Novice teachers' perception of senior management support and its connection with involvement in school development and collegial co-operation

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Summary

Adaptation to school culture and creation of collegial relationships are challenging for any novice teacher. Therefore, as novice teachers are insecure in their teaching competences, it is only natural that they have greater need for school management and collegial support. Hence, supportive school management has a major role both in creating collegial relationships at school and supporting novice teachers' professional development (Day et al., 2007), especially during the first five years of practice when the number of teachers leaving the profession is the largest (Stokking et al., 2003).

The aim of the current article is to analyse how novice teachers' perception of school culture changes during the first five years of practice. In our article we analyse the connections between novice teachers' involvement in school development, collegial co-operation and supportive school management while the latter is central to our analysis because we believe that the role of school leaders in creating a professionally supportive school culture cannot be underestimated. We hypothesised that a) perceived school management support is connected both with collegial co-operation and involvement into school development both in the first and fifth year of work and that these connections strengthen throughout the years; b) teacher's readiness to propose for the improvement of their work organisation is connected with their involvement in the development of a school and collegial co-operation and these connections strengthen throughout the years.

The data used in this article have been gathered from a long-term survey (Eisenschmidt et al., 2013). The sample of the research consists of teachers who participated in the induction programme during the school year 2004/2005 and who had stayed in the profession for further five years. The list of novice teachers who took part in the first Induction Year Programme in 2004/2005 included 145 teachers of whom 96 (i.e. 66%) participated in the

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first survey. From April to October 2009 the websites of Estonian schools were searched and the details of 129 teachers, who had participated in the first Induction Year Programme, were found. During November and December of the same year, questionnaires were sent to these 129 teachers. It turned out that 24 had left the profession and 29 were on maternity leave and, therefore, they were not included in the sample. Consequently the possible sample comprised 76 teachers of whom 54 (i.e. 34% of the original sample and 66% of the sample who could be contacted after five years) answered to the questions of this research project. The questionnaire as a research instrument was designed and based on the theory describing teachers' professional development in a school context (Fullan, 1991; Harris & Muijs, 2005; Senge, 1990). In order to analyse the data quantitative research methods, mainly correlation analysis was used with the aim to estimate the relationships between statements reflecting the different aspects of school culture.

The first hypothesis was partially acknowledged, as there are connections between the novice teachers' perception of school management support and involvement in school development and collegial co-operation. Although the school management support is correlated with fewer statements in the fifth year than it was in the first year, the correlation between statements is stronger in the fifth year. The second hypothesis was also partially acknowledged, as teachers' readiness to propose for improvement at school is connected with their involvement in school development and collegial co-operation, although by the fifth year their readiness to propose improvement has fewer statistically relevant correlations than in the first year.

The results of our research show that teachers' perception of school management support is connected with their involvement in school development processes and positive school culture in general, but not with collegial co-operation. Teachers' determination to show initiative and propose improvement to their work is correlated with their feeling of being fully-fledged members of the organisation and the support offered by senior management. However, by the fifth year of their practice the teachers' willingness to propose for school development has no connections either with their awareness of school goals or participation in collegial discussions about school development. The results of our research acknowledge that school leaders are partially successful in driving Estonian schools towards being learning organisations, although there is a potential for greater improvement.

Based on our research we propose for both school leaders' in-service education and teachers' professional development. Although the need for the professional development of school leaders has been acknowledged in Estonia (Eesti elukestva õppe strateegia, 2014), our research results indicate

that there might be a need for the implementation of more effective measures (i.e. international school development programmes, leaders „shadowing" programmes etc.). School leaders should have more efficient feedback to their work and more emphasis should be given to the development of their professional staff development competence. Although teacher's perception of their profession develops throughout their teacher education studies and during an induction year, it is also important that their professional development is supported during their first years of practice. Although, there are several forms of support available, of which visiting colleagues' lessons is one of the most important ones, they have been consistently under-used by Estonia school communities.

Keywords: novice teachers, school leader, collegial cooperation, involvement in school development, management support