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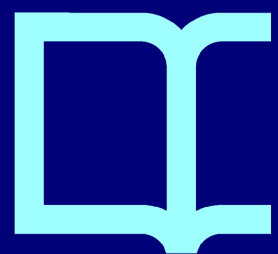

JÖRG MÜLLER, CAROLINE NORRIE, FERNANDO HERNÁNDEZ,
JUANA M. SANCHO, AMALIA CREUS AND VERÓNICA LARRAÍN

5. EUROPEAN SCHOOLTEACHERS' WORK AND LIFE UNDER RESTRUCTURING

Professional Experiences, Knowledge and Expertise in Changing Contexts

INTRODUCTION

This chapter was written using data produced as part of an EU-funded project, *Professional Knowledge – Restructuring Work and Life between the State and Citizens in Europe (Profknow).* This project aimed to compare educational restructuring in seven countries (England, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Finland and Sweden). The *Profknow* project juxtaposed *policy narratives* of restructuring with primary teachers' own *work-life narratives* of reform. This comparison highlighted the extent to which *policy narratives* were accepted, contested or resisted by teachers in each national context. This was a way of exploring how restructuring *policy narratives* have influenced teachers at the chalkface or have simply been refracted at various levels in the different national contexts.

Examination of *policy narratives* highlighted how *deregulation, marketisation, privatization* and *commercialization* have been a reality to different degrees for northern European welfare institutions since the 1980s. This could be seen in Sweden, Ireland and Finland and above all England. In contrast, narratives of welfare roll-out, Europeanization and democratization have marked the trajectories of the southern welfare states of Spain, Greece and Portugal. The result of this is that in Northern Europe, restructuring policy narratives are associated with a *decline* in public provision while in the Southern countries, they are linked with a *growth* in services. Whereas the northern countries started to build their welfare states after WWII, in the southern countries this process started later. Welfare roll-out in the south gained momentum precisely when the northern and continental European reference models entered into crisis from the 1970s onwards. The southern countries are still well below EU average public expenditure in education and have thus never reached the standards of the northern and "older" welfare states now affected by "restructuring" (Adelantado & Calderón, 2006). Whereas in England or Sweden teachers' day to day experiences were influenced by policy inspired by market forces narratives, in Spain or Portugal – recent government Neoliberal reform narratives were viewed as more rhetorical rather than influencing classroom practice. Greece is an exception and an interesting case. Here parents have acquired an influential position in schools—in terms of financial

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support—which allows them to see their relation to schools primarily as clients. Meanwhile Finland and Ireland demonstrated their own idiosyncratic trajectories of reform.

Whatever the governmental policy narratives, close examination of the teachers' own work-life narratives highlights how wider societal and economic transformations (such as the move to a knowledge society, changes in women's work and increased commercialization of society) are interacting with teachers' everyday lives (Norrie & Goodson, 2005; Beach, 2005). The investigation of primary teachers, '*situated between the state and the citizen*', offers a window on the larger picture of welfare restructuring and relations with professionals and their knowledge.

This chapter will outline the *Profknow* project's methodological approach. This will be followed by cross-national analysis of primary teachers' work-life narratives.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

A life history approach connects the personal narratives or biographies of teachers with the wider socio-cultural and historical context (Goodson, 1998; Cary, 1999; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Inter-generational analysis was used as a strategy for exploring how reforms interact with professional identities over time (Mannheim, 1952). Professionals belonging to different generations were chosen as research participants: early career teachers (around 1 to 5 years of experience), mid-career teachers (around 10–15 years of experience), and experienced teachers (with around 30 years of experience). This approach highlighted the varying identities, opinions and outlooks of cohorts of teachers with different experiences of reform.

In each country three primary teachers belonging to different generations were selected working within one case-study school. Teachers' life stories were captured by way of two interviews with each participant. The first interview was held in a semi-structured and open manner, the second interview investigated emerging issues as well as questioning discrepancies or omissions. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and in most cases lasted between 40 minutes to 1½ hours. Each teacher was also work shadowed for three days. The field-notes produced during observations were converted to "ethnographic descriptions" (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994) and used to contextualize and compare the teachers' life story narratives. The interview data and the observational notes were analysed according to a thematic grid that was derived from the general theoretical position of the project and work carried out during the previous stages of *Profknow* (Beach, 2005; Norrie & Goodson, 2005). The analytic-thematic grid provided the structure for interim written reports delivered by each member country partner.

