of the phenomenon may be endless, and the researcher's goal is to disclose as much as possible. Thus, the current research seeks the essences of the teacher professional agency phenomenon within their professional working environment.

*Research object.* The object of the current research is teachers' lived experience of professional agency. "Lived experience" means knowledge, information, and encounters which teachers gain during their everyday teaching practice, and communication within their working environment.

*Research questions.* The current study seeks to answer the main questions:

What are the essences of the teacher professional agency phenomenon?

What does it mean for teachers to experience agency?

How does a teacher experience agency within the formal school structures?

How does a teacher experience agency as going beyond the prescribed teaching roles?

How is agency experienced within interaction with students in a teacher's practice?

**Novelty of the research**

The current research result is a reflection about teacher everyday practices which contributes to a better understanding of teacher professional agency by incorporating the authentic experiences of practicing teachers. The phenomenological approach allows to cognize lived experience on how teachers experience their professional agency, make professional choices, and take stances. The lived experiences of professional agency represent the most significant aspects of the lived everyday world of teachers when they experienced a sense of agency. The research results demonstrate a structure of teacher professional agency as it was experienced by diverse teachers from different schools and regions of Lithuania. The structure shows the essences of the teacher lived professional agency phenomenon. The phenomenon is viewed inseparably from the surrounding social and cultural context; thus, the research reveals the issue of interaction between school structure and teacher professional agency. The research results might be useful for practicing teachers, educational authorities and policymakers who are interested in enhancing teacher autonomy and empowering their agency.

**Structure of this thesis**

The thesis consists of four main chapters. The first chapter introduces a theoretical framework of agency-structure interaction based on Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration. The notion of human agency is viewed generally from the position of structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), postructuralism (Foucault, 1979; Buttler, 1990), phenomenology (Nida-Rumelin, 2018; Coole, 2005), and Bourdieu's (1990) sociology of culture. The second chapter is aimed at exploring the concept of teacher professional agency and focuses on its notion and different approaches of its

conceptualization; the issues of school as a structure, sedimentation, crystallization and ritualization of teaching and school practices are described. The third chapter describes a research methodology based on the phenomenological research approach; the stages of conducting empirical research, research parameters, way of conducting empirical research and ethical issues are described. The fourth chapter represents the research findings of two stages of the research. It demonstrates contextual issues faced by teachers and teachers' lived experience of professional agency, and provides a scheme of essences of the phenomenon. The last chapter involves a discussion where the essential components of teacher agency are analyzed in relation to a broader school structure. The thesis ends with concluding remarks, acknowledgements, and list of references.

**Overview of the theoretical part**

The issue of agency is analyzed in terms of its relation to the existing social structures. The issues of agency are analyzed from the perspective of Giddens' theory of structuration, critical theories, poststructuralist, and phenomenological perspectives. The key point of Giddens' theory of structuration implies that human agents and existing structures cannot be separated and exist independently, but rather exist in *duality* (Burridge, 2014). The structure is not considered as a constraint, but rather both constraining and enabling at the same time. On one hand, human agents exist within the structures, which may limit their actions, however, on the other hand, human agents may influence the structures by changing existing practices. Thus, teachers, as members of the school community, may be influenced by the school structures while at the same time teachers influence the school structures by their actions (Burridge, 2014). Giddens (1991) distinguishes three levels of human consciousness: practical, discursive, and unconscious. The agent can elaborate on and explain the ways and reasons of his/her actions and behavior ("practical consciousness"). However, practical consciousness is non-conscious (not unconscious), and actions are conducted according to commonly accepted patterns of behavior, which allow agents to act according to understandable and common patterns. While the knowledge of day-to-day practices (practical consciousness) remains tacit and performed almost automatically, discursive consciousness implies that a person is able to elaborate and justify one's own actions explicitly (Giddens, 1984). Using practical or discursive consciousness, the agent is able to rationalize his/her actions. Nida-Rumelin (2018) states that human agency refers to "the experience of self as source" in the way we experience our own behavior as actively brought about by ourselves. Another important theory is Bourdieu's theory of social action (1977), which introduces a concept of "habitus", and offers a dual understanding of the social system (Kort & Gharbi, 2013) and examines people's actions, way of life, behavior and communication in terms of practices which

can be modified by a combination of habitus and capital (accumulated social and cultural resources) as applied to a social context (Bourdieu, 1985). Habitus is a "structuring mechanism" that enables individuals to cope with uncertainty and changes (Mtaki, 2021, p. 17), a set of acquired patterns of thought, behavior, and taste, which has a mediatory role between society and individual (Ozturk, 2011). In works of Foucault (1990) the relation between structure and agency is seen in terms of resistance between oppressing external power and the extent of human subjugation.

In this research professional agency is related to the individual's activities within one's professional field and focused on the professional self (Eteläpelto et al., 2013), meaning that professional agency is oriented towards working practices, surrounding and conditions, and, as a result, toward a person's professional identity (Vähäsantanen, Räikkönen, Paloniemi, Hökkä, & Eteläpelto, 2018). The term "profession" involves not only formal qualifications and occupation, but also training, knowledge and, what is important, elements of professional ethics (Tapper & Millet, 2015), occupational knowledge, teaching skills, didactics, and possession of certain personality traits and personal predisposition in order to accomplish professional mission (Hotaman, 2010). Professional agency is viewed as an action-based phenomenon manifested through actions rather than individual properties or character traits (Vähäsantanen et al., 2018). The action is intentional in nature and the agency is seen as a combination of intention and action (Hadar & Benish-Weisma, 2019), when teachers make active choices (Sang, 2020) and decisions, by influencing, negotiating, and taking stances in the professional practice (Vähäsantanen et al., 2018). Professional agency refers to professional actors (employees and leaders) who are able to exercise control and make an impact on their work and working environment (Calvert, 2016; Hökkä, Rautiainen, Silander, & Eteläpelto, 2019). Thus, the general notion of agency implies an intentional professional action manifested in employees' ability to exert influence within a certain professional environment.

Teacher professional agency can be manifested individually or collectively, and practiced when professional subjects and/or communities make choices, take stances, and have an influence on their work and/or professional identities (Billet, 2008). Teacher agency is viewed as professional actions teacher take within working contexts, which condition, allow and determine those actions (Buchanan, 2015). The emphasis on pedagogical action is a core characteristic of teachers' professional agency (Toom et al., 2015; Imants & Van der Wal, 2020). Sense of agency is reflected in the internal locus of control, taking responsibility for the situation as well as making suggestions, pedagogical choices and conscious decisions based on their own professional goals and reflection (Buchanan, 2015; Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

Professional agency is something that people do in practice (Biesta et al., 2015). However, this does not imply that teacher behavior can be used as a criterion for professional agency. Rather, it is teacher behaviors combined with internal processes such as attitudes, emotions and cognitive processes which constitute the complexity of professional agency (Toom et al., 2015). As agency is an intentional action, and teachers are able to elaborate on reasons behind their actions, led by certain self-encompassing values and self-determined goals through planning and execution of strategic actions (Frost, 2006). Thus, teacher professional agency can be manifested through a teacher's actions which correspond to one's inner professional goals and values.

**Research methodology**

*The phenomenological approach.* Reflective lifeworld research is the core methodology for the current study. The methodology was developed by the Swedish scientist Karin Dahlberg, based on the ideas of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer, utilizing the phenomenological and hermeneutical traditions, and unites their philosophical notions at the point where: "life manifests itself in experience" (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 95). The reflective lifeworld research is aimed at asking how the world, with its everyday phenomena, is lived, experienced and described by humans. The current research is phenomenological, seeking to investigate how teachers experience agency in everyday life, during their everyday professional activities within usual working conditions. In the current research, the phenomenon of teacher agency in their professional practices has been investigated through understanding of teachers' everyday lived experiences and subjective perspectives.

*Research phases.* The initial idea of the research process implied two stages: case study and reflective lifeworld research (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Data gathering process

| Phase/ duration | Activities | Goals | Sample | Outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Phase I** Case study (2018–2019) | Qualitative research (focus group interview) | Explore teachers' everyday professional experiences, values, attitudes and challenges within the given professional context. Analyze the qualitative data applying *phenomenological thematic analysis*. | 5 focus group interviews, 10–12 participants | The themes and subthemes of teachers' everyday experiences are formulated. |
| **Phase II** Reflective lifeworld research (2020) | Qualitative research (individual in-depth interviews) | Answer the research questions: what does it mean for a teacher to experience agency within a professional environment? Analyze the qualitative data applying reflective lifeworld research methodology. | 24 interviews with 24 research participants | The themes and subthemes of teachers' agency experiences are formulated. The essences of teacher agency experiences are formulated. |

In the first phase, initial interviews were supposed to reveal the basic attitudes and beliefs of teachers about their professional experiences, values, attitudes and challenges within the given professional context. The second phase was aimed at gathering data containing teachers' deeper insights and experiences related to teacher everyday agentic experiences.

**Phase 1. Researching for institutional context**

*Research participants.* The participants of the focus group were 12 teachers employed at the same private primary school. The research participants were aged from 24 to 45, working as primary classroom teachers, in physical education, religion, arts and English language. There were ten female and two male research participants. The length of teaching experience ranged from 1 to 10 years. The research took place in the teachers' workplace at a time free from professional duties. In order to ensure greater confidentiality, researchers did not collect personal information from any participant.

*Data gathering.* The procedure of data gathering involved conducting five meetings (sessions) with research participants (focus group). The initial interview was aimed at familiarizing the participants with the goals, tasks and methodology of the research. The opening question was aimed at making the participants feel comfortable when sharing knowledge or experiences with other members of the focus group. The second, third and fourth interviews were aimed at collecting information about how teachers experienced themselves working within their professional field in relation to the concepts of authority, respect, dignity and professional development. The focus of the research was on the empowering factors and experiences of "powerfulness", ability to make decisions and choices within the school and classroom environment.

*Data analysis.* The data was collected, recorded, transcribed verbatim and analyzed applying a thematic analysis. The data analysis included several steps (acc. to Braun & Clarke, 2012): familiarizing with texts, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report. Generating initial codes involving paragraph-to-paragraph coding was applied. The pieces of data were read carefully, and the most meaningful pieces of data were chosen for coding. Later the codes were revisited and some were changed, as new ideas and understandings appeared. The procedure of the theme search included review of the coded data and a search of overlapping and similarities between codes. The codes were clustered or grouped in accordance with their meaning, so that they reflect some unique and coherent piece of data. As a result of this step, 37 themes were produced. Then, they were split and joined with other, more sustainable themes.

**Phase 2. Reflective lifeworld research**

*Research participants.* Based on the assumption that all teachers experience professional agency in certain ways, and agency is an inherent feature of the teaching profession, the selection of the research participants was mainly guided by the principle of sample diversity and research participants' teaching experience. The criteria of informant selection for the individual in-depth interviews were diversity, employment at school and at least one year of teaching experience. In general, 24 individual in-depth interviews were conducted. The sample consists of 9 male and 15 female participants, aged from 27 to 56 having from 1 to 36 years of teaching experience. The majority of research participants were from urban areas, from the biggest cities of Lithuania (n=18), and several participants were representatives of the countryside (n=6). The participants reported teaching different subjects and represent different spheres of science: Natural sciences (Biology), Philology (English, Russian language), Humanities (History, National Security, Economics), Arts (Music, Theatre, Drawing), Primary and Preschool subjects. Some participants were classroom teachers (n=7).

*Data gathering***.** The data was gathered applying semi-structured in-depth interview method with open-ended questions. The demographic data collection (name, age, level of education, teaching experience, school type, region (city) of Lithuania) usually took place at the beginning of each interview. Due to the pandemic situation, there was no possibility to organize interviews in the form of a real meeting, thus they were held online, using diverse communication systems: Zoom, Google Meet and Teams, depending on the preferences of research participants. The interview questions were focused on participants' reflections on certain events in their professional lives when they experienced themselves as active agents, for instance: *"Tell me what you do to work differently as a teacher?" "What makes you to do things differently?",* etc.

*Data analysis.* The first step of data analysis involved reading the data, when the researcher familiarizes him/herself with the interview material by reading several times. The second step was dividing the data into meaning units by distinguishing the points of meaning transition. Then the meaning units were re-examined, probed and described, and the researcher organizes the data into parts. The last step involved expressing the structure of phenomenon combining the meaning units and forming a coherent structure.

*Research ethics.* The guiding principles of the research ethics were participants' confidentiality, anonymity, avoidance of any potential harm and scientific responsibility. The letters of invitation were sent to all potential participants before the research took place. The letter contained an invitation to participate in the focus group and information about main goals, objectives, research procedure and guarantee of confidential participation. Informants were

assured about their confidentiality, anonymity, and personal data protection. Confidentiality of participation was guaranteed and assured by the anonymity of participants.

## Research results

### Phase 1. Researching the institutional context

Findings highlight essential aspects of the institutional context which surrounds teachers and influences their perception of professional well-being and identity at different levels (micro, meso, and macro) when teachers are dealing with members of school community and social surrounding.

#### Teacher-self (micro-level)

Teachers give meaning to their professional effort and view themselves as mediators who care about their learners and aspire for future benefit of this effort. Teachers view their own endeavor into professional prestige, and this is the way they perceive themselves as influential. However, excellent execution of professional duties is accompanied by a sense of sacrificing own family or health. Everyday teaching activities require a strong sense of professional commitment, and teachers "give themselves" in order to accomplish all objectives.

Teachers enact the way of behavior that reflects their personal beliefs and identity. Teachers are willing to display their humanity by demonstrating their real emotions rather than concealing their true feelings. They believe that this kind of self-disclosure decreases a power distance between them and their students, weakening the image of the unapproachable teacher and change stereotypical way of perceiving teachers. Teachers' self-disclosure involves allowing themselves to make mistakes, or fail to remember something, or show certain weaknesses. However, the areas of the personal and the professional are seen as opposite and overlapping. Teachers express their concern about the future of their personalities, experience lack of time for private life and, thus, view their job as a threat to identity, and a source of depersonalization. Teachers admit that often their personal attitudes and values differ from the prescribed rules and requirements accepted at school.

#### Teacher-learners (micro-level)

Teachers view their role in leading without imposing a certain type of behavior or decisions, they are rather trustworthy and serve as an exemplar for students. In contrast, the teacher is viewed as a person, who stays around offering suggestions, evoking thoughts and encouraging students to make decisions on their own. The teacher is seen as being an important actor, a source of approval. In order to encourage and empower their learners, teachers discover their positive features, even though research participants confess it may be difficult. For that, a teacher needs to find strength and "*overstep oneself emotionally*", meaning that the teacher needs to make an effort and overcome their own negative prejudice and emotions. The research participants associate the impact on a learner's

behavior with a "*miracle"* and change *"that may surprise you*". Teachers recognize learners' expertise and ability to generate knowledge, bringing change into the learning process and making it less teacher-centered. In order to achieve the learning results and pursue the desired learning outcomes, teachers admit their perseverance. The process is accompanied by failing, trying and improving. Such professional commitment requires a making a decision to dedicate both personal time and lesson time in order to create the ways to engage students.

**Teacher-parents (micro-level)**

Students' parents directly influence a teacher's perception of their own professional identity and sense of professional accomplishment. Teachers experience an impact through direct communication with pupils' parents. Teachers feel recognized as professionals when they receive polite requests for some advice, where parents recognize the importance of the teacher's opinion in matters of the child's education. Teachers experience unpleasant emotions when dealing with students' parents in conflict situations, when parents speak emotionally or even rudely. Teachers emphasize the need to be treated as humans first, and only after that to be treated as a teacher. They often face parents' unwillingness to make efforts to work with their children at home, and the responsibility is put on teacher. Teachers claim that they often are subjected to a client-customer relationship with parents, which diminishes the teachers' sense of dignity.

**Teacher-colleagues and administration (micro-level)**

The assimilation of colleagues' behavior happens through direct observation and co-teaching, based on the desire to learn. Teachers admit that time spent with colleagues, observing and participating in colleagues' lessons, familiarizes them with methods and ways of teaching which are later applied in personal professional practice. Teacher involvement in decision making is viewed as a means of demonstrating respect by the school administration. However, teachers feel acknowledged when they can participate in the creation of solutions which influence their situation at the workplace. "Top-down" instructions are opposed to a mutual search for compromise which enables teachers to perceive themselves as equal members of the school community. A sense of acknowledgement by the employer is measured by the employer's endeavor, efforts or aspiration to do something good for teachers. Teachers perceive these efforts as a manifestation of valuing their personalities, which dignifies them and makes feel good at work. The research participants underline that this kind of relationship is more significant than the amount of salary they receive. At the same time teachers experience the unwillingness of the employer (school administration) to invest in their development and blame the view that in the education sector employees must gain knowledge exclusively on their own.

