

Opportunities for teacher professional development in Estonia: supporting teacher autonomy and collaboration with colleagues

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Introduction

- **Average age** of teachers – 47.9 (42.9 OECD average)
- **Work experience** – 21.6 (16.2 OECD average)
- Historically, **subject-orientation** in initial teacher education, students identities were related to their subject fields
- PISA results very good but many students do not enjoy going to school. Thus, the **performance of Estonian students is quite good**, but their **psychological well-being is of concern**. The latter could be linked to teachers' pedagogical beliefs and instructional practices.

Pedagogical beliefs

- **Change** in teachers' pedagogical beliefs from **subject** focus to **didactics** and **pedagogical** focus (see Poom-Valickis, 2003; Poom-Valickis & Oder, 2013).
- Confirmed by others e.g. Lepik et al., 2013. The average scores of different groups of teachers were higher on the **constructivism scale** (close to maximum scores) than on the traditionalism scale (close to the average score).
- The acceptance of **social-constructivism beliefs** by Estonian teachers was also visible in the TALIS study (TALIS survey, 2013)

Instructional practices

- Teachers' pedagogical beliefs are **not necessarily related** to their instructional practices.
- In TALIS study (2013), Estonian teachers reported that their most common practices were **presenting a summary of recently learned content** (80% did it frequently or in all or nearly all lessons), followed by **checking students' exercise books** (71%) and letting students **practise similar tasks**, (68%).
- Uibu et al. (2013) – instructional practices aiming at **comprehension, application, and individualization** (related mainly to cognitive constructivism) more than supporting students' independence (social constructivism scale) and traditional rote learning practices
- Uibu et al. (2016) – language modelling, teachers used dialogue in their classes, its main purpose was **to check their students' knowledge** or to simply **transfer knowledge** to students. It was rarely that dialogue was used to support classroom discussion and shared meaning making.

Pedagogical beliefs and instructional practices

- Teachers' beliefs have changed towards student-centred views over the years in Estonia. The **actual teaching practices seem to be more traditional** and are changing more slowly.
- Following I present some possible explanations as to **why these developments** have taken so much time
- Describe some recent **state-level interventions** that aim at fostering the student-centred turn in Estonian schools (see also Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 – Eesti elukestva õppe..., 2014).

Teachers' autonomy

- Estonia's educational system has been radically reformed since 1991, after the re-establishment of the independent republic. In 1996, the new national curriculum was launched. It had been developed on the basis of many western curricula but was **still mainly subject-oriented**.
- In 1997, new **national state exams** were introduced at the end of upper secondary school to test the achievement of the objectives set out in the national curriculum.
- Introduction of such **high-stakes** standardized tests **decreased teachers' autonomy** in deciding what and how to teach their students.

Teachers' autonomy

- During the last decade, both the **national curriculum** and **state exams** have been **changed**. Teachers were involved in this process – some of them in the workgroups designing changes and several others in giving feedback.
- Viirpalu, Krull and Mikser (2014) - teachers are now expected to act as **curriculum leaders** and 43% of them have been involved in curriculum development.
- Today, the curriculum is **still rather subject-oriented** in defining subject-specific expected outcomes, but the **general competencies** have gained much more importance and teachers have more freedom to decide what and how to teach.
- Schools, teachers and students have **more freedom**.

Teachers' professional development

- Another change introduced in the mid-1990s was the **teachers' attestation system**, which was important for the goals of that time but had to be adjusted to new societal needs.
- Pedaste (2012) has concluded that the old system **did not** support teachers' autonomy and professional development **toward using innovative teaching and learning approaches**, e.g. no position-specific or more complex work was expected from teachers moved to a higher level through attestation.
- In 2013 the **new professional standards** of teachers were introduced and these distinguish between teachers, senior teachers and master teachers. Research-oriented competencies. More attention to reflection. Portfolio-based assessment. University teacher ed programs designed accordingly.
- As of September 2013, the minimum or maximum number of lessons a teacher has to teach weekly **is not specified**.
- Thus, more autonomy has been granted to schools and teachers in designing the school's curriculum and deciding what type of work should be done by which teachers

Challenges related to implementation of changes

- **Resources**, schools should have enough money to differentiate teachers' work and salaries as well as support their professional development and research.
- It is not always easy for school leaders to implement these ideas given the limited resources (salaries on the lower side).