In addition, focus groups (Morgan, 1988; Kreuger, 1988) were held in each country with teachers from another school, (except Finland, where a fourth teacher was interviewed and shadowed). The focus groups aimed to examine to what extent emerging working hypothesises were supported by teachers in different working contexts.

Drawing conclusions or making generalisations from such a small sample group would evidently be impossible. Rather, the data was viewed as personal, situated examples which might point to wider issues in the national contexts. When we

refer in the following chapter to the different case studies by their country name this is not intended to represent the overall situation in each country but rather to identify the research carried out in each context.

A PROFILE OF SCHOOLS & PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

This section aims to provide greater detail of the case-study schools and teachers in the seven *Profknow* project countries.

All the schools were public primary institutions, located in urban settings. The socio-economic contexts were middle to lower working class environments. The schools' size spanned a wide range: from approximately 160 students in Spain and Greece up to 900 students in the case of Ireland. The multi-cultural nature of the schools also differed, with ethnic minorities making up different proportions of the student body, for example Ireland (30%), Spain (80%), or Sweden (90%). School infrastructures varied widely between the institutions with Finland, England and Sweden being described as relatively "luxurious" in terms of buildings and equipment in comparison to the situation in Portugal, Spain or Greece where school facilities were lacking for example in sports equipment or ICT infrastructure.

Overall 22 primary teachers (three per country and four in Finland) participated in our study, as well as an additional 25 teachers and 3 teaching assistants who were involved in the focus groups. The distribution of sexes—18 women and 4 men—mirrors the increasing feminization of the profession in primary and secondary teaching across Europe (Eurydice, 2005:235).

The age of teachers spanned the "whole" range, the youngest being 22 years old (Ireland), up to 65 years (Sweden). Working experiences did not always correspond to age groups. In Sweden and England, for example teachers were in-and-out of their work, for example one Swedish teacher was 38 years old and in her first year of working in a school.

This inevitably brief and reductionist account of the participating schools and teachers offers a snapshot of the research. Detailed case-study descriptions are available across the different national reports (Müller *et al.*, 2007).

A CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY WORK-LIFE NARRATIVES

The remainder of this chapter will present the work-life narratives of primary teachers' 1) changing experiences (commonalities and differences) 2) changing knowledge and 3) professional re-configuration in the seven case studies of Sweden, England, Ireland, Finland, Spain, Greece, and Portugal.

1) Teachers' Common Narratives of Changing Working Conditions

Common narratives were identified from the teachers' work-life stories around the following areas: a) students have become more demanding b) increasing diversity of pupils; c) relations with parents have changed and d) teachers' prestige and status has declined over the generations.

a) More demanding students. A common work-life narrative expressed by teachers across the age, gender and experience boundaries, outlined how over the years, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain discipline and order in class due to more demanding students. This situation was viewed as occurring with different speeds and intensities in the different national contexts. In England for example, this state of affairs was discussed as occurring from the 1980s, whereas in Spain it was viewed as a more recent process. Teachers offered various explanations for the changes in children's behaviour. In the English case, teachers' attributed the rise of more demanding students to wider changes in society - commercialization, marketisation and disintegrating family structures. The Greek teachers primarily refer to the lowering of class barriers as the main cause of a changing student profile. Especially in Greece, where parents have come to play a decisive role in the educational configuration, the lack of discipline is seen as forming part of the larger picture of loss of respect towards teachers, as the following quote demonstrates:

> "I believe that in general teachers' social prestige has been lost…in the past, if my parents were in disagreement with a teacher's practices …they would not allow us to oppose the teacher, to disagree and come into open conflict with him, (our parents) would never allow the child to criticise the teacher." (GR-T1)

The Swedish teachers discussed the increasing lack of discipline and how the effort required to establish a sort of "ordered" and "calm" atmosphere in class was increasingly harder to achieve. In Portugal, these differences in student behaviour are mapped in terms of an urban-rural dichotomy. Even in the Finnish case (where teachers reported satisfaction with their working conditions reflecting the outsiders' picture of a "successful" education system) teachers mentioned that students have become more talkative.