**Teacher-school (meso-level)**

There is a dissonance between the professional requirements and personal agreement to follow them in private life. Attainment of complete congruence seems difficult when it comes to teachers' personal values, which may differ from professional ones. Discussing the clichés faced in their professional field, teachers emphasized the vocation and suitability for the profession. They are being manipulated with the issue of whether one fits the profession, based on the following of a certain set of external rules and requirements, rather than having personal qualities and the ability to sustain relationship with others. Teachers believe that the system does not allow any mistakes and blames people for "not fitting" the notion of "teacher vocation". Instead, they are pushed to obey and match the prescribed norm. Speaking about own individuality, they emphasize that *"... we cultivate personalities, but we cannot be personalities ourselves".* Thus, the school's externally prescribed rules and expectations are perceived as constraining rather than guiding. Teachers view the possibility of being easily replaced should the quality of their work suffer due to some issues by someone younger and more enthusiastic is emphasized. Teachers express their regret because of the employer's unwillingness to organize professional support and help those teachers who are in trouble or tired. They call it *"consuming teachers"* and blame the school for lack of effort to support teachers. A teacher's career is viewed as flat, without any prospect of promotion, thus discouraging improvement of one's practice. They emphasize the lack of financial motivation and blame an attitude towards a teacher's salary as being a fixed norm, which is hardly to be changed.

**Teacher-social surrounding (macro-level)**

Teachers live and work within a certain social surrounding and experience its influence. On the one hand, they experience a positive impact of being acknowledged, recognized, and valued. However, on the other hand, they experience tension when they encounter opposing views on the teaching profession, which sometimes overestimate teacher's opportunities and the boundaries of their professional duties. Teachers admit that they gain positive feedback and appreciation of their social role from their social surrounding, which is rather a cumulative word for a circle of teacher's social environment (parents, friends, spouses, partners, etc.) and public discourse. Social persuasion contributes to the enhancement of teachers professional and personal self-esteem (*"you are a good person*", *"you create an added value*"), increases teachers' awareness about society's aspirations (*"you are changing the society"*) and importance of the teachers' mission (*"everything is in your hands"*). Teachers perceive this kind of feedback as a positive evaluation of input they bring to pupils and society.

On the other hand, teachers still perceive themselves judged and blamed for the learner's lack of success or learning failure. They view themselves as having *"tied hands"*, and blamed for

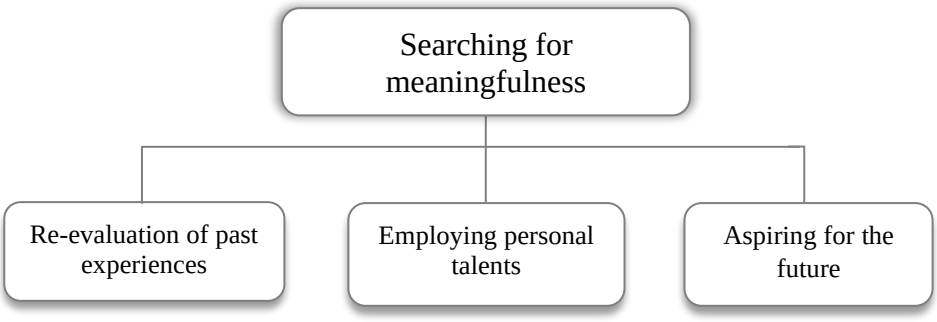
learners' failure despite their efforts. Despite personal disagreement with this notion, teachers express the need to *"accept that"*, as imposed by the surrounding context. Teachers experience themselves as being condemned due to the existing public opinion that *"teacher must gain small salary",* or *"requiring too much during public demonstrations".* They express disagreement with the views of public people, who state that the teacher must obey and not focus on such material things as salary or size of workload. Teachers experience themselves being condemned and judged by others who pose existing clichés related to the teacher's mission in the educational system and imposed overestimated expectations, which they grasp from the public discourse. In addition, teachers blame an imposed disharmonious image of a teacher when they are supposed to hide their private lives, for instance, in social networks, in order to look better than others.

Importantly that in the end of the fifth focus group interview, the teachers began to raise questions and talk about possible solutions. Unexpectedly, they asked the researcher to be their voice in the public discourse and bring the current discussion to the level of state educational authorities. Teachers demonstrated their agency and also viewed the researcher as a partner, an agent, who could help them to pursue change.

**Phase 2. Reflective lifeworld research on teacher professional agency**

**Personal dimension of teacher professional agency**

**Searching for meaningfulness**



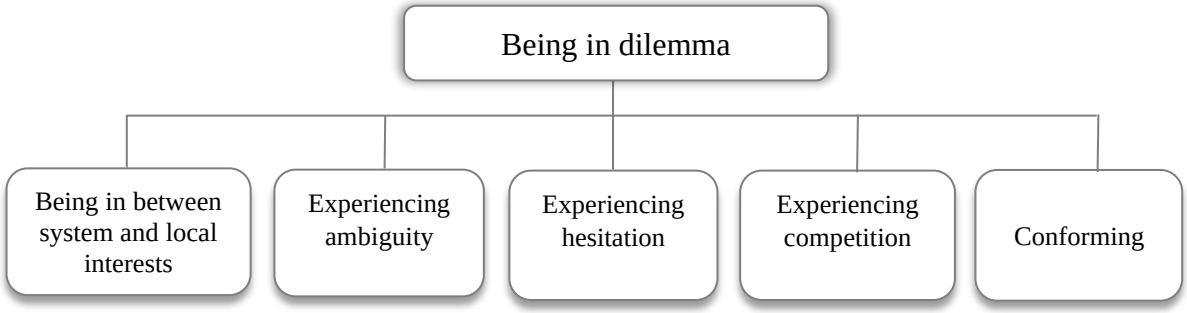

Agency as a predisposition of a teacher to act is build upon and originate from past achievements, understandings, and patterns of action. Past experiences form a certain type of identity and impact a course of action. Achieving internal maturity gives a stimulus to make one's own decisions and leave the restraining environment. The teacher's professional agency is seen as a possibility to choose the environment to work in, the surroundings where a teacher can reveal talents and implement one's professional competencies.

The reason for acting in a professional field is an opportunity to implement personal talents and transfer knowledge to students, thus contributing to students' growth. The possibility to develop and utilize personal talents and skills brings a sense of satisfaction, fulfilment, and meaningfulness of a job to the teacher. At the same time, there is a possibility to transfer

knowledge to students, evoking their interest in the subject taught. Teachers often used the word "give" when speaking about their teaching (*"give them what I know").* The possibility to perform teaching in accordance to own character and personal features empower the teacher for further action – contributing to student learning.

Teachers take an action in order to guide their students and ensure their future success. They feel responsible for the future of their students, their ability to choose the right pathway. These actions are intended to empower students, ensuring their success and giving them the possibility to fulfil their talents in the future. However, the intentions to act appear even without a clear vision of benefits or immediate future success.

**Being in a dilemma**




The sense of being in dilemma was often emphasized by teachers, and one of its aspects refers to being between system and local interests. Teachers find themselves in a situation when their professional effort is assessed by the school administration considering quantitative indicators, for instance, by number of students who participated in a scientific Olympiad. Teacher professional goals are mostly directed towards "local" things: student emotions and psychological well-being, while quantitative indicators, required by the system, outweigh qualitative ones. The need to strive for quantitative achievement and compete with other teachers slightly demotivates teachers, makes them feel undervalued. Nevertheless, such situation motivates teachers to act the way they think is the most appropriate.

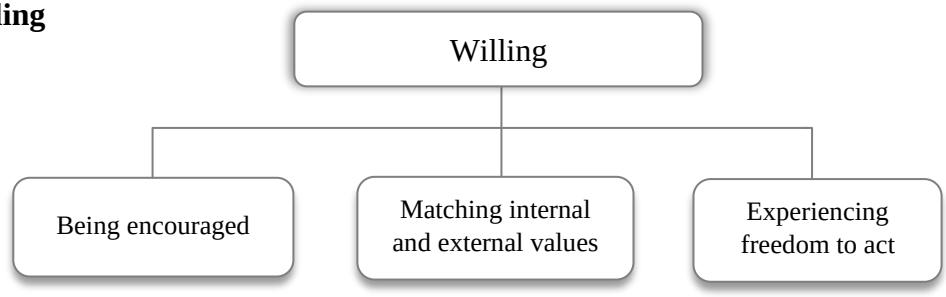
Teachers admit that the external official requirements of conducting lessons conflict with the real needs and interests of students. The rigid lesson structure and the need to fulfil the requirements of an external audit and implement routinized rules of an abstract system are viewed by teachers as unmotivating and boring. Intersubjective, alternative reality (construed through documents and policy obligations) is valued more than actual existential problems. School as an institution creates its own intersubjective reality with its requirements and attributes. Teachers choose to satisfy students' "local" existential needs of their learners, rather than conform to imposed official demands. Hence, a discrepancy exists between internal attitudes and official school provisions: a feeling of being compressed between school rules and internal values. Given

the need to fill the documents as a routinized, abstract system, the teacher does not contact students directly, but fills the forms online. Teachers face a need to choose between "local, non-professional" ways of acting and procedures pursued by the abstract systems.

The effort made by teachers does not always bring the desired change or benefits, so the teacher experiences a variety of emotions: regret, anger, sadness, and sometimes hopelessness. The agentic actions which do not lead to desired outcomes, especially when we speak about the teacher-student relationship, may bring negative experiences. Experiencing the risk of replaceability and thus, a sense of regret, caused by competition motivates the teacher to act and develop her own professional skills.

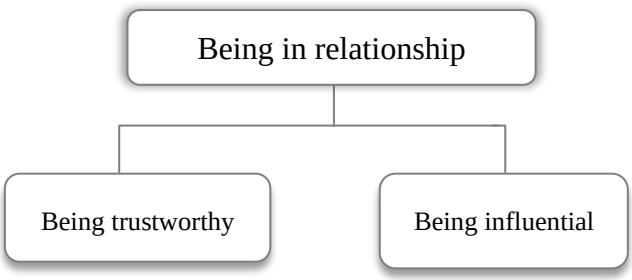
**Relational dimension of teacher professional agency**

**Willing**



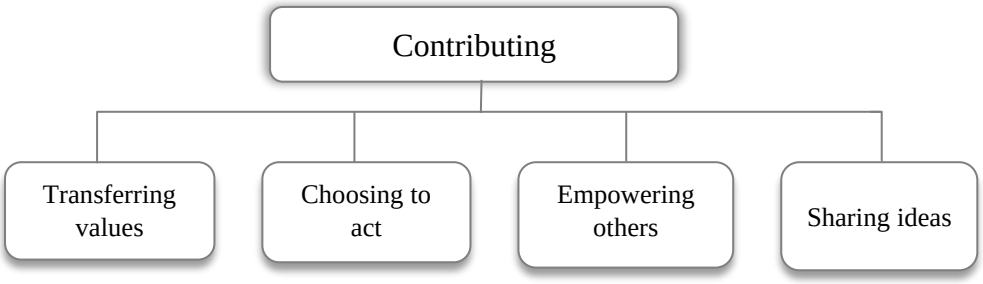

The sense of willingness to become agents in a professional field is dependent on recognition and approval of significant others: colleagues, administration, supervisors, etc., therefore strongly lined to relational dimension. The teachers feel encouraged and empowered when colleagues express their interest and approval, especially those who are at the early stage of their professional careers. Recognition by the school administration and the absence of direct control and observation enables the teacher's sense of freedom to act. However, the freedom to act is seen as something given by the school administration (*"I am allowed to manifest myself")*, rather than something inherent to the working environment. Teachers act in accordance with their beliefs, which coincide with school administration's actions and expectations, school's internal rules and order. As a result, the teachers are more motivated to act in a professional field despite the high limitations of time and workload. This makes the teachers experience a sense of happiness and satisfaction in their job, and motivates for further professional action. Teachers actively act when the requirements and rules of school environment coincide with their own internal rules and ways of acting.

**Being in relationship**



The teacher invests effort and dedicate their time to maintain the trustworthy relationship with students, encouraging them to speak about informal topics, to open up and share their concerns. Teachers view their agency through the effort they make to sustain the relationship with students: openness, support, absence of tensions, trust, etc. Teachers pay attention to the nature of communication with their students and emphasize openness in conversations, absence of fear in conversations and evaluating the teacher's work. Teachers experience professional agency by rejecting acting in a "traditional" way and encouraging students to self-evaluate and to evaluate the teacher's work.

**Contributing**

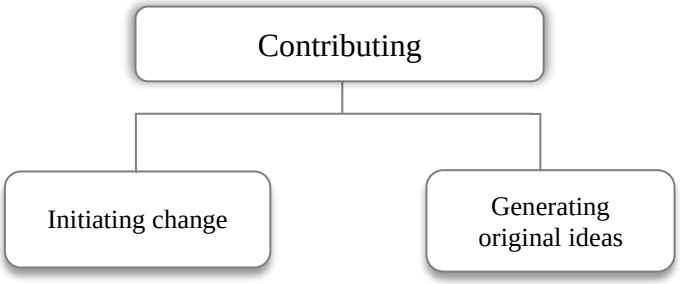



The reason to act and improve one's own teaching is observing students' reaction and success. Teachers choose to go beyond their teaching role and provide quality learning experience for their students, involving additional non-conventional materials and methods of teaching. Sometimes teachers' actions are directed towards pushing students to try new fields outside the school borders. Some teachers go beyond the prescribed roles and involve their students in another activities, where they can acquire different knowledge and experience. Some actions may be triggered by certain issues, one of which is students' lack of motivation to execute tasks and actively participate in the learning process. Thus, some teachers chose to act and create different approaches for coping with the issue.

Teachers act in order to transfer those values which they think are important and share the ideas they personally think are worth spreading. The intentional agentic actions are expressed through initiatives to share the ideas with students or colleagues, empowering their learning and professional development. Teachers share ideas related to their professional field with colleagues. The recognition of those ideas by the colleagues directly influences the teacher's perception of his/her own professional identity and sense of accomplishment. The agentic activity leads to exercising teacher leadership with colleagues. Moreover, the students are often involved in a process of improving and developing the idea. One of teachers said: *"I never keep the knowledge for myself",* meaning that she acts and shares the knowledge and enrich others.

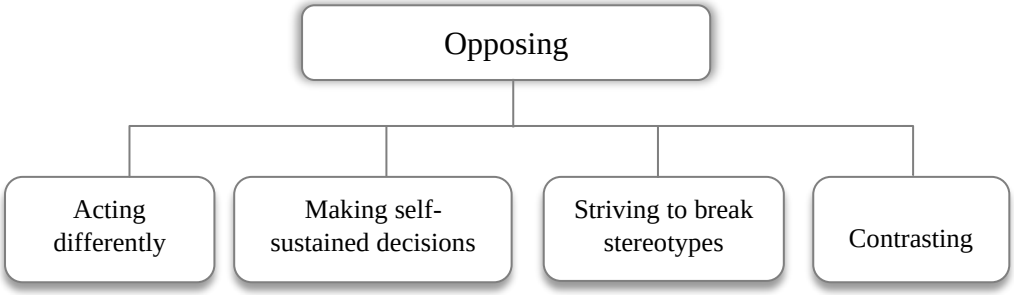
**Practical dimension of teacher professional agency**

**Contributing**




Another aspect of contributing related to the practical dimension, when teachers generate and actively create the new ways of teaching within challenging obstacles (for instance, when teachers had to organize a learning process remotely). Teachers act intentionally in order to improve learning process and create a system where students were able to collaborate effectively. The need to generate new ideas and act as agent may be caused by the changing working conditions.

**Opposing**

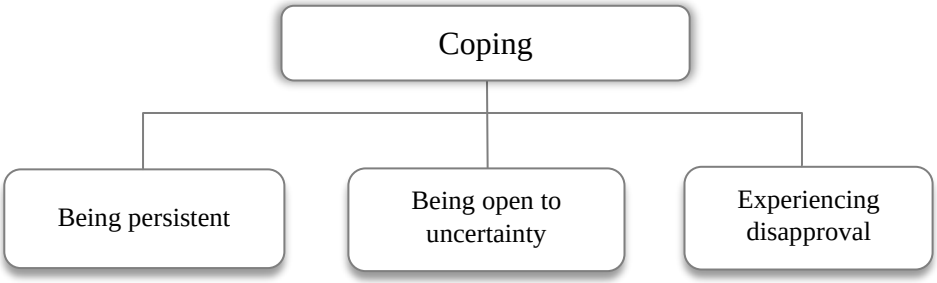



Teachers experience the professional agency by acting differently within their professional field. Some of them critically evaluate the usage of textbooks. Teachers admit that student books are lacking a link with real-time events, so they act differently and seek better sources of knowledge. One of the motives to act differently implies teacher's desire to change the existing way of student thinking and break existing stereotypes, which they believe are present within the school community. For example, the teachers strive to change students' settled attitude towards church and faith, or towards stereotypes in how teacher should behave and look. Teachers underline that such attitudes are sedimented norms transferred from families and surrounding.