Challenges related to implementation of changes

- The resources are not enough if school leaders and teachers' **willingness to adopt changes** and **self-efficacy** or courage to take responsibility are not in accordance with the increased autonomy they have.
- Teachers should **feel competent** according to the expectations specified in the professional standards and other relevant documents.
- The need for **relatedness** should also be satisfied – in this context, teachers should share the new pedagogical aims with many other teachers.

Challenges related to implementation of changes

- Unfortunately, there are some **worrying research results** related to Estonian teachers' self-efficacy and willingness to adopt educational reforms.
- In the analysis of the TALIS data, four clusters of Estonian teachers have been specified (based on the sample teaching in lower secondary school, see Loogma & Nemeržitski, 2013). Two clusters contained teachers with rather **low self-efficacy (71%)**. However, among the teachers with **high self-efficacy, only one cluster (17% of teachers) of teachers was satisfied with their work and societal position**.
- Thus, only a small group of teachers has been shown to be prepared for adopting new educational approaches.

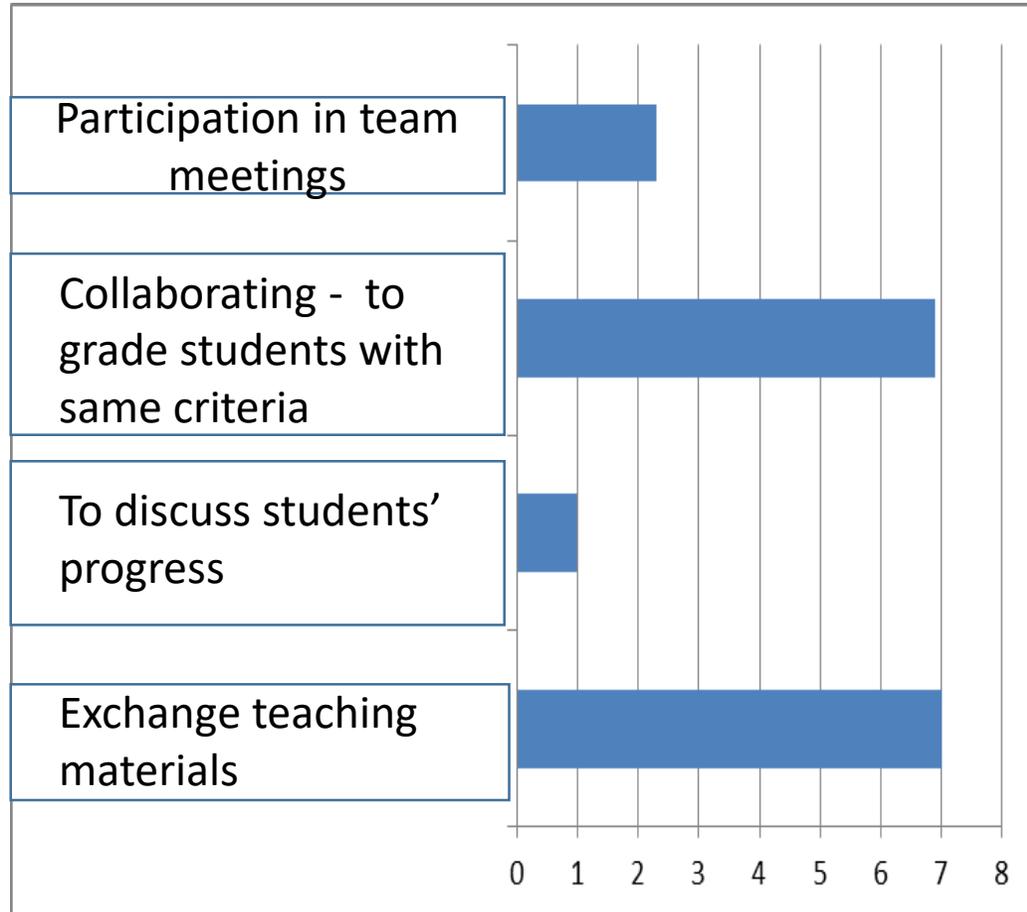
Teacher Collective efficacy

- AERA 2017, Jing-Ping Sun
- Meta analysis of studies over 25 years
- 7 studies on the impact of **teacher collective efficacy** on students' **learning outcomes**
- 11 studies on the impact of **school leadership** on **teacher collective efficacy**
- Impact of teacher collective efficacy on students' learning outcomes is big (**effect size 0.55**)
- Teacher collective efficacy is important **mediator** between school leadership and students' learning outcomes.