The identification of this narrative leads to the questioning of the traditional model of teaching and learning. Teachers did not discuss that student discipline may be connected not only to issues of changing societal and family relations and working patterns, but also to the failure of schools to change *enough themselves* in the face of a radically altered, IT-knowledgeable, media-savvy generation of pupils.

b) Increased student diversity. A related key theme arising from the primary teachers' work-life narratives was the increase in student diversity. There exist huge national differences in provision, assessment and funding of special needs children in Europe (Eurydice, 2005:129). Teachers' narratives however across the Profknow countries were full of references to issues around the increased SEN numbers of children in school. In addition, increasingly there are more children whose first language is not that of the member state. Inclusive education was viewed by the teachers as problematic with teachers complaining about the lack of training in integrating pupils with special needs. The following quote from Portugal is illustrative.

> "I don't mean to say that we were against them [SEN students], we were against the way they were integrated ... because the children showed up in the school and there were no teachers to support them and no one knew how that was

> going to be done. [...] in the beginning, it was awful (...) it was insane, because they [the pupils] were supposed to be integrated full-time, as if they were exactly the same as the other pupils, it was... it almost drove us crazy." (PT-T1)

The narrative of increased student diversity was articulated differently according to the local and national contexts. The Irish, Finnish and English teachers talked of the increased identification of SEN children and the additional preparation time required to differentiate lessons in order to cater for a diversity of needs. In the English case one teacher highlighted the government rhetoric of inclusion of SEN children compared to the reality at the chalkface of disturbed children disrupting a whole class for four years. In the Swedish and Greek contexts learning difficulties were seen in terms of the relationship between the school and parents. In Portugal, as mentioned, teachers especially bemoaned the lack of official support structures for integrating SEN pupils and the personal stress this caused. Meanwhile in Spain and Greece immigration is a relatively new social situation and services for children whose first language is not that of the home country are not well developed which was an issue for teachers. Consequently changes in the pupils were viewed through this lens especially in the Spanish context. In summary, a narrative of having to teach an increasingly diverse population of students was identified, although this was articulated in a variety of ways in the different school contexts.

c) Relations with parents. Relations with parents constitute another significant, common point of change in teachers' work-life narratives. Parents in general have become more assertive, demanding a greater role in the education of their children. The rise of the parent-as-consumer policy narrative could be identified across the Profknow countries—although working in different ways and with different intensities according to the national context. The Greek case is paradigmatic for this neo-liberal, consumerist, "parentocracy" (Brown, 1990) narrative. While in the past Greek teachers were cautious about the scrutiny of the inspectorate and the administrative hierarchy, today their main concern is the scrutiny of the parents. A quote from the mid-career teacher in Greece demonstrates this changing relationship with parents.

> "You should keep the parents at a certain distance, in order for them to respect you. Otherwise, they do not respect you. They consider that you are similar, like them, or even inferior to them. [] If you don't try, you will loose the game. [...] everything we do, we "write" in front of the parents: through our appearance, in the way that we speak, by the work that we do, the photocopies that we distribute, from the appearance that the children's exercise books have." (GR-T2)

In England, the introduction of the right for parents to express a preference in school choice combined with compulsory testing, targets and internet-available league tables means parents have gained more power in relation to teachers. Swedish legislation has also introduced increased parental power, in this case via a voucher system which created a consumerist element to the system and obliged teachers to explore new methods of parent-school involvement as a way of keeping pupil numbers up.

In Ireland the cooperation with parents had a clear professional dimension in being tied to a remuneration scheme. Maintaining good relations was seen from a pragmatic point of view and valued as benefiting the child:

> "I just think it is so important to develop and maintain a good relationship with parents. You don't have to be a friend to them, but courteous and respectful. I often say to parents at our open meetings at the beginning of the year, 'Look, we are both here for the same reason. YOUR CHILD. We both want the best for him/her so let's work together to make it happen." (IR-2)

In contrast, in the Spanish and Portuguese cases, parents form part of school life but play a much less decisive role in teachers' everyday practice. Again, it was Finland where the most positive narratives were found. Here two of the Finnish teachers reported quite passionately the positive relations they had established with their students' parents. Although in Finland cooperation was required by the national curriculum, in general parents did not occupy a very "threatening" role.

d) Loss of status, prestige, respect. Examination of teachers' work-life narratives found a common concern over a perceived falling of professional prestige over time. Teachers from across the cases mentioned this loss of respect and the increased media public criticism of the profession. Literature suggests this negative self-perception might in reality be at odds with more positive accounts available through general surveys on teachers' status and respect (Eurydice, 2004:7). However, across Europe rising educational standards, and falling of class barriers mean the relative decrease of the historically privileged situation of teachers. As an Irish teacher noted,