Teachers contrast their ways of teaching with conventional teaching practices applied by their colleagues and passiveness of colleagues, who tended to hold lessons in more conventional and routinized forms. Their comparisons are made in terms of applying diverse teaching methods, approaches, textbooks usage, nature of communication with students (keeping distance and

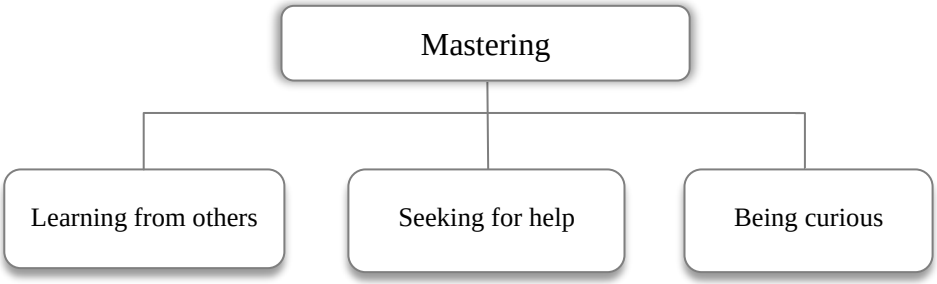
maintaining hierarchy versus developing equality), technology application, etc. Some teachers viewed themselves as those who bring novelty, movement and activity into classroom. These actions correspond to the teachers' abilities and professional beliefs, hence their professional identity.

**Coping**




Some teachers experienced professional agency as an adventure in making actions and decisions, and sometimes those sudden decisions brought successful results. Some teachers admit that they initiate certain innovative ways of teaching and learning and perceive them as adventurous. Being open to uncertainty allows trying to find ways of acting, implementing new approaches. Thus, being agent implies taking and tolerating risks, and, at the same time implies teacher's willingness to act *("I think why not?")*. Teacher professional agency is sometimes accompanied with the sense of disapproval of colleagues who may judge the novel ways of acting, conducting the lesson, which, in their opinion, contradict the conventional school norms. The clash between the socially accepted school norm and the internal beliefs and aspirations of teachers make them experience a sense of absurdity and astonishment. Thus, some teachers view their agency as an opposition to the opinion of the majority, a deviation from the norm rather than subjugation to the accepted norms of action.

**Mastering**




Teachers admit that they learn from their students and colleagues, thus, they act in order to develop and improve professionally. Personal disagreement with certain prescribed ways of teaching stimulates teachers to act in order to search for another, more satisfying and acceptable solutions. Thus, teachers refer to their colleagues and ask for some help, and emphasize curiosity

and persistence as main factors for taking action. Curiosity makes the teacher look for knowledge and skills within the school community and learners. Curiosity is considered as one of the main characteristics allowing a teacher to seek new knowledge, acquire skills and improve professional competence, look for new ideas and imagine the possibilities to apply them in own teaching practice. Teachers emphasize that curiosity is one of the main predispositions that enables them to look for new ideas which they can share.

**Discussion**

The current research aimed to highlight the essential aspects of teacher professional agency based on teacher everyday experiences. The conduct of the research involved two stages, which allowed investigation of the context which surrounds teachers, as well as delving into individual teachers' lifeworld. The research findings proved that teacher professional agency is highly dependent on a teacher's biography and a professional context, which enables and constrains teacher agency at the same time; teacher professional agency implies the ability of teachers to make decisions and judgements and choose among the possible paths of action. Teacher agency is an intentional and conscious action that manifests in making professional choices directed to future outcomes. Teacher professional agency does not exclusively imply acting differently, but teachers may consciously choose to reproduce social structures (Morrison, 2005). However, the constraints on actions are perceived by teachers as opportunities to engage in action, which shows the dual nature of teacher agency and the surrounding structure, expressed by Giddens (1984). The research results demonstrate that the phenomenon of teacher professional agency involves eight elements (themes), which were the most salient within the research data: searching for meaningfulness, willingness, being in relationship, being in a dilemma, contributing, opposing, coping, and mastering.

The professional agency of a teacher manifests through searching for meaningfulness and making sense of teaching. It includes re-evaluation of past achievements, understandings, and choices, and searching for ways to implement personal talents, aspiring for future success. Teachers usually reflected on their biographies, their past experiences, mainly regarding how they came into the profession. Teachers consider the path towards the teaching profession as a certain expression of their personal position, or disagreement with their current situation. The issue of teacher identity is particularly important here, because reflection on past experiences and modes of action enables teachers to selectively reactivate their further actions. For many research participants the pattern "past-nowadays" was common, when they reflected on personal historical perspectives of becoming a teacher, gaining professional experience, and acting. What is important is that teachers are able to reflect on their experiences and elaborate on their current and future actions consciously, which coincides with Giddens' ideas of practical and discursive

consciousness. Teachers tend to search for a meaning and view their agency as an opportunity to choose the environment to work in, the surroundings where he/she is able to realize their own talents and implement competencies.

Teacher agency does not necessarily imply exclusively positive emotions or successful accomplishments. The experience of professional agency encompassed facing and coping with certain dilemmas, and here the link between agency and surrounding structures seems to appear the most salient. Teachers experience some extent of discrepancy between official school requirements and their own professional beliefs, for instance, in questions of student assessment or evaluation of a teacher's performativity. The meritocratic approach, when success and achievement are valued the most, is viewed as constraining for teacher agency. Another dilemma relates to experiencing ambiguity, when a teacher's actions do not lead to desired outcomes; thus, teachers experience a sense of regret, anger, sadness, and sometimes hopelessness. Agency is seen through giving self to the process ("I gave a lot of myself" ROM), as a sort of sacrifice, rather than a gain. Teachers sacrifice their time, which is often taken from their private lives. The issue of conforming to existing established practices was also highlighted. The paperwork was recognized as an undesirable part of the teaching job, requiring a lot of time and effort; however, fruitless, and perceived as an unnecessary duty. The need to complete different documents may be seen as an institutionalized social practice, regarded as obligation. These institutionalized practices, which became normalized and routinized, however, not accepted by teachers, evoke a sense of disappointment or regret among teachers. The issue of power is important here – how teachers are capable of shaping the school system, and to what extent the system allows to maneuver or choose possible ways of action. The research results show that teachers have a wide range of possibilities to choose certain ways of acting and make an impact at the school level.

For this reason, teachers view their agency through opposing the general established norms or rules, coping with them, mastering their abilities, and contributing to students' success and school improvement. The theme of opposing is particularly important, as it shows a range of fields where teachers contradict the existing system and establish their own understandings and ways of doing things. Importantly, teachers make choices to shape the existing practices or believes, and act intentionally, demonstrating consciousness, named "reflective" by Giddens. One aspect refers to self-sustained decision-making and making own professional choices by teachers. Teachers choose the ways of teaching, the ways of developing a relationship with students, using resources and materials, not acting by habit, but rather recognizing and refashioning past patterns of behavior and acting differently. Teachers make a conscious choice to act by opposing existing practices, however, not all practices are possible to affect. While some teachers disagree with the need to grade students or fulfill the school documentation, they are still obliged to perform these

activities. These established norms are affirmed as the rules and are obligatory for teachers, and here we may notice the parallel with Giddens' (1984) notion of rules as codified (in our case, written and affirmed) and those discursively formulated, which may be interpreted differently by teachers. Therefore, teachers are able to exercise their professional agency when the rules are discursively formulated (symbolic meaning). For instance, by coping with student stereotypical thinking about lessons of religion teachers are seen as coping with a sedimented school norm, where those lessons are not considered as important: managing one's own physical appearance by wearing clothes that are not socially acceptable due to the norms of a certain historical period; and using unconventional resources and materials when teachers reject using textbooks or following the standardized lesson structure. Teachers avoid following routinized patterns of behavior, but rather "manoeuvre among répertoires" when dealing with professional issues (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). The theme of coping appears to be salient in a structure of teacher professional agency, as teachers choose to act and cope with uncertain situations which may appear.

Teachers are able to explain and motivate their actions and choices. At the same time, they monitor not only their actions, but actions of their colleagues, by comparing the desired and current way of acting. Importantly, early-career teachers do not expect other colleagues to behave the same way, they rather expect support and confirmation of their own professional actions, and recognition from important others (Bandura, 1989). However, they notice a contrast between the level of effort they and colleagues make, in other words, teachers elaborate on the passiveness of their colleagues and their failure to take an action. Following Giddens' statement that human actors expect others to behave the same way, we may conclude that research participants in their reflections expressed their disillusion or even blaming some of their colleagues for absence of desire to help students and contribute to their success. Indeed, teachers expect others to put in a similar amount of teaching effort and to act. Due to teachers being a part of school community, they inevitably observe the behavior of colleagues (vicarious experience) and juxtapose their own trajectories of action with those exercised by their colleagues. Then the routinized and sedimented ways of teaching become especially visible and widely practiced. These routinized ways relate to lesson planning in a traditional manner, following the same patterns of teaching and learning, and even ways of managing one's own physical appearance. By gaining positive feedback from others (students' parents, school administration, colleagues, friends), teachers experience an increase of their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989) and empowerment to repeat agentive behaviors.

Regarding the relationship with a greater community and interacting with its members, for the teacher, the significant others (authorities, school administration, student, their parents) are a source of external motivation for pedagogical action. Getting approval is highly important,

especially during the early stages of a teaching career (Bandura, 1989). When a teacher's actions are praised and affirmed by others, they experience positive emotions and, as a result, gain encouragement for further actions. At this point, the role of school leaders is highly important. Being inspired by like-minded leaders seems to be a very important stimulus for individual and collegial action, even when teachers face shortage of time for certain additional activities. Research findings proved that the willingness to act and exercise agency is built on the relationship with other members of school community (colleagues, students, or school administration). Some teachers experience professional agency in terms of sacrifice for better futures for students, putting their personal needs in second place. Teachers experience professional agency in a form of opposing the generally accepted norms by acting differently, dressing differently, and applying unconventional teaching methods and approaches.

The data shows that neoliberal discourse, foundations and principles of acting within the school community challenge the existing teachers' well-being and identity. The idea of acquisition of cultural human capital by students, expressed by Bourdieu (1998), blames the risk of reproducing inequality by the means of public education. And, research participants confirmed their disagreement with consideration of public education through lenses of business-model. School norms that treat teachers' professional practice as public service, focused on a meritocratic approach to teaching and learning, testing, measuring, comparing achievement inhibit teacher's motivation to work. Schools, as social structures, act based on business model, which is inevitably reflected in behavior and relationships between members of the school community. Teachers find themselves being blamed for students' unsuccessful learning, experience external pressure and blaming for lack of action, lack of investment into own human capital. However, these unfavorable conditions create a field for teacher agency where they are able to act and change the existing norms, for instance, by raising discussions among school community, avoiding testing and comparing students, making own teaching individualized and meaningful.

The current research is not focused on the temporality of teacher professional agency and its change during a teacher's professional career. Thus, further research could focus on how teachers experience their agency during their lifespan, and empirically distinguish certain peculiarities or stages of agency development. The current research was mostly focused on the teacher professional agency experiences at individual level, without specification of collective action. Thus, in the future there is a need to define the essential features of the individual and collective agency of teachers. In addition, further research needs to focus on investigating how teachers engage in collective participative action, and how they experience collective agency; defining the factors which trigger collective agentic behaviors among group of teachers.

## Conclusions

Teacher professional agency is seen as a conscious intentional action which corresponds to a teacher's personal and professional goals, values, and aspirations. Teacher professional agency is a tacit experience, emerging as unconscious, "hidden" in practical consciousness and manifesting discursively through a teacher's critical reflection about their own professional practice. Teachers perceive their agency as normal teaching behavior grounded in professional commitment rather than something going beyond their professional duties. The recognition of one's self as an agentic professional requires more in-depth critical reflection by teachers, and discursive verbalization of one's own actions.

Teacher professional agency manifests through following routinized patterns of behavior if they correspond to their professional beliefs. However, non-coincidence of external demands and internal understandings also stimulate action. Teachers recognize crystalized practices when they do not coincide with their internal beliefs and attitudes. The action may be manifested explicitly, through active opposition or engagement in innovative practices, or taken implicitly, by transferring values and building relationships with students. The school, as a structure, enables teacher agency and constrains it at the same time; however, teachers are able to navigate within it and make professional choices.

Teacher professional agency is possible when there is a choice of certain repertoires of action, and teachers are able to choose between taking action or retain status quo. The role of the school community is crucial. Teacher professional agency is a social phenomenon, inevitably linked to the surrounding social environment, which has the strongest impact, enabling or constraining the action. Teachers, especially during early career stages, engage in collective participative action by acting differently, initiating change, breaking stereotypes, and, thus, transforming school culture. At the same time, the strongest stimulus of action is grounded in relationship with others. Teachers engage in innovative practices and lead change in order to influence their students, build better learning environments and sustain stronger relationships.

# SANTRAUKA

## Įvadas

Šiame tyrime nagrinejama, kaip mokytojai patiria profesinę veikmę savo kasdienėje veikloje santykiuose su mokiniais, kolegomis, valdžios institucijomis ir kitais mokyklos bendruomenės nariais. Ši tema pasirinkta neatsitiktinai, nes ją lėmė mano asmeninės profesinės pedagoginės praktikos apmąstymai. Man, kaip buvusiai mokytojai, įdomu, kaip vieniems mokytojams pavyksta ugdyti mokinius, siekti jų gerovės, tobulinti savo profesinius įgūdžius ir koreguoti mokymo programas, kad pasiektų geriausių rezultatų, o kiti mokytojai tokių pastangų atsisako. Daug metų bendrauju su mokytojais ir dažnai girdžiu, kad ugdymo programos, iniciatyvos ir taisyklės yra „nuleistos iš viršaus“ (Švietimo ministerijos), o jie, paprasti mokytojai, negali daryti įtakos situacijai. Todėl man tapo įdomu daugiau sužinoti apie mokytojų ir esamos švietimo sistemos sąveikos pobūdį ir mokytojų vaidmenį šiuolaikiniame švietime. Kartą perskaičiau profesorės Lilijos Duoblienės straipsnį (2017), kuriame ji aptaria mokytojų standartizavimo ir pedagoginių inovacijų bei kūrybiškumo priešpriešą. Autorė teigia, kad mokytojai patenka į spąstus ir turi pasirinkti, ar laikytis oficialių reikalavimų, ar elgtis pagal savo profesinius įsitikinimus ir nuostatas. Duoblienė (2017) aptaria požiūrį „iš apačios į viršų“, kai mokytojai gali daryti įtaką situacijai švietimo sistemoje, ir, remdamasi Priestley, Biesta ir Robinson (2015) ekologiniu požiūriu, įveda terminą „mokytojo veikmė“.

Pagrindinė tyrimo idėja buvo ištirti, kaip mokytojai patiria lyderystę profesinėje aplinkoje. Tačiau pirminiai empiriniai duomenys, surinkti per du tyrimo etapus, parodė, kad tyrimo dalyviai, kalbėdami apie lyderystę, daugiau dėmesio skiria veikmei. Pirmajame tyrimo etape išryškėjo įtampa tarp mokyklos sistemos, mokytojų požiūrio ir asmeninių vertybių bei išsiskyrė mokytojus supančios struktūros. Antrasis etapas parodė, kad grynoji lyderystė negali būti iki galo įgyvendinta struktūrose, kurios engia veikėjus. Kai kurie mokytojai nesutiko pripažinti savo lyderio vaidmens, todėl, norint įtikinti mokytojus, kad jie savo klasėse yra lyderiai, reikėjo papildomų paaiškinimų. Todėl šiame etape maniau, kad reikia kalbėti ne apie lyderystę, o apie veikmę. Taigi nusprendžiau sutelkti dėmesį į mokytojų veikmės problemą, susijusią su Lietuvoje egzistuojančia švietimo sistema.