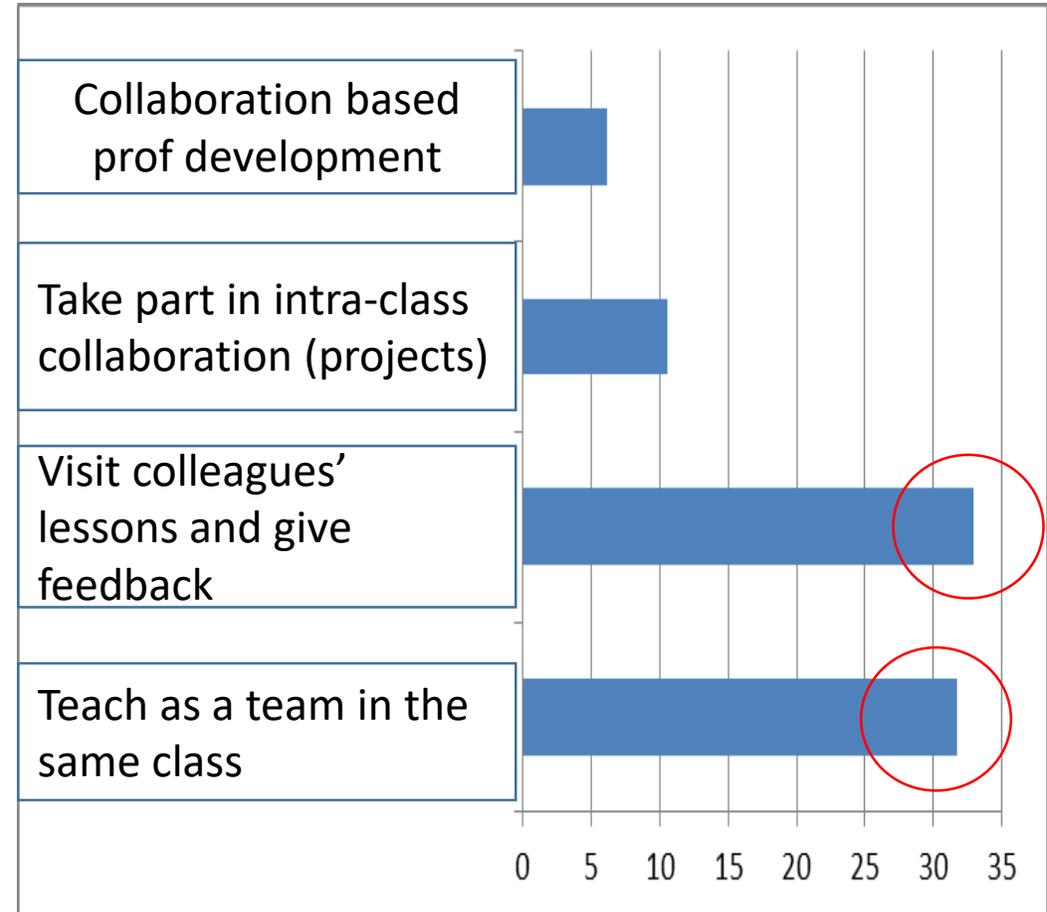
Teacher collaboration: TALIS (Loogma, 2014).

(Estonian teachers who reported **NOT involved** in these activities)

Work coordination



Professional collaboration



In brief

- Estonian legislative system of education has moved towards more **flexibility** and **decentralization**
- Increased opportunities for **teacher autonomy**
- **Resources** limited
- Teachers' **perceived view on their autonomy** is a concern
- Teacher personal and collective **self-efficacy** is a concern

Changing teacher education programmes in Estonia

- More **responsibility** to teachers
 - **Knowledge** for defining and solving problems (to overcome limited autonomy)
 - Support **emotional, psychological and physical health** of teachers
 - Supporting **self-regulation, reflection** and **action research practices**
- Support **teacher collaboration**
 - Implement collaborative professional development methodologies **e.g. lesson study**

Thank you!

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