> "Very few of the parents would have been to secondary school or passed their Junior Cert themselves so they would have been in awe of anybody who did go to college but now there's so many people going to college there isn't the same distinction." (IR-3)

Although Irish teachers were quite sceptical concerning their status in the eyes of the public, a recent OECD (2006) report indicates, Irish teachers are held in relatively high esteem. However, it is possible that recent industrial conflict (involving prolonged and difficult negotiations over salaries) and a changing economy have damaged the public perception of teachers, especially in the secondary sector. A similar situation was described in Finland. Finnish teachers complained about their loss of status but according to Simola (2005:458ff) they are well appreciated by the public, enjoying high levels of social trust together with members of the political and economic elite—quite to the contrary of their own self-perceptions.

The Greek case presented the most extreme situation of public attacks on teachers. The Greek teachers analysed the situation in terms of a rising, questioning, middle class, modernization of society and the waning of traditional (family) values combined with the expansion of consumerist ideologies, fuelled by a public discourse on the malfunctioning of public services. The Portuguese case, adds again the specific urban-rural dimension, where teachers' status was perceived as higher in past times in rural areas and was perceived to be under attack currently in urban environments.

In the English case the primary teachers described how their falling status started under Thatcherism when they were publicly attacked in the media for poor teaching standards and protracted strikes for improved conditions ended in humiliating defeat. In addition, teachers mentioned how increasingly media panic over paedophilia discouraged men from entering primary teaching.

Overall, the teachers' narrative of loss of status and prestige was one of the strongest motifs arising from this research. No matter which school or country, teachers expressed a feeling they were increasingly working in an atmosphere where their professional status was in decline and influenced by media blaming campaigns targeting them.

2) Teachers' Diverging Narratives of Changing Working Conditions

So far we have described the common narratives of changing working conditions. The following section explores diverging concerns over working conditions. When it comes to changes in a) accountability and b) curriculum reform, teachers in the *Profknow* case-study schools reported quite differently.

a) Accountability. Governments across the Profknow countries use policy narratives around the increasing accountability of teachers via increased governance-by-results. Teachers' work-life narratives however demonstrate the wide diversity in the systems of accountability in place.

In England, teachers worked within a highly prescriptive system where their performance was highly directed, monitored and evaluated. In this context, the teachers' narratives were full of references to being held accountable at many levels – via the inspection agency (OFSTED) and their students' internet-accessible test results as well as through new performance related pay schemes and increased demands for documentation.

In contrast, in Spain, the head-teacher noted an increase in "paper work" but rather viewed it as an empty gesture. This view was confirmed in the focus group as the following quote shows:

> "There is a lot of absurd paper work, useless which takes up a lot of time [...] you just photocopy and that's it. Who is going to look at all this? This is just impossible. Where does this go to? What is it good for?" (ES-T6)

The Greek case is different again. Official inspection or accountability to external educational authorities is missing as in the Spanish and also the Portuguese cases. However, the existence of a very prescriptive curriculum combined with the role of parents as source of control nevertheless, established a very tight regime of accountability.

In Sweden the teachers noted the introduction of the "Balanced Scoreboards" within their city district to allow public comparison of schools. However this system of accountability was not yet fully developed in the Swedish case-study school and teachers were resistant to aiding its implementation by collecting data. The Swedish teachers only took documentation seriously when it came to reporting on the SEN

or when claiming additional resources for pupils—but not in terms of controlling their performance. Likewise, the Irish teachers also noted the new situation requirement of filling in extensive documentation especially to gain resources for SEN pupils.

b) Curriculum reform. Curriculum reform is another area where teachers' experiences diverge to a large degree. The teachers' narratives are characterized by a diverse European map of curriculum reform revealing a range of changes in objectives and practices over time. Curriculum reform has played out in distinctive and diverse ways in the different national contexts and teachers' experiences of this demonstrate even wider variation.

Whereas one might expect a correlation between positive versus negative evaluations of reform depending on the resulting changes in professional autonomy, the evidence pointed in other directions. The English teachers, for example, appreciated retrospectively what was viewed as an increase in professionalism due to the National Numeracy and Literacy strategies. The highly prescriptive curriculum (although originally criticised) was in retrospect seen as helping establish a common vocabulary between colleagues while at the same time bringing "real skills" improvements for