Teorinio pagrindo ir tinkamos tyrimo metodikos paieškos užtruko ir įvyko ne iš karto. Siekiau atlikti kokybinį tyrimą, kad sužinočiau mokytojų įžvalgas apie tai, kaip jie patiria veikmę, ir ką reiškia būti veikliu mokytoju. Fenomenologija buvo pasirinkta todėl, kad ji leidžia įsigilinti į žmonių patirtį, visų pirma į tai, kaip mokytojai patiria veikmę, ir išskirti esminius šio fenomeno komponentus. Kaip teorinį pagrindą pasirinkau Giddenso struktūrizacijos teoriją, nes empiriniai rezultatai aiškiai parodė ryšį tarp supančių struktūrų ir mokytojų profesinės veikmės, kai veiksnių

ir struktūrų sąveika reiškia emancipacijos galimybę. Šis požiūris atitiko mano požiūrį į situaciją švietimo sistemoje, kai veikėjus (mokytojus) riboja sistema, tačiau tuo pat metu jie gali daryti poveikį ir prisidėti prie pokyčių.

**Temos aktualumas**

Mokytojų profesinė veikmė yra plačiai aprašoma literatūroje, tačiau trūksta empirinių šio reiškinio tyrimų (Toom et al., 2021). Pagrindiniai klausimai yra, kas yra mokytojų profesinė veikmė ir kodėl ji svarbi? Naujausioje literatūroje pirmuoju ir svarbiausiu aspektu laikomas mokytojų gebėjimas daryti teigiamus pokyčius mokykloje, tobulinti mokymo programą, sudaryti palankesnes sąlygas mokiniams mokytis ir taip gerinti mokinių pasiekimus (Priestley, 2015). Mokytojai yra tie, kurie ne tik perduoda žinias, bet ir sukuria mokiniams mokymosi aplinką bei prisideda prie bendro mokyklos gerinimo (Hargreaves, 1998). Jau daugiau nei 30 metų švietimo tyrimuose vyrauja tendencija į mokytojus žvelgti kaip į pokyčių vykdytojus, galinčius vadovauti procesui ir diegti naujoves į mokyklos mokymo programą (Badley, 1986; Hargreaves, 1998; Lane, Lacefield-Parachini ir Isken, 2003; Etelapelto ir kt., 2013; Buchanan, 2014; Forde ir Dickson, 2017). EBPO (2018 m.) ataskaitoje pabrėžiama būtinybė ugdyti besimokančiųjų veikmę ir bendradarbiavimą, siekiant didinti jų įsitraukimą ir atsakomybę už asmeninį mokymąsi ir kolektyvinius pasiekimus, taip pat jų gebėjimą inicijuoti veiksmus ir atsakingai veikti formuojant bendrą žmonijos gerovę 2030 m. Dokumento autoriai pabrėžia, kad svarbu sukurti palankias mokymosi sąlygas ir socialinę aplinką, todėl yra labai svarbus mokytojų vaidmuo. Panašios tendencijos pastebimos ir Lietuvoje, kur viešajame diskurse diskutuojama apie reikšmingą mokytojo profesijos vaidmenį (Skarbalienė, 2015; Želvys, Dukynaitė ir Vaitekaitis, 2018). Mokytojas suvokiamas kaip svarbiausias švietimo sistemos elementas, pokyčių nešėjas (Priestley, 2015), gebantis nuolat mokytis ir tobulinti savo profesines kompetencijas (Parulienė, 2013).

Mokytojų profesinėje praktikoje profesinė veikmė yra įgyvendinama per kompetencijas, motyvaciją, savarankiškumą, veikimą, kūrybiškumą ir iniciatyvą. Tačiau veikmės sąvoka yra politinis-socialinis reiškinys, o mokytojų gebėjimai kartais pernelyg sureikšminami (Priestley, 2015). Todėl mokytojų veikmė gali būti laikoma individualiu reiškiniu, o pernelyg akcentuojant mokytojo savybes dažnai pamirštama kita svarbi mokytojo veikmės sąlyga – jį supanti aplinka ir socialinės struktūros, formuojančios mokytojo darbą (Datnow ir kt., 2002). Mokytojų veikmė pasireiškia sąveika su kitais asmenimis darbo sąlygomis (Eteläpelto ir kt., 2013), kai mokytojai bendradarbiauja su mokiniais ir kitais mokyklos bendruomenės nariais. Tai reiškia, kad mokytojų veikmė yra susijusi su tam tikromis struktūromis ir tam tikromis sociokultūrinėmis sąlygomis, pavyzdžiui, politika, institucinėmis tradicijomis, kultūra, normomis ir kt.

Kai kurie tyrėjai (Hökkä, Rautiainen, Silander ir Eteläpelto, 2019) ir teoretikai (Bandura, 1989) sutelkia dėmesį į veikmę kaip į mokytojo prigimtinį gebėjimą daryti įtaką profesinei

aplinkai. Kiti pabrėžia sociokultūrines ir ekologines (Priestley et al., 2015) sąlygas, kuriose gali būti plėtojama mokytojo kompetencija. Visgi veikmė nėra asmeninė savybė, o veikiau individo ar individų grupės gebėjimas. Ekologinio požiūrio šalininkai yra laikomi „pragmatikais“, nes jie į mokytojų veikmę.žiūri kaip į pasiekiamą gebėjimą, kurio tikslas – ištirti sąlygas, kuriose galima pasiekti mokytojų veikmę. (Leijen ir kt., 2020).

Nors iš mokytojų tikimasi, kad jie dirbs tam tikrais mokymo programoje ir švietimo standartuose numatytais būdais, jie susiduria su daugybe situacijų, reikalaujančių priimti profesinius sprendimus ir imtis veiksmų. Gebėjimas veikti iš dalies priklauso nuo mokytojų vidinių įsitikinimų, įsipareigojimo ir profesinės praktikos supratimo (Stillman ir Anderson, 2015). Giddensas (Giddens, 1984) teigia, kad žmonės gali veikti, jei sistema kelia tam tikrus nereikšmingus reikalavimus, kurie prieštarauja jų sampratoms. „Veiksmas arba veikmė yra apibrėžiama kaip faktinių ar numanomų kūniškų būtybių priežastinių intervencijų srautas vykstančiame pasaulio įvykių procese“ (Giddens, 1976, p. 75). Todėl mokytojų veikmė gali būti laikoma procesu, kurį lemia sąveika su išorinėmis sąlygomis. Mokytojų veikmė gali viršyti nustatytus mokytojo vaidmenis arba prieštarauti nustatytai tvarkai, ir net priešintis pokyčiams (Buchanan, 2015); mokytojų veikmė egzistuoja tam tikrame kontekste, kuriame mokytojai gali veikti ir sąveikauti su kitais veikėjais (Lane ir Sweeny, 2019). Taigi mokytojai formuoja ir kuria švietimo realybę tam tikrame socialiniame ir kultūriniame kontekste, o jų veiksmai formuoja šį kontekstą.

**Tyrimo problema**

Kalbėdamas apie mokytojų veikmę ir esamas struktūras, Morrisonas (2005) užduoda retorinį klausimą: „*Kodėl mokytojai, užuot pakeitę praktiką, kuri daugeliu atžvilgių yra priešiška ugdymui, ją įtvirtina*?“ (p. 312). Iš tiesų kyla problema, kai plačiai diegiamos kai kurios diskredituotos praktikos, pavyzdžiui, perteklinis testavimas arba mokinių konkurencijos didinimas. Daug nusiskundimų girdime iš mokytojų, kurie kaltina esamus ugdymo planus ir programas ir mano, kad jie varžo ir riboja jų kūrybiškumą. Geros mokyklos koncepcija (2015) yra dokumentas, kuriame pateikiamos ugdymo proceso organizavimo Lietuvos mokyklose gairės bei numatomas pedagogų ir visų mokymosi proceso dalyvių savarankiškumąs ir pasirinkimo laisvė. Visgi praktikoje daugelis mokytojų kaltina švietimo politikos formuotojus dėl mokymo proceso standartizavimo ir biurokratizavimo. Tačiau kai kurie mokytojai, nepaisydami išorinių apribojimų ar kontrolės, nusprendžia elgtis kitaip (Buchanan, 2015). Jų veiksmus galime paaiškinti analizuodami esamas išorines struktūras (išorinio socialinio spaudimo sukeltus apribojimus) arba savo pačių susikurtus įsitikinimus ir praktiką (Morrison, 2005). Todėl šiame tyrime bus nagrinėjamos socialinės praktikos struktūrizavimo ir reprodukcijos teorijos kaip galimas mokytojų profesinės veikmės paaiškinimas (Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1990).

„Profesinės veikmės“ sąvoka, kuri yra pagrindinė šio tyrimo sąvoka, reiškia profesinius veikėjus (darbuotojus ir vadovus), kurie gali kontroliuoti arba daryti įtaką savo darbui ir darbo aplinkai (Hökkä, Rautiainen, Silander ir Eteläpelto, 2019). Šiame tyrime ypač svarbu suprasti, kaip mokytojai patiria veikmę, susijusią su mokyklos struktūromis. Profesinė veikmė yra glaudžiai susijusi su subjektų profesine tapatybe, kompetencijomis, žiniomis ir patirtimi, tačiau visuomet laikinai įgyvendinama esant sociokultūrinėmis sąlygomis (Hökkä et al., 2019). Tyrime daugiausia dėmesio skiriama mokytojų kasdienės profesinės praktikos analizei, kai jų patirtį formuoja sociokultūrinės sąlygos ir profesinė aplinka; mokytojo gebėjimui kontroliuoti savo veiksmus ir sprendimus nusistovėjusioje, habitualizuotoje švietimo sistemos struktūroje.

Šis tyrimas apima keletą susijusių klausimų:

- Mokytojų profesinės veikmės patirtis, kai jie peržengia nustatytų mokytojo vaidmenų ribas ir (arba) priešinasi šioms struktūroms.

- Įtampa tarp normalizavimo (tapimo pavaldžiu struktūroms) ir to, kiek mokytojas gali kontroliuoti savo profesinę praktiką ir priimti profesinius sprendimus.

- Susikristalizavusių mokyklos struktūrų ir mokytojo profesinės veiklos sąveika, kai tam tikri mokyklos gyvenimo aspektai suvokiami kaip natūralūs ir mokyklos bendruomenės narių priimami be jokių abejonių.

- Nuolatinė profesinės veikmės ir vadovavimo sąveika kasdienėje mokymo praktikoje.

**Tyrimo klausimai**

*Tyrimo tikslas.* Šio tyrimo tikslas – išsiaiškinti, kaip mokytojai savo profesinėje kasdienybėje patiria veikmę. Tyrimu nesiekiama ieškoti naujos teorijos, paaiškinančios mokytojų veikmę, bet siekiama fenomenologiškai ištirti mokytojų išgyvenamas egzistencines patirtis. Anot Dahlbergo, pagrindinis „gyvenamojo pasaulio tyrimų“ tikslas – atskleisti ir paaiškinti esminę prasmę, būdingą tam tikram fenomenui, atskleidžiant jam būdingų bruožų (esmių) rinkinį, išskiriantį jį iš kitų reiškinių (Dahlberg ir kt., 2008). Tačiau, pasak Dahlbergo (ibid.), reiškinio esmių skaičius gali būti begalinis, o tyrėjo tikslas yra atskleisti jų kuo daugiau. Taigi šiuo tyrimu siekiama išsiaiškinti mokytojų profesinės veikmės fenomeno esmę jų profesinėje darbo aplinkoje.

*Tyrimo objektas*. Šio tyrimo objektas yra mokytojų profesinės veikmės gyvenamoji patirtis. „Gyvenamoji patirtis“ – tai žinios, informacija ir patirtys, kurias mokytojai įgyja kasdienės mokymo praktikos metu ir bendraudami savo darbo aplinkoje.

*Tyrimo klausimai.* Šiuo tyrimu siekiama atsakyti į pagrindinius klausimus:

Kokia yra mokytojų profesinės veikmės fenomeno esmė?

Ką mokytojams reiškia patirti veikmę?

Kaip mokytojai patiria veikmę formaliose mokyklos struktūrose?

Kaip mokytojai patiria veikmę, kuri peržengia nustatytų mokytojo vaidmenų ribas?

Kaip mokytojų praktikoje veikmė yra patiriama sąveikoje su mokiniais?

**Tyrimo naujumas**

Šio tyrimo rezultatai – tai mokytojų kasdienės praktikos apmąstymai, kurie padeda geriau suprasti mokytojų profesinę veikmę, įtraukiant autentišką praktikuojančių mokytojų patirtį. Fenomenologinis metodas leidžia pažinti gyvenamąją patirtį ir tai, kaip mokytojai patiria savo profesinę veikmę, priima profesinius sprendimus ir užima pozicijas. Išgyventos profesinės veikmės patirtys atspindi svarbiausius mokytojų kasdieninės veiklos aspektus, kai jie patyrė veikmės jausmą. Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidžia mokytojų profesinės veikmės struktūrą, su kuria susidūrė įvairūs mokytojai iš skirtingų Lietuvos mokyklų ir regionų. Struktūra parodo mokytojų gyvenamosios profesinės veikmės fenomeno esmę. Į šį fenomeną žvelgiama neatsiejamai nuo jį supančio socialinio ir kultūrinio konteksto, todėl tyrimas atskleidžia mokyklos struktūros ir mokytojų profesinės veikmės sąveikos problemą. Tyrimo rezultatai gali būti naudingi praktikuojantiems mokytojams, švietimo institucijoms ir politikams, kurie domisi mokytojų savarankiškumo augimu ir jų kompetencijos stiprinimu.

**Disertacijos struktūra**

Disertaciją sudaro keturi pagrindiniai skyriai. Pirmajame skyriuje pristatoma teorinė veikm*ės* ir struktūros sąveikos sistema, pagrįsta Giddenso (1984) struktūrizacijos teorija. Į žmogaus veikmės sąvoką paprastai žvelgiama iš struktūrizacijos teorijos (Giddens, 1984), postruktūralizmo (Foucault, 1979; Buttler, 1990), fenomenologijos (Nida-Rumelin, 2018; Coole, 2005) ir Bourdieu (1990) kultūros sociologijos pozicijų. Antrajame skyriuje nagrinėjama mokytojų profesinės veikmės samprata, dėmesys sutelkiamas į jos sąvoką ir skirtingus požiūrius į jos konceptualizavimą; aprašomi mokyklos kaip struktūros, mokymo ir mokyklinės praktikos sedimentacijos, kristalizacijos ir ritualizacijos klausimai. Trečiajame skyriuje aprašoma tyrimo metodologija, pagrįsta fenomenologiniu tyrimo metodu; aprašomi empirinio tyrimo atlikimo etapai, tyrimo parametrai, empirinio tyrimo atlikimo būdas ir etiniai klausimai. Ketvirtajame skyriuje pateikiami dviejų tyrimo etapų rezultatai. Jame parodomos kontekstinės problemos, su kuriomis susiduria mokytojai, ir mokytojų profesinės veikmės gyvenamoji patirtis, taip pat pateikiama profesinės veikmės fenomeno esminių aspektų schema. Paskutiniame skyriuje pateikiama diskusija, kurioje esminiai mokytojų veikmės komponentai yra analizuojami atsižvelgiant į platesnę mokyklos struktūrą. Darbo pabaigoje pateikiamos baigiamosios pastabos, padėkos ir literatūros sąrašas.

## 1. Teorinės dalies apžvalga

Veikmės problema analizuojama atsižvelgiant į jos santykį su egzistuojančiomis socialinėmis struktūromis. Veikmės problemos analizuojamos remiantis Giddenso struktūrizacijos teorija, kritinėmis teorijomis, poststruktūralistine ir fenomenologine perspektyvomis. Pagrindinė Giddenso struktūrizacijos teorijos nuostata yra ta, kad žmonės ir egzistuojančios struktūros negali būti atskirti ir egzistuoti nepriklausomai, o veikiau egzistuoja kaip duetas (Burridge, 2014). Struktūra nėra laikoma suvaržymu, o veikiau tuo, kas tuo pat metu ir apriboja, ir įgalina. Viena vertus, žmonės egzistuoja struktūrose, kurios gali riboti jų veiksmus, tačiau, kita vertus, žmonės gali daryti įtaką struktūroms keisdami esamą praktiką. Taigi mokytojai, kaip mokyklos bendruomenės nariai, gali būti veikiami mokyklos struktūrų, o kartu mokytojai savo veiksmais daro įtaką mokyklos struktūroms (Burridge, 2014). Giddensas (1991) išskiria tris žmogaus sąmonės lygmenis: praktinį, diskursyvųjį ir nesąmoningąjį. Veikėjas gali išsamiai išdėstyti ir paaiškinti savo veiksmų ir elgesio būdus bei priežastis („praktinė sąmonė“). Tačiau praktinė sąmonė yra nesąmoninga (ne nesąmoninga), o veiksmai atliekami pagal visuotinai priimtus elgesio modelius, kurie leidžia žmonėms veikti pagal suprantamus ir bendrus modelius. Kasdienės praktikos žinios (praktinė sąmonė) išlieka numanomos ir atliekamos beveik automatiškai, o diskursyvioji sąmonė reiškia, kad žmogus gali aiškiai apibrėžti ir pagrįsti savo veiksmus (Giddens, 1984). Pasitelkdamas praktinę arba diskursyviąją sąmonę, žmogus gali racionalizuoti savo veiksmus. Nida-Rumelin (2018) teigia, kad žmogaus veikmė reiškia „savęs kaip šaltinio patyrimą“, kai savo elgesį patiriame kaip aktyviai mūsų pačių sukeltą. Kita svarbi teorija – Bourdieu socialinės veiklos teorija (1977), kurioje pateikiama „habitus“ sąvoka ir siūlomas dvejopas socialinės sistemos supratimas (Kort ir Gharbi, 2013), o žmonių veiksmai, gyvenimo būdas, elgesys ir bendravimas nagrinėjami kaip praktika, kurią galima modifikuoti derinant habitus ir kapitalą (sukauptus socialinius ir kultūrinius išteklius), taikomus socialiniame kontekste (Bourdieu, 1985). Habitus – tai „struktūrizavimo mechanizmas“, leidžiantis individams susidoroti su neapibrėžtumu ir pokyčiais (Mtaki, 2021, p. 17), įgytų mąstymo, elgesio ir skonio modelių rinkinys, atliekantis tarpininko vaidmenį tarp visuomenės ir individo (Ozturk, 2011). Foucault (1990) darbuose santykis tarp struktūros ir veikmės suvokiamas kaip pasipriešinimas tarp engiamosios išorinės galios ir žmogaus pavergimo masto.

Šiame tyrime profesinė veikmė siejama su asmens veikla savo profesinėje srityje ir yra orientuota į profesinį „aš“ (Eteläpelto ir kt., 2013), t. y. profesinė veikmė yra orientuota į darbo praktiką, aplinką ir sąlygas, taigi ir į asmens profesinį tapatumą (Vähäsantanen, Räikkönen, Paloniemi, Hökkä ir Eteläpelto, 2018). Sąvoka „profesija“ apima ne tik formalią kvalifikaciją ir profesiją, bet ir mokymą, žinias ir, kas labai svarbu, profesinės etikos elementus (Tapper & Millet,

2015), profesines žinias, mokymo įgūdžius, didaktiką, tam tikrų asmenybės bruožų ir asmeninių polinkių turėjimą siekiant atlikti profesinę misiją (Hotaman, 2010). Profesinė veikmė laikoma veiksmais pagrįstu reiškiniu, pasireiškiančiu per veiksmus, o ne individualiomis savybėmis ar charakterio bruožais (Vähäsantanen et al., 2018). Veiksmai yra tikslingo pobūdžio, o veikmė yra suvokiama kaip ketinimo ir veiksmo derinys (Hadar & Benish-Weisma, 2019), kai mokytojai daro aktyvius pasirinkimus (Sang, 2020) ir priima sprendimus, darydami įtaką, derėdamiesi ir užimdami pozicijas profesinėje praktikoje (Vähäsantanen et al., 2018). Profesinė veikmė reiškia profesionalius veikėjus (darbuotojus ir vadovus), galinčius kontroliuoti savo darbą ir darbo aplinką bei daryti jiems įtaką (Calvert, 2016; Hökkä, Rautiainen, Silander ir Eteläpelto, 2019). Taigi bendroji profesinės veikmės sąvoka reiškia sąmoningą profesinį veiksmą, pasireiškiantį darbuotojų gebėjimu daryti įtaką tam tikroje profesinėje aplinkoje.

Mokytojų profesinė veikmė gali pasireikšti individualiai arba kolektyviai ir būti praktikuojama, kai profesiniai subjektai ir (arba) bendruomenės priima sprendimus, užima poziciją ir daro įtaką savo darbui ir (arba) profesinei tapatybei (Billet, 2008). Mokytojų profesinė veikmė yra suprantama kaip profesiniai veiksmai, kurių mokytojas imasi darbo kontekste, kuris sąlygoja, leidžia ir lemia šiuos veiksmus (Buchanan, 2015). Pedagoginių veiksmų akcentavimas yra pagrindinė mokytojų profesinės veikmės ypatybė (Toom et al., 2015; Imants & Van der Wal, 2020). Veikmės jausmą atspindi vidinis kontrolės lokusas, atsakomybės už situaciją prisiėmimas, taip pat pasiūlymų teikimas, pedagoginiai pasirinkimai ir sąmoningi sprendimai, pagrįsti savo profesiniais tikslais ir apmąstymais (Buchanan, 2015; Eteläpelto ir kt., 2013).

Profesinė veikmė yra tai, ką žmonės daro praktiškai (Biesta ir kt., 2015). Tačiau tai nereiškia, kad mokytojo elgesys gali būti naudojamas kaip profesinės veikmės kriterijus. Veikiau būtent mokytojo elgesys kartu su vidiniais procesais, tokiais kaip nuostatos, emocijos ir kognityviniai procesai, sudaro profesinės veikmės kompleksiškumą (Toom et al., 2015). Kadangi veikmė yra sąmoningas veiksmas, o mokytojai, planuodami ir vykdydami strateginius veiksmus, gali išsamiai paaiškinti savo veiksmų priežastis, vadovaudamiesi tam tikromis save apimančiomis vertybėmis ir savarankiškai nustatytais tikslais (Frost, 2006). Taigi mokytojų profesinė veikmė gali pasireikšti per mokytojo veiksmus, kurie atitinka jo vidinius profesinius tikslus ir vertybes.

## 2. Tyrimo metodologija

*Fenomenologinė prieiga*. Reflektyvus gyvenamojo pasaulio tyrimas yra pagrindinė šio tyrimo metodologija. Metodologiją sukūrė švedų mokslininkė Karin Dahlberg, remdamasi Husserlio, Heideggerio, Merleau-Ponty ir Gadamerio idėjomis bei fenomenologine ir hermeneutine tradicija, ir suvienija jų filosofines sampratas toje vietoje, kur: „gyvenimas pasireiškia patirtimi“ (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 95). Reflektyvaus gyvenamojo pasaulio tyrimais

siekiama išsiaiškinti, kaip žmonės gyvena, patiria ir aprašo pasaulį, jo kasdienius reiškinius. Šis tyrimas yra fenomenologinis, juo siekiama išsiaiškinti, kaip mokytojai patiria veikmę kasdieniame gyvenime, vykdydami kasdienę profesinę veikmę įprastomis darbo sąlygomis. Šiame tyrime mokytojų veikmės fenomenas jų profesinėje veikloje buvo tiriamas per mokytojų kasdienės gyvenamosios patirties ir subjektyvių perspektyvų pažinimą.

*Tyrimų etapai.* Pradinė tyrimo proceso idėja apėmė du etapus: atvejo studiją ir reflektyvųjį gyvenamojo pasaulio tyrimą (1 lentelė). Pirmajame etape pirminiai interviu turėjo atskleisti pagrindines mokytojų nuostatas ir įsitikinimus apie jų profesinę patirtį, vertybes, požiūrį ir iššūkius konkrečiame profesiniame kontekste. Antrajame etape buvo siekiama surinkti duomenis, kuriuose būtų pateiktos gilesnės mokytojų įžvalgos ir patirtys, susijusios su mokytojų kasdiene veikline patirtimi.

**1 lentelė.** Duomenų rinkimo procesas

| Etapas / trukmė | Veikla | Tikslai | Pavyzdžiai | Rezultatai |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1 etapas** Atvejo analizė (2018–2019) | Kokybinis tyrimas (tikslinės grupės interviu) | Išnagrinėti kasdienę mokytojų profesinę patirtį, vertybes, požiūrį ir iššūkius tam tikrame profesiniame kontekste. Analizuoti kokybinius duomenis taikant *fenomenologinę teminę analizę*. | 5 tikslinių grupių interviu, 10–12 dalyvių. | Suformuluotos mokytojų veikmės patirties temos ir potekstės. |
| **2 etapas** Reflektyvus gyvenamojo pasaulio tyrimas (2020) | Kokybiniai tyrimai (individualūs giluminiai interviu) | Atsakykite į tyrimo klausimus: ką mokytojui reiškia patirti veikmę profesinėje aplinkoje? Analizuoti kokybinius duomenis taikant reflektyvaus gyvenamojo pasaulio tyrimo metodologiją. | 24 interviu su 24 tyrimo dalyviais | Suformuluotos mokytojų veikmės patirties temos ir potekstės. Suformuluota mokytojų veikmės patirties esmė. |

**1 etapas. Institucinio konteksto tyrimas**

*Tyrimo dalyviai.* Tikslinėje grupėje dalyvavo 12 mokytojų, dirbančių toje pačioje privačioje pradinėje mokykloje. Tyrimo dalyvių amžius buvo nuo 24 iki 45 metų, jie dirbo pradinių klasių mokytojais, kūno kultūros, tikybos, dailės ir anglų kalbos mokytojais. Tyrime dalyvavo dešimt moterų ir du vyrai. Jų pedagoginio darbo stažas svyravo nuo 1 iki 10 metų. Tyrimas vyko mokytojų darbo vietoje laisvu nuo darbo metu. Siekdami užtikrinti didesnį konfidencialumą, tyrėjai nerinko nė vieno dalyvio asmeninės informacijos.

*Duomenų rinkimas.* Renkant duomenis buvo surengti penki susitikimai (sesijos) su tyrimo dalyviais (tikslinė grupė). Pirminis pokalbis buvo skirtas supažindinti dalyvius su tyrimo tikslais, uždaviniais ir metodika. Įžanginiu klausimu buvo siekiama, kad dalyviai jaustųsi patogiai dalydamiesi žiniomis ar patirtimi su kitais tikslinės grupės nariais. Antruoju, trečiuoju ir

ketvirtuoju interviu buvo siekiama surinkti informaciją apie tai, ką mokytojai patyrė dirbdami savo profesinėje srityje, atsižvelgiant į autoriteto, pagarbos, orumo ir profesinio tobulėjimo sąvokas. Tyrimo metu daugiausia dėmesio buvo skiriama įgalinantiems veiksniams ir „galingumo“ patirčiai, gebėjimui priimti sprendimus ir rinktis mokyklos ir klasės aplinkoje.

*Duomenų analizė.* Duomenys buvo renkami, įrašomi, stenografuojami ir analizuojami taikant teminę analizę. Duomenų analizę sudarė keli etapai (pagal Braun ir Clarke, 2012): susipažinimas su tekstais, pradinių kodų generavimas, temų paieška, temų peržiūra, temų apibrėžimas ir įvardijimas bei ataskaitos parengimas. Buvo taikomi pradiniai kodai, apimantys pastraipų kodavimą. Duomenų dalys buvo atidžiai perskaitytos ir kodavimui atrinktos reikšmingiausios duomenų dalys. Vėliau, atsiradus naujoms idėjoms ir supratimui, kodai buvo peržiūrėti, o kai kurie pakeisti. Temų paieškos procedūra apėmė koduotų duomenų peržiūrą ir kodų sutapimų bei panašumų paiešką. Kodai buvo sugrupuoti arba suklasifikuoti pagal jų reikšmę, kad atspindėtų tam tikrą unikalią ir nuoseklią duomenų dalį. Atlikus šį veiksmą buvo sukurtos 37 temos. Tada jos buvo suskirstytos ir sujungtos su kitomis, tvaresnėmis temomis.

**2 etapas. Reflektyvus gyvenamojo pasaulio tyrimas**

*Tyrimo dalyviai.* Remiantis prielaida, kad visi mokytojai tam tikrais būdais patiria profesinę veikmę, o veikmė yra neatsiejamas mokytojo profesijos bruožas, atrenkant tyrimo dalyvius daugiausia vadovautasi imties įvairovės principu ir tyrimo dalyvių pedagogine patirtimi. Atrenkant informantus individualiems giluminiams interviu buvo taikomi šie kriterijai: įvairovė, darbas mokykloje ir bent vienerių metų pedagoginio darbo stažas. Iš viso buvo atlikti 24 individualūs giluminiai interviu. Imtį sudaro 9 vyrai ir 15 moterų, kurių amžius – nuo 27 iki 56 metų ir pedagoginio darbo stažas – nuo 1 iki 36 metų. Didžioji dalis tyrimo dalyvių buvo iš miestų, didžiųjų Lietuvos miestų (n = 18), keli dalyviai – kaimo atstovai (n = 6). Dalyviai nurodė dėstantys skirtingus dalykus ir atstovaujantys skirtingoms mokslo sritims: Tai gamtos mokslai (biologija), filologija (anglų, rusų kalba), humanitariniai mokslai (istorija, nacionalinis saugumas, ekonomika), menai (muzika, teatras, piešimas), pradiniai ir ikimokykliniai dalykai. Dalis dalyvių buvo klasių auklėtojai (n = 7).

*Duomenų rinkimas***.** Duomenys buvo renkami taikant pusiau struktūruoto giluminio interviu metodą su atvirais klausimais. Demografiniai duomenys (vardas, pavardė, amžius, išsilavinimo lygis, pedagoginio darbo stažas, mokyklos tipas, Lietuvos regionas (miestas) paprastai buvo renkami kiekvieno interviu pradžioje. Dėl pandemijos situacijos nebuvo galimybės surengti interviu kaip realaus susitikimo, todėl jie vyko internetu, naudojant įvairias ryšio sistemas: Priklausomai nuo tyrimo dalyvių pageidavimų, buvo naudojamos "Zoom", "Google Meet" ir "Teams" ryšio sistemos. Interviu klausimai buvo skirti dalyvių apmąstymams apie tam

tikrus jų profesinio gyvenimo įvykius, kai jie suprato esą aktyvūs veikėjai, pvz.: „*Papasakokite, ką darote, kad dirbtumėte kitaip kaip mokytojas?“* „*Kas verčia jus daryti kitaip*?“ ir pan.

*Duomenų analizė.* Pirmasis duomenų analizės etapas – duomenų skaitymas, kai tyrėjas kelis kartus susipažįsta su interviu medžiaga. Antrasis žingsnis buvo duomenų suskirstymas į prasminius vienetus, išskiriant prasmės perėjimo taškus. Tada reikšmių vienetai buvo dar kartą ištirti, išnagrinėti ir aprašyti, o tyrėjas duomenis suskirstė į dalis. Paskutiniame etape reikėjo aprašyti fenomeno struktūrą, sujungiant prasminius vienetus ir suformuojant nuoseklią struktūrą.

*Tyrimo etika.* Informantų teisių apsauga yra pagrindinis mokslinių tyrimų etikos klausimas (Ryan, Coughan ir Cronin, 2009). Pagrindiniai tyrimo etikos principai buvo šie: dalyvių konfidencialumas, anonimiškumas, galimos žalos vengimas ir mokslinė atsakomybė. Visiems potencialiems dalyviams prieš atliekant tyrimą buvo išsiųsti kvietimai. Laiške buvo kvietimas dalyvauti tikslinėje grupėje ir informacija apie pagrindinius tikslus, uždavinius, tyrimo procedūrą ir konfidencialaus dalyvavimo garantijas. Informantai buvo patikinti dėl jų konfidencialumo, anonimiškumo ir asmens duomenų apsaugos. Dalyvavimo konfidencialumas buvo garantuotas ir užtikrintas dalyvių anonimiškumas.

## 3. Tyrimo rezultatai

### 1 etapas. Institucinio konteksto tyrimas

Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidžia esminius institucinio konteksto aspektus, kurie supa mokytojus ir daro įtaką jų profesinės gerovės ir tapatybės suvokimui. Siekiant tinkamiau pateikti išvadas, temos ir potekstės buvo sugrupuotos pagal skirtingus lygmenis (mikro, mezo ir makro), kai mokytojai bendrauja su mokyklos bendruomenės nariais.

**Mokytojo asmeninis lygmuo (mikro lygmuo)**

Mokytojai įprasmina savo profesines pastangas ir nukreipia viltis į ateitį. Jie laiko save tarpininkais, kurie rūpinasi savo mokiniais ir siekia, kad šios pastangos būtų naudingos ateityje. Mokytojai į savo pastangas žiūri kaip į profesinį prestižą, ir laiko save įtakingais. Tuo pačiu metu į įtaką žvelgiama iš ateities perspektyvos. Mokytojai save iškelia į centrą, kaip pagrindinę savo profesinio prestižo priežastį. Tačiau puikų profesinių pareigų atlikimą lydi jausmas, kad aukojama savo šeima ar sveikata. Kasdienė mokymo veikla reikalauja stipraus profesinio atsidavimo jausmo, o mokytojai „atiduoda save“, kad pasiektų visus tikslus.

Mokytojai elgiasi taip, kad tai atspindėtų jų asmeninius įsitikinimus ir tapatybę. Mokytojai nori parodyti savo žmogiškumą, demonstruodami savo tikrąsias emocijas, o ne slėpdami tikruosius jausmus. Jie mano, kad toks savęs atskleidimas mažina galios distanciją tarp jų ir mokinių, silpnina neprieinamo mokytojo įvaizdį ir keičia stereotipinį požiūrį į mokytojus. Mokytojų savęs atskleidimas reiškia, kad jie leidžia sau klysti, ko nors neprisiminti ar parodyti

tam tikras silpnybes. Tačiau asmeninė ir profesinė sritys laikomos priešingomis ir persidengiančiomis. Mokytojai išreiškia susirūpinimą dėl savo asmenybės ateities, patiria laiko asmeniniam gyvenimui stygių, todėl savo darbą vertina kaip grėsmę tapatybei ir depersonalizacijos šaltinį. Mokytojai pripažįsta, kad dažnai jų asmeninės nuostatos ir vertybės skiriasi nuo mokykloje priimtų nustatytų taisyklių ir reikalavimų.

**Mokytojas ir mokiniai (mikro lygmuo)**

Mokytojai į savo vadovaujamą vaidmenį žiūri kaip į vadovavimą, neįtvirtindami tam tikro elgesio ar sprendimų, jie yra verti pasitikėjimo ir yra pavyzdys mokiniams. Priešingai, į mokytoją žiūrima kaip į asmenį, kuris būna šalia, teikia pasiūlymus, sukelia mintis ir skatina mokinius savarankiškai priimti sprendimus. Į mokytoją žiūrima kaip į svarbų veikėją, pritarimo šaltinį. Siekdami paskatinti ir įgalinti savo mokinius, mokytojai atranda jų teigiamas savybes, nors tyrimo dalyviai pripažįsta, kad tai gali būti sunku. Tam mokytojas turi rasti jėgų ir *„emociškai perlipti per save“*, t. y. mokytojas turi stengtis ir įveikti savo neigiamus prietarus bei emocijas. Tyrimo dalyviai poveikį besimokančiojo elgesiui sieja su *„stebuklu“* ir pokyčiais, *„kurie gali jus nustebinti“*. Mokytojai pripažįsta besimokančiųjų kompetenciją ir gebėjimą kurti žinias, taip įnešdami pokyčių į mokymosi procesą ir padarydami jį mažiau orientuotą į mokytoją. Siekdami mokymosi rezultatų ir siekdami norimų mokymosi rezultatų, mokytojai pripažįsta savo atkaklumą. Procesą lydi nesėkmės, bandymai ir tobulėjimas. Toks profesinis įsipareigojimas reikalauja priimti sprendimą skirti ir asmeninio laiko, ir pamokų laiko, kad būtų sukurti būdai, kaip sudominti mokinius.

**Mokytojas ir tėvai (mikro lygmuo)**

Mokinių tėvai daro tiesioginę įtaką mokytojo profesinės tapatybės suvokimui ir profesinio pasitenkinimo jausmui. Mokytojai patiria poveikį tiesiogiai bendraudami su mokinių tėvais. Mokytojai jaučiasi pripažinti kaip profesionalai, kai sulaukia mandagių prašymų duoti tam tikrą patarimą, kai tėvai pripažįsta mokytojo nuomonės svarbą vaiko ugdymo klausimais. Nemalonias emocijas mokytojai patiria bendraudami su mokinių tėvais konfliktinėse situacijose, kai tėvai kalba emocingai ar net grubiai. Mokytojai pabrėžia, kad pirmiausia su jais reikia elgtis kaip su žmonėmis, o tik po to kaip su mokytojais. Jie dažnai susiduria su tėvų nenoru stengtis dirbti su vaikais namuose, todėl atsakomybė užkraunama mokytojui. Mokytojai teigia, kad su tėvais dažnai susiduria su kliento ir kliento santykiais, o tai menkina mokytojų orumo jausmą.

**Mokytojas, kolegos ir administracija (mikro lygmuo)**

Kolegų elgesys įsisavinamas tiesiogiai stebint ir mokant kartu, remiantis noru mokytis. Mokytojai pripažįsta, kad laikas, praleistas su kolegomis, stebint ir dalyvaujant kolegų pamokose, supažindina juos su mokymo metodais ir būdais, kuriuos vėliau pritaiko asmeninėje profesinėje praktikoje. Mokytojų dalyvavimas priimant sprendimus vertinamas kaip mokyklos

administracijos pagarbos demonstravimo priemonė. Tačiau mokytojai jaučiasi pripažinti, kai gali dalyvauti kuriant sprendimus, kurie daro įtaką jų padėčiai darbo vietoje. Nurodymams „iš viršaus į apačią“ priešpriešinamos abipusės kompromisų paieškos, leidžiančios mokytojams suvokti save kaip lygiaverčius mokyklos bendruomenės narius. Darbdavio pripažinimo jausmas matuojamas darbdavio pastangomis, pastangomis ar siekiu padaryti ką nors gero mokytojams. Šias pastangas mokytojai suvokia kaip jų asmenybės įvertinimo išraišką, kuri juos pagerbia ir leidžia gerai jaustis darbe. Tyrimo dalyviai pabrėžia, kad toks santykis yra reikšmingesnis už gaunamo atlyginimo dydį. Kartu mokytojai patiria darbdavio (mokyklos administracijos) nenorą investuoti į jų tobulėjimą ir kaltina požiūrį, kad švietimo sektoriuje darbuotojai turi įgyti žinių tik patys.

**Mokytojas ir mokykla (mezo lygmuo)**

Egzistuoja disonansas tarp profesinių reikalavimų ir asmeninio sutikimo jų laikytis asmeniniame gyvenime. Pasiekti visišką kongruenciją atrodo sudėtinga, kai kalbama apie mokytojų asmenines vertybes, kurios gali skirtis nuo profesinių. Aptardami klišes, su kuriomis susiduria savo profesinėje srityje, mokytojai pabrėžė pašaukimą ir tinkamumą profesijai. Jais manipuliuojama klausimu, ar žmogus tinka profesijai, remiantis tam tikrų išorinių taisyklių ir reikalavimų laikymusi, o ne asmeninėmis savybėmis ir gebėjimu palaikyti santykius su kitais. Mokytojai mano, kad sistema neleidžia daryti klaidų ir kaltina žmones dėlto, kad jie „netelpa“ į „mokytojo pašaukimo“ sąvoką. Vietoj to jie verčiami paklusti ir atitikti nustatytas normas. Kalbėdami apie savo individualumą, jie pabrėžia, kad *„... mes ugdome asmenybes, bet patys negalime būti asmenybėmis“*. Taigi mokyklos išoriškai nustatytos taisyklės ir lūkesčiai suvokiami kaip varžantys, o ne nukreipiantys. Mokytojų nuomone, pabrėžiama galimybė būti lengvai pakeistiems, jei dėl tam tikrų problemų nukentėtų jų darbo kokybė, kuo nors jaunesniu ir entuziastingesniu. Mokytojai išreiškia apgailestavimą dėl darbdavio nenoro organizuoti profesinę paramą ir padėti tiems mokytojams, kurie turi bėdų ar yra pavargę. Jie tai vadina „*mokytojų suvartojimu*“ ir kaltina mokyklą dėl nepakankamų pastangų remti mokytojus. Mokytojo karjera vertinama kaip plokščia, be jokių paaukštinimo perspektyvų, todėl neskatinama tobulinti savo praktikos. Jie pabrėžia finansinės motyvacijos stoką ir kaltina požiūrį į mokytojo atlyginimą kaip į fiksuotą normą, kurią vargu ar galima pakeisti.

**Mokytojas ir socialinė aplinka (makro lygmuo)**

Mokytojai gyvena ir dirba tam tikroje socialinėje aplinkoje ir patiria jos įtaką. Viena vertus, jie patiria teigiamą poveikį, nes yra pastebėti, pripažįstami ir vertinami. Tačiau, kita vertus, jie patiria įtampą, kai susiduria su priešingais požiūriais į mokytojo profesiją, kurie kartais pervertina mokytojo galimybes ir jo profesinių pareigų ribas. Mokytojai pripažįsta, kad teigiamo grįžtamojo ryšio ir savo socialinio vaidmens įvertinimo jie sulaukia iš savo socialinės aplinkos, kuri yra veikiau kaupiamasis žodis, reiškiantis mokytojo socialinės aplinkos (tėvų, draugų,

sutuoktinių, partnerių ir kt.) ir viešojo diskurso ratą. Socialinis įtikinėjimas prisideda prie mokytojų profesinės ir asmeninės savivertės stiprinimo (*„tu esi geras žmogus“*, *„tu kuri pridėtinę vertę*"), didina mokytojų supratimą apie visuomenės siekius ("*tu keiti visuomenę*") ir mokytojo misijos svarbą (*„viskas yra tavo rankose“*). Mokytojai tokį grįžtamąjį ryšį suvokia kaip teigiamą jų indėlio mokiniams ir visuomenei įvertinimą.

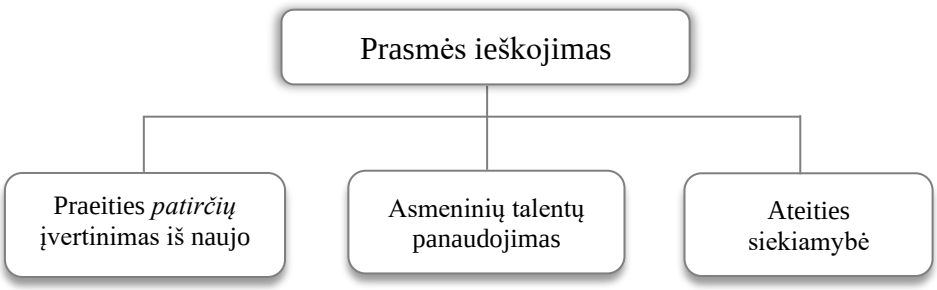
Kita vertus, mokytojai vis dar mano, kad jie yra vertinami ir kaltinami dėl mokinio nesėkmės ar nesėkmingo mokymosi. Jie laiko save turinčiais „surištas rankas“ ir kaltinamais dėl besimokančiųjų nesėkmių, nepaisant jų pastangų. Nepaisant asmeninio nesutikimo su šia nuostata, mokytojai išreiškia būtinybę *„su tuo susitaikyti“*, nes tai primeta supantis kontekstas. Mokytojai patiria, kad yra pasmerkti dėl egzistuojančios visuomenės nuomonės, jog *„mokytojas turi gauti mažą atlyginimą“* arba *„per daug reikalauja per viešas demonstracijas“*. Jie išreiškia nesutikimą su visuomenės žmonių nuomone, kurie teigia, kad mokytojai turi paklusti ir nekreipti dėmesio į tokius materialius dalykus kaip atlyginimas ar darbo krūvio dydis. Mokytojai patiria, kad yra smerkiami ir vertinami kitų, kurie kelia esamas klišes, susijusias su mokytojo misija švietimo sistemoje, ir primeta pervertintus lūkesčius, kuriuos perima iš viešojo diskurso. Be to, mokytojai kaltina primestą disharmonišką mokytojo įvaizdį, kai jie turi slėpti savo asmeninį gyvenimą, pavyzdžiui, socialiniuose tinkluose, kad atrodytų geresni už kitus.

Svarbu tai, kad penktojo tikslinės grupės interviu pabaigoje mokytojai pradėjo kelti klausimus ir kalbėti apie galimus sprendimus. Netikėtai jie paprašė tyrėjo būti jų balsu viešajame diskurse ir perkelti dabartinę diskusiją į valstybinių švietimo institucijų lygmenį. Mokytojai pademonstravo savo veiksnumą ir taip pat vertino tyrėją kaip partnerį, tarpininką, galintį padėti jiems siekti pokyčių.

**2 etapas. Reflektyvaus gyvenamojo pasaulio tyrimai apie mokytojų profesinę veikmę**

**Asmeninis mokytojų profesinės veikmės aspektas**

**Prasmės ieškojimas**



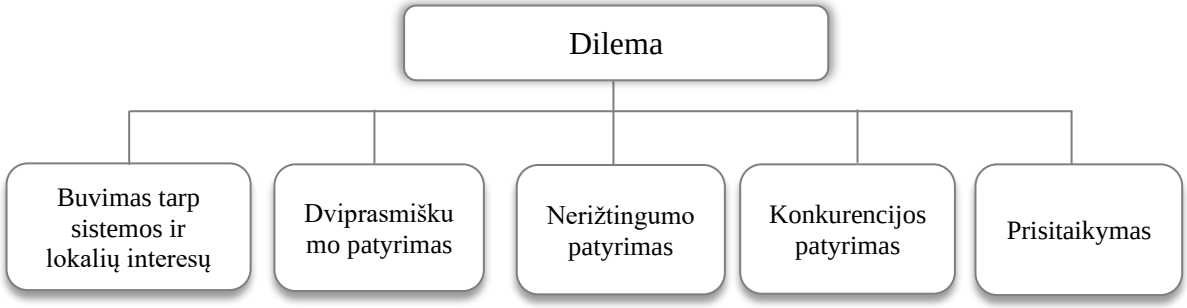

Veikmė, kaip mokytojo polinkis veikti, gali būti grindžiama ankstesniais pasiekimais, supratimu ir veiklos modeliais. Praeities patirtis, susijusi su tam tikru tapatybės tipu, gali turėti įtakos veiksmų krypčiai. Vidinės brandos pasiekimas suteikia stimulą pačiam priimti sprendimus

ir palikti varžančią aplinką. Mokytojų profesinė veikmė suvokiama kaip galimybė rinktis aplinką, kurioje mokytojas gali atskleisti savo talentus ir realizuoti profesines kompetencijas.

Veiklos profesinėje srityje priežastis – galimybė įgyvendinti asmeninius talentus ir perduoti žinias mokiniams, taip prisidedant prie jų augimo. Galimybė ugdyti ir panaudoti asmeninius talentus ir įgūdžius suteikia mokytojui pasitenkinimo, savirealizacijos ir darbo prasmingumo jausmą. Kartu atsiranda galimybė perduoti žinias mokiniams, sužadinant jų susidomėjimą dėstomu dalyku. Mokytojai, kalbėdami apie savo mokymą, dažnai vartojo žodį „duoti“ (*„duoti jiems tai, ką žinau“*). Galimybė vykdyti mokymą pagal savo charakterį ir asmenines savybes įgalina mokytoją tolesnei veiklai – prisidėti prie mokinių mokymosi.

Mokytojai imasi veiksmų, siekdami vadovauti savo mokiniams ir užtikrinti jų sėkmę ateityje. Jie jaučiasi atsakingi už savo mokinių ateitį, jų gebėjimą pasirinkti teisingą kelią. Šiais veiksmais siekiama įgalinti mokinius, užtikrinti jų sėkmę ir suteikti jiems galimybę ateityje realizuoti savo talentus. Tačiau ketinimai veikti atsiranda net ir neturint aiškios naudos ar tiesioginės ateities sėkmės vizijos.

**Dilema**




Mokytojai dažnai pabrėždavo dilemos pojūtį, o vienas iš jo aspektų – buvimas tarp sistemos ir lokalių interesų. Mokytojai atsiduria situacijoje, kai jų profesines pastangas mokyklos administracija vertina pagal kiekybinius rodiklius, pavyzdžiui, pagal mokinių, dalyvavusių mokslo olimpiadose, skaičių. Mokytojų profesiniai tikslai dažniausiai nukreipti į „vietinius“ dalykus: mokinių emocijas ir psichologinę gerovę, o sistemos reikalaujami kiekybiniai rodikliai nusveria kokybinius. Poreikis siekti kiekybinių pasiekimų ir konkuruoti su kitais mokytojais šiek tiek demotyvuoja mokytojus, verčia juos jaustis neįvertintus. Vis dėlto tokia situacija motyvuoja mokytojus elgtis taip, kaip jie mano esant tinkamiausia.

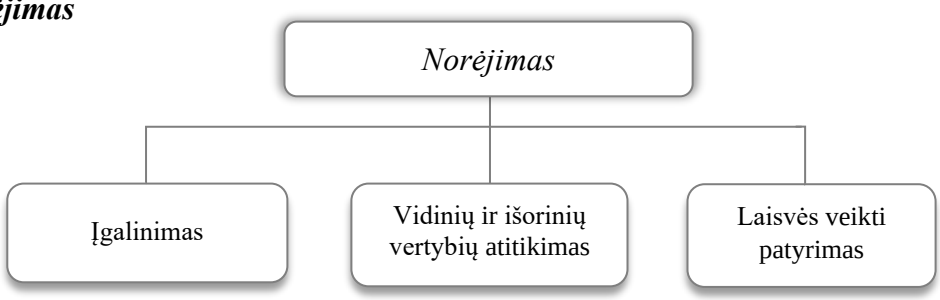
Mokytojai pripažįsta, kad išoriniai oficialūs pamokų vedimo reikalavimai prieštarauja tikriesiems mokinių poreikiams ir interesams. Griežtą pamokos struktūrą, būtinybę vykdyti išorinio audito reikalavimus ir įgyvendinti rutinizuotas abstrakčios sistemos taisykles mokytojai vertina kaip nemotyvuojančią ir nuobodžią. Intersubjektyvi, alternatyvi tikrovė (konstruojama per dokumentus ir politinius įsipareigojimus) vertinama labiau nei realios egzistencinės problemos.

Mokykla kaip institucija kuria savo intersubjektyvią tikrovę su savo reikalavimais ir atributais. Mokytojai renkasi tenkinti „vietinius“ mokinių egzistencinius mokinių poreikius, o ne taikytis prie primestų oficialių reikalavimų. Taigi tarp vidinių nuostatų ir oficialių mokyklos nuostatų egzistuoja neatitikimas: jaučiamas spaudimas tarp mokyklos taisyklių ir vidinių vertybių. Atsižvelgdamas į būtinybę pildyti dokumentus kaip rutinizuotą, abstrakčią sistemą, mokytojas tiesiogiai nesikreipia į mokinius, bet pildo formas internetu. Mokytojai susiduria su būtinybe rinktis tarp „vietinių, neprofesionalių“ veikimo būdų ir procedūrų, kurių siekiama abstrakčiomis sistemomis.

Mokytojų pastangos ne visada atneša norimus pokyčius ar naudą, todėl mokytojas patiria įvairių emocijų: apgailestavimą, pyktį, liūdesį, o kartais ir beviltiškumą. Veiklūs veiksmai, kurie nepadeda pasiekti norimų rezultatų, ypač kai kalbame apie mokytojo ir mokinio santykius, gali sukelti neigiamų išgyvenimų. Konkurencijos sukeltas pavojaus būti pakeistam, taigi ir apgailestavimo jausmo, išgyvenimas motyvuoja mokytoją veikti ir tobulinti savo profesinius įgūdžius.

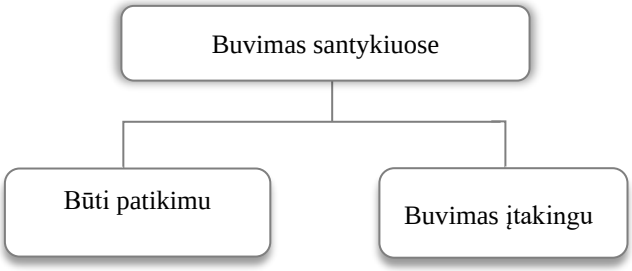
**Mokytojų profesinės veikmės santykinė dimensija**

***Norėjimas***



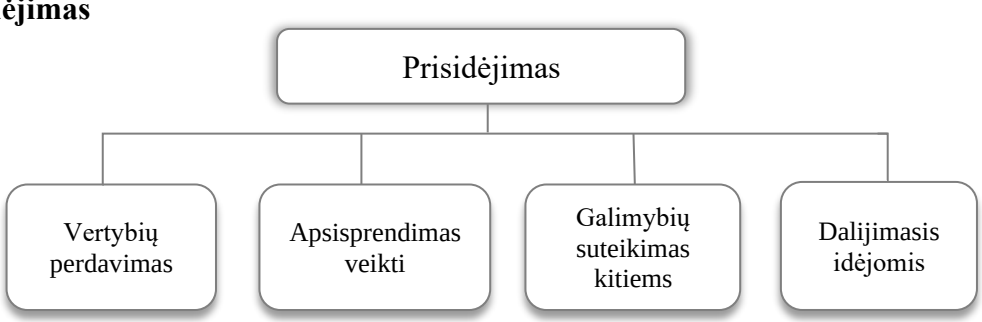

Noras veikti profesinėje srityje priklauso nuo kitų svarbių asmenų: kolegų, administracijos, vadovų ir t. t., pripažinimo ir pritarimo, todėl stipriai susijęs su santykių dimensija. Mokytojai jaučiasi padrąsinti ir įgalinti, kai kolegos išreiškia susidomėjimą ir pritarimą, ypač tie, kurie yra ankstyvajame savo profesinės karjeros etape. Mokyklos administracijos pripažinimas ir tiesioginės kontrolės bei stebėjimo nebuvimas leidžia mokytojui pajusti laisvę veikti. Tačiau laisvė veikti suvokiama kaip mokyklos administracijos duotas dalykas (*„man leista pasireikšti“*), o ne kaip kažkas, kas būdinga darbo aplinkai. Mokytojai veikia pagal savo įsitikinimus, kurie sutampa su mokyklos administracijos veiksmais ir lūkesčiais, mokyklos vidaus taisyklėmis ir tvarka. Todėl mokytojai yra labiau motyvuoti veikti profesinėje srityje, nepaisant didelių laiko ir darbo krūvio apribojimų. Dėl to mokytojai patiria laimės ir pasitenkinimo savo darbu jausmą ir motyvuoja tolesnei profesinei veiklai. Mokytojai aktyviai veikia, kai mokyklos aplinkos reikalavimai ir taisyklės sutampa su jų pačių vidinėmis taisyklėmis ir veikimo būdais.

**Buvimas santykiuose**




Mokytojas deda pastangas ir skiria savo laiką, kad palaikytų patikimus santykius su mokiniais, skatindamas juos kalbėti neoficialiomis temomis, atsiverti ir dalytis rūpesčiais. Mokytojai savo veikmę vertina per pastangas, kurias jie deda palaikydami santykius su mokiniais: atvirumą, palaikymą, įtampos nebuvimą, pasitikėjimą ir pan. Mokytojai atkreipia dėmesį į bendravimo su mokiniais pobūdį ir pabrėžia pokalbių atvirumą, baimės nebuvimą pokalbiuose, mokytojo darbo vertinimą. Mokytojai patiria profesinę veikmę atsisakydami veikti „tradiciniu“ būdu ir skatindami mokinius savarankiškai vertinti ir vertinti mokytojo darbą.

**Prisidėjimas**



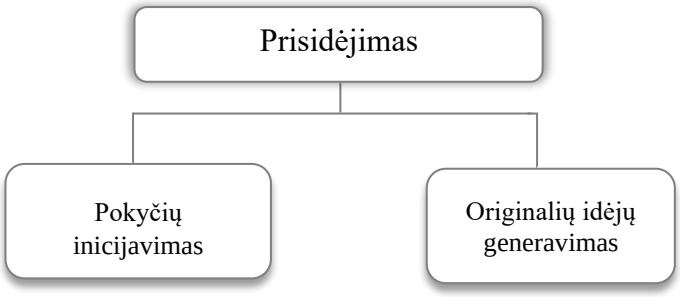

Priežastis veikti ir tobulinti savo mokymą – stebėti mokinių reakciją ir sėkmę. Mokytojai nusprendžia neapsiriboti vien tik mokytojo vaidmeniu ir suteikti mokiniams kokybišką mokymosi patirtį, pasitelkdami papildomas netradicines mokymo priemones ir metodus. Kartais mokytojų veiksmai nukreipti į tai, kad mokiniai išbandytų naujas sritis už mokyklos ribų. Kai kurie mokytojai neapsiriboja nustatytais vaidmenimis ir įtraukia mokinius į kitą veiklą, kurioje jie gali įgyti kitokių žinių ir patirties. Kai kuriuos veiksmus gali paskatinti tam tikros problemos, viena iš jų – mokinių motyvacijos atlikti užduotis ir aktyviai dalyvauti mokymosi procese stoka. Taigi kai kurie mokytojai pasirinko veikti ir kurti skirtingus būdus šiai problemai spręsti.

Mokytojai veikia siekdami perteikti tas vertybes, kurios, jų manymu, yra svarbios, ir dalijasi idėjomis, kurias, jų manymu, verta skleisti. Sąmoninga veikmė pasireiškia iniciatyvomis dalytis idėjomis su mokiniais ar kolegomis, suteikiant jiems galimybę mokytis ir tobulėti profesinėje srityje. Mokytojai su kolegomis dalijasi idėjomis, susijusiomis su jų profesine sritimi. Tų idėjų pripažinimas kolegų tiesiogiai veikia mokytojo savo profesinio tapatumo suvokimą ir

pasiekimų jausmą. Veikmė veda prie mokytojo lyderystės įgyvendinimo kartu su kolegomis. Be to, į idėjos tobulinimo ir plėtojimo procesą dažnai įtraukiami ir mokiniai. Vienas iš mokytojų teigė: ,,Aš niekada nepasilieku žinių sau", tai reiškia, kad jis veikia ir dalijasi žiniomis bei praturtina kitus.

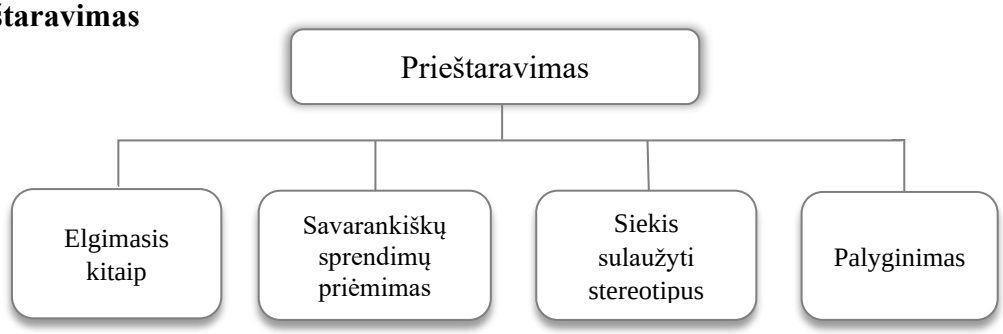
**Praktinis mokytojo profesinės veikmės aspektas**

**Prisidėjimas**




Kitas prisidėjimo aspektas susijęs su praktiniu klausimu, kai mokytojai, susidūrę su sudėtingomis kliūtimis (pavyzdžiui, kai mokytojai turėjo organizuoti mokymosi procesą nuotoliniu būdu), kuria ir aktyviai kuria naujus mokymo būdus. Mokytojai veikia tikslingai, siekdami pagerinti mokymosi procesą ir sukurti sistemą, kurioje mokiniai galėtų veiksmingai bendradarbiauti. Poreikį generuoti naujas idėjas ir veikti kaip agentui gali lemti besikeičiančios darbo sąlygos.

**Prieštaravimas**

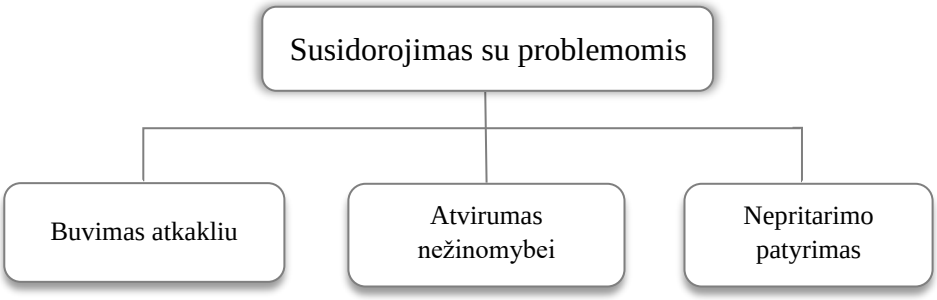



Mokytojai patiria profesinę veikmę, nes savo profesinėje srityje elgiasi skirtingai. Kai kurie iš jų kritiškai vertina vadovėlių naudojimą. Mokytojai pripažįsta, kad mokinių knygoms trūksta ryšio su realaus laiko įvykiais, todėl jie elgiasi kitaip ir ieško geresnių žinių šaltinių. Vienas iš motyvų elgtis kitaip reiškia mokytojų norą pakeisti esamą mokinių mąstymo būdą ir sulaužyti egzistuojančius stereotipus, kurie, jų manymu, egzistuoja mokyklos bendruomenėje. Pavyzdžiui, mokytojai siekia pakeisti nusistovėjusį mokinių požiūrį į bažnyčią ir tikėjimą arba į stereotipus, kaip turėtų elgtis ir atrodyti mokytojas. Mokytojai pabrėžia, kad tokios nuostatos yra nusistovėjusios normos, perduotos iš šeimų ir aplinkos.

Mokytojai savo mokymo būdus sugretina su kolegų taikoma įprastine mokymo praktika ir kolegų pasyvumu, kurie buvo linkę pamokas vesti labiau įprastinėmis ir rutinizuotomis

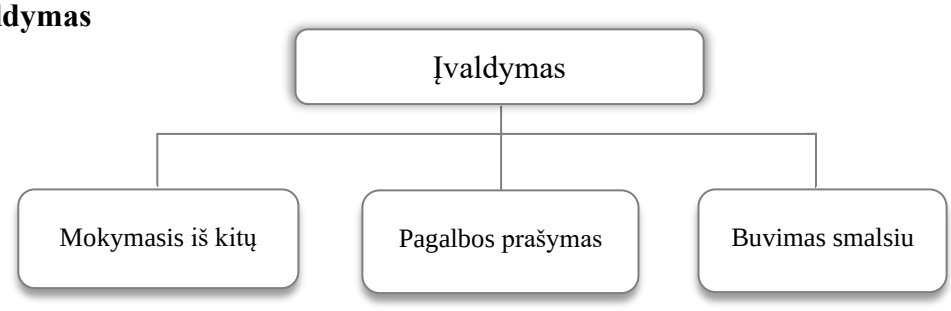
formomis. Jie lygina įvairius mokymo metodus, požiūrius, vadovėlių naudojimą, bendravimo su mokiniais pobūdį (distancijos išlaikymas ir hierarchijos palaikymas, o ne lygybės ugdymas), technologijų taikymą ir kt. Kai kurie mokytojai save laikė tais, kurie į klasę įneša naujumo, judesio ir aktyvumo. Šie veiksmai atitinka mokytojų gebėjimus ir profesinius įsitikinimus, taigi ir jų profesinę tapatybę.

**Susidorojimas su problemomis**




Kai kurie mokytojai patyrė profesinę veikmę kaip nuotykį priimant veiksmus ir sprendimus, ir kartais šie netikėti sprendimai atnešdavo sėkmingų rezultatų. Kai kurie mokytojai pripažįsta, kad inicijuoja tam tikrus naujoviškus mokymo ir mokymosi būdus ir suvokia juos kaip nuotykius. Atvirumas netikrumui leidžia bandyti ieškoti veikimo būdų, įgyvendinti naujus metodus. Taigi buvimas veikėju reiškia rizikos prisiėmimą ir toleravimą, o kartu reiškia mokytojo norą veikti (*„galvoju, kodėl gi ne?“*). Mokytojų profesinę veikmę kartais lydi kolegų nepritarimo jausmas, kurie gali vertinti naujus veikimo, pamokos vedimo būdus, kurie, jų nuomone, prieštarauja įprastoms mokyklos normoms. Visuomenėje priimtos mokyklos normos ir mokytojų vidinių įsitikinimų bei siekių susidūrimas verčia juos patirti absurdo ir nuostabos jausmą. Taigi kai kurie mokytojai savo veikmę suvokia kaip pasipriešinimą daugumos nuomonei, nukrypimą nuo normos, o ne paklusimą priimtoms veiklos normoms.

**Įvaldymas**




Mokytojai pripažįsta, kad mokosi iš savo mokinių ir kolegų, todėl veikia siekdami vystytis ir tobulėti profesinėje srityje. Asmeninis nesutikimas su tam tikrais nustatytais mokymo būdais skatina mokytojus veikti ir ieškoti kitų, labiau tenkinančių ir priimtinų sprendimų. Taigi mokytojai kreipiasi į kolegas ir prašo tam tikros pagalbos, o kaip pagrindinius veiksnius, skatinančius imtis veiksmų, pabrėžia smalsumą ir atkaklumą. Smalsumas verčia mokytoją ieškoti

žinių ir įgūdžių mokyklos bendruomenėje ir mokiniuose. Smalsumas laikomas viena pagrindinių savybių, leidžiančių mokytojui ieškoti naujų žinių, įgyti įgūdžių ir tobulinti profesinę kompetenciją, ieškoti naujų idėjų ir įsivaizduoti galimybes jas pritaikyti savo pedagoginėje praktikoje. Mokytojai pabrėžia, kad smalsumas yra viena iš pagrindinių predispozicijų, leidžiančių jiems ieškoti naujų idėjų, kuriomis jie galėtų dalytis.

**Diskusija**

Šiuo tyrimu siekta išryškinti esminius mokytojų profesinės veikmės aspektus, remiantis mokytojų kasdiene patirtimi. Tyrimas buvo vykdomas dviem etapais, kurie leido ištirti mokytojus supantį kontekstą ir įsigilinti į atskirų mokytojų gyvenamąjį pasaulį. Tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad mokytojų profesinė veikmė labai priklauso nuo mokytojo biografijos ir profesinio konteksto, kuris tuo pat metu ir įgalina, ir varžo mokytojų veikmę; mokytojų profesinė veikmė reiškia mokytojo gebėjimą priimti sprendimus ir vertinimus bei pasirinkti vieną iš galimų veiksmų būdų. Mokytojų veikmė yra sąmoningas ir tikslingas veiksmas, pasireiškiantis profesiniu pasirinkimu, nukreiptu į būsimus rezultatus. Mokytojų profesinė veikmė nereiškia vien tik kitokio elgesio, bet mokytojai gali sąmoningai pasirinkti atkurti socialines struktūras (Morrison, 2005). Tačiau mokytojai veiklos apribojimus suvokia kaip galimybes įsitraukti į veiklą, o tai rodo Giddenso (1984) išsakytą dvejopą mokytojų veikmės ir supančios struktūros prigimtį. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad mokytojų profesinės veikmės fenomenas apima aštuonis elementus (temas), kurie buvo svarbiausi tyrimo duomenyse: prasmingumo ieškojimas, noras, buvimas santykyje, buvimas dilemoje, prisidėjimas, prieštaravimas, susidorojimas ir įvaldymas.

Mokytojų profesinė veikmė pasireiškia prasmės ieškojimu ir mokymo įprasminimu. Tai apima praeities pasiekimų, supratimo ir pasirinkimų pervertinimą, asmeninių talentų įgyvendinimo būdų ieškojimą, ateities sėkmės siekimą. Mokytojai dažniausiai svarstė apie savo biografiją, savo ankstesnę patirtį, daugiausia apie tai, kaip jie įgijo profesiją. Mokytojai kelią link mokytojo profesijos laiko tam tikra savo asmeninės pozicijos išraiška arba nesutikimu su esama padėtimi. Mokytojų tapatybės klausimas šiuo atveju yra ypač svarbus, nes praeities patirties ir veiklos būdų apmąstymas leidžia mokytojams selektyviai reaktyvuoti savo tolesnius veiksmus. Daugeliui tyrimo dalyvių buvo būdingas modelis „praeitis-šiandien“, kai jie apmąstydavo asmenines istorines tapimo mokytoju, profesinės patirties įgijimo ir veikimo perspektyvas. Svarbu tai, kad mokytojai geba sąmoningai apmąstyti savo patirtį ir apgalvoti savo dabartinius ir būsimus veiksmus, o tai sutampa su Giddenso praktinės ir diskursyvios sąmonės idėjomis. Mokytojai yra linkę ieškoti prasmės ir į savo veikimą žiūri kaip į galimybę pasirinkti aplinką, kurioje nori dirbti, aplinką, kurioje gali realizuoti savo talentus ir įgyvendinti kompetencijas.

Mokytojų veikmė nebūtinai reiškia tik teigiamas emocijas ar sėkmingus pasiekimus. Profesinės veikmės patirtis apima susidūrimą su tam tikromis dilemomis ir jų įveikimą, ir čia ryšys tarp veikmės ir supančių struktūrų atrodo svarbiausias. Mokytojai patiria tam tikrą neatitikimą tarp oficialių mokyklos reikalavimų ir savo profesinių įsitikinimų, pavyzdžiui, mokinių vertinimo ar mokytojo veiklos vertinimo klausimais. Meritokratinis požiūris, kai labiausiai vertinama sėkmė ir pasiekimai, vertinamas kaip varžantis mokytojo veiksnumą. Kita dilema susijusi su dviprasmiškumo išgyvenimu, kai mokytojo veiksmai nepadeda pasiekti norimų rezultatų, todėl mokytojai patiria apgailestavimo, pykčio, liūdesio, o kartais ir beviltiškumo jausmą. Veikmė suvokiama per savęs atidavimą procesui (*„Aš atidaviau daug savęs“*), kaip savotišką auką, o ne naudą. Mokytojai aukoja savo laiką, kuris dažnai atimamas iš jų asmeninio gyvenimo. Taip pat buvo pabrėžta prisitaikymo prie esamos nusistovėjusios praktikos problema. Dokumentų tvarkymas buvo pripažintas nepageidaujama mokytojo darbo dalimi, reikalaujančia daug laiko ir pastangų, tačiau nevaisinga ir suvokiama kaip nereikalinga pareiga. Būtinybė pildyti įvairius dokumentus gali būti laikoma institucionalizuota socialine praktika, laikoma pareiga. Šios institucionalizuotos praktikos, kurios tapo įprastos ir rutininės, tačiau mokytojams nepriimtinos ir sukelia mokytojams nusivylimo ar apgailestavimo jausmą. Čia yra svarbus galios klausimas – kaip mokytojai geba formuoti mokyklų sistemą ir kiek sistema leidžia manevruoti ar pasirinkti galimus veikimo būdus. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad mokytojai turi plačias galimybes rinktis tam tikrus veikimo būdus ir daryti poveikį mokyklos lygmeniu.

Dėl šios priežasties mokytojai į savo veiklą žiūri kaip į pasipriešinimą bendroms nustatytoms normoms ar taisyklėms, jų laikymąsi, savo gebėjimų įvaldymą ir indėlį į mokinių sėkmę bei mokyklos tobulėjimą. Pasipriešinimo tema yra ypač svarbi, nes parodo įvairias sritis, kuriose mokytojai prieštarauja egzistuojančiai sistemai ir įtvirtina savo supratimą bei būdus. Svarbu tai, kad mokytojai priima sprendimus, kuriais formuoja esamą praktiką ar įsitikinimus, ir veikia sąmoningai, demonstruodami sąmoningumą, kurį Giddensas pavadino „reflektyviu“. Vienas aspektas susijęs su savarankišku mokytojų sprendimų priėmimu ir savo profesiniu pasirinkimu. Mokytojai renkasi mokymo būdus, santykių su mokiniais plėtojimo būdus, naudoja išteklius ir medžiagas, veikia ne pagal įprotį, o atpažįsta ir perkuria ankstesnius elgesio modelius ir elgiasi kitaip. Mokytojai sąmoningai pasirenka veikti priešindamiesi esamai praktikai, tačiau ne visas praktikas įmanoma paveikti. Nors kai kurie mokytojai nesutinka, kad reikia vertinti mokinius ar pildyti mokyklos dokumentaciją, jie vis tiek privalo atlikti šią veiklą. Šios nusistovėjusios normos patvirtinamos kaip taisyklės ir yra privalomos mokytojams, ir čia galime pastebėti paralelę su Giddenso (1984) kodifikuotų (mūsų atveju rašytinių ir patvirtintų) taisyklių ir diskursyviai suformuluotų taisyklių, kurias mokytojai gali interpretuoti skirtingai, samprata. Todėl mokytojai gali naudotis savo profesine kompetencija, kai taisyklės yra diskursyviai

suformuluotos (simbolinė reikšmė). Pavyzdžiui, susidorojant su stereotipiniu mokinių mąstymu apie tikybos pamokas, mokytojai laikomi susidorojančiais su nusistovėjusia mokyklos norma, kai šios pamokos nelaikomos svarbiomis: savo fizinės išvaizdos valdymas dėvint drabužius, kurie nėra socialiai priimtini dėl tam tikro istorinio laikotarpio normų; netradicinių priemonių ir medžiagos naudojimas, kai mokytojai atsisako naudotis vadovėliais ar laikytis standartizuotos pamokos struktūros. Spręsdami profesinius klausimus mokytojai vengia laikytis įprastų elgesio modelių, o „manevruoja tarp repertuarų“ (Priestley, Biesta ir Robinson, 2015). Susidorojimo tema atrodo svarbi mokytojų profesinės veikmės struktūroje, nes mokytojai renkasi, kaip elgtis ir susidoroti su neaiškiomis situacijomis, kurios gali iškilti.

Mokytojai geba paaiškinti ir motyvuoti savo veiksmus ir pasirinkimus. Kartu jie stebi ne tik savo, bet ir kolegų veiksmus, lygindami norimą ir esamą veikimo būdą. Svarbu tai, kad pradedantieji mokytojai nesitiki, jog kiti kolegos elgsis taip pat, jie veikiau tikisi palaikymo ir savo profesinės veiklos patvirtinimo bei pripažinimo iš kitų svarbių asmenų (Bandura, 1989). Tačiau jie pastebi kontrastą tarp jų ir kolegų dedamų pastangų lygio, kitaip tariant, mokytojai detalizuoja savo kolegų pasyvumą ir nesiėmimą veiksmų. Vadovaudamiesi Giddenso teiginiu, kad žmonės tikisi, jog kiti elgsis taip pat, galime daryti išvadą, kad tyrimo dalyviai savo refleksijose išreiškė nusivylimą ar net kaltino kai kuriuos kolegas dėl noro padėti mokiniams ir prisidėti prie jų sėkmės nebuvimo. Iš tiesų mokytojai tikisi, kad ir kiti dės panašias pedagogines pastangas ir veiks. Kadangi mokytojai yra mokyklos bendruomenės dalis, jie neišvengiamai stebi kolegų elgesį (netiesioginė patirtis) ir savo pačių veiksmų trajektorijas sugretina su kolegų veiksmų trajektorijomis. Tuomet rutinizuoti ir nusistovėję mokymo būdai tampa ypač matomi ir plačiai praktikuojami. Šie rutinizuoti būdai susiję su tradiciniu pamokų planavimu, tų pačių mokymo ir mokymosi modelių laikymusi ir net savo fizinės išvaizdos formavimu. Gavę teigiamą grįžtamąjį ryšį iš kitų (mokinių tėvų, mokyklos administracijos, kolegų, draugų), mokytojai patiria didesnį saviveiksmingumą (Bandura, 1989) ir įgalinimą pakartoti veiklų elgesį.

Kalbant apie santykius su didesne bendruomene ir bendravimą su jos nariais, mokytojui svarbūs kiti asmenys (valdžia, mokyklos administracija, mokinys, jo tėvai) yra išorinis pedagoginės veiklos motyvacijos šaltinis. Gauti pritarimą yra labai svarbu, ypač ankstyvuoju pedagoginės karjeros etapu (Bandura, 1989). Kai mokytojo veiksmus giria ir patvirtina kiti, jis patiria teigiamų emocijų ir dėlto įgyja drąsos tolesniems veiksmams. Šioje vietoje labai svarbus mokyklos vadovų vaidmuo. Panašu, kad įkvėpimas iš bendraminčių lyderių yra labai svarbi paskata individualiai ir kolegialiai veiklai, net kai mokytojams trūksta laiko tam tikrai papildomai veiklai. Tyrimų rezultatai įrodė, kad noras veikti ir imtis veikmės priklauso nuo santykių su kitais mokyklos bendruomenės nariais (kolegomis, mokiniais ar mokyklos administracija). Kai kurie mokytojai patiria profesinę veikmę kaip pasiaukojimą vardan geresnės mokinių ateities, savo

asmeninius poreikius nustumdami į antrą planą. Mokytojai patiria profesinę veikmę kaip pasipriešinimą visuotinai priimtoms normoms, elgdamiesi kitaip, rengdamiesi kitaip, taikydami netradicinius mokymo metodus ir būdus.

Duomenys rodo, kad neoliberalusis diskursas, pagrindai ir veikimo principai mokyklos bendruomenėje kvestionuoja esamų mokytojų gerovę ir tapatybę. Bourdieu (1998) išsakyta mokinių kultūrinio žmogiškojo kapitalo įgijimo idėja kaltina nelygybės reprodukavimo riziką viešojo švietimo priemonėmis. Ir tyrimo dalyviai patvirtino nesutinkantys su viešojo švietimo svarstymu per verslo modelio prizmę. Mokyklos normos, pagal kurias mokytojų profesinė veikla traktuojama kaip viešoji tarnyba, orientuota į meritokratinį požiūrį į mokymą ir mokymąsi, testavimą, vertinimą, pasiekimų lyginimą, slopina mokytojų motyvaciją dirbti. Mokyklos, kaip socialinės struktūros, veikia pagal verslo modelį, kuris neišvengiamai atsispindi mokyklos bendruomenės narių elgesyje ir tarpusavio santykiuose. Mokytojai kaltinami dėl nesėkmingo mokinių mokymosi, patiria išorinį spaudimą ir kaltinimus dėl neveiklumo bei nepakankamų investicijų į savo žmogiškąjį kapitalą. Tačiau šios nepalankios sąlygos sukuria mokytojų veikmės lauką, kuriame jie gali veikti ir keisti esamas normas, pavyzdžiui, kelti mokyklos bendruomenės diskusijas, vengti mokinių testavimo ir lyginimo, individualizuoti ir įprasminti savo mokymą.

Šiame tyrime neskiriama dėmesio mokytojo profesinės veikmės laikinumui ir jos kaitai mokytojų profesinės karjeros metu. Todėl tolesniuose tyrimuose būtų galima sutelkti dėmesį į tai, kaip mokytojai patiria savo veikmę per visą savo gyvenimą, ir empiriškai išskirti tam tikrus veikmės raidos ypatumus ar etapus. Dabartiniame tyrime daugiausia dėmesio skirta mokytojų profesinės veikmės patirčiai individualiu lygmeniu, nesigilinant į kolektyvinius veiksmus. Todėl ateityje būtina apibrėžti esminius individualios ir kolektyvinės mokytojų veikmės bruožus. Be to, tolesniuose tyrimuose reikia sutelkti dėmesį į tai, kaip mokytojai įsitraukia į kolektyvinius dalyvaujamuosius veiksmus ir kaip jie patiria kolektyvinę veikmę; nustatyti veiksnius, skatinančius mokytojų grupės kolektyvinį veikmės elgesį.

**Išvados**

Mokytojų profesinė veikmė suprantama kaip sąmoningas, tikslingas veiksmas, atitinkantis mokytojo asmeninius ir profesinius tikslus, vertybes ir siekius. Mokytojų profesinė veikmė yra tylioji patirtis, atsirandanti kaip nesąmoninga, „paslėpta“ praktinėje sąmonėje ir diskursyviai pasireiškianti mokytojui kritiškai apmąstant savo profesinę praktiką. Mokytojai savo veikmę suvokia kaip įprastą mokytojo elgesį, pagrįstą profesiniu įsipareigojimu, o ne kaip kažką, kas viršija jų profesines pareigas. Norint pripažinti save kaip veiklų profesionalą, mokytojams reikia nuodugnesnės kritinės refleksijos ir diskursyvaus savo veiksmų verbalizavimo.

Mokytojų profesinė veikmė pasireiškia per įprastų elgesio modelių laikymąsi, jei jie atitinka jų profesinius įsitikinimus. Tačiau veikti skatina ir išorinių reikalavimų bei vidinių supratimų nesutapimas. Mokytojai atpažįsta išsikristalizavusią praktiką, kai ji nesutampa su jų vidiniais įsitikinimais ir nuostatomis. Veiksmai gali pasireikšti akivaizdžiai, aktyviai priešinantis ar dalyvaujant naujoviškoje praktikoje, arba pasireikšti netiesiogiai, perduodant vertybes ir kuriant santykius su mokiniais. Mokykla, kaip struktūra, įgalina mokytojų veiklą ir kartu ją riboja, tačiau mokytojai gali joje orientuotis ir priimti profesinius sprendimus.

Mokytojų profesinė veikmė įmanoma tada, kai yra galimybė rinktis tam tikrus veiksmų repertuarus, o mokytojai gali pasirinkti, ar imtis veiksmų, ar išlaikyti *status quo*. Mokyklos bendruomenės vaidmuo yra labai svarbus. Mokytojų profesinė veikmė yra socialinis reiškinys, neišvengiamai susijęs su jį supančia socialine aplinka, kuri daro didžiausią įtaką, įgalindama arba varžydama veiksmus. Mokytojai, ypač ankstyvaisiais karjeros etapais, įsitraukia į kolektyvinį dalyvaujamąjį veiksmą, veikdami kitaip, inicijuodami pokyčius, laužydami stereotipus ir taip keisdami mokyklos kultūrą. Tuo pat metu stipriausias akstinas veikti yra pagrįstas santykiais su kitais žmonėmis. Mokytojai imasi novatoriškos praktikos ir vadovauja pokyčiams, kad darytų įtaką savo mokiniams, kurtų geresnę mokymosi aplinką ir palaikytų tvirtesnius santykius.

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**THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL AGENCY**

Doctoral Dissertation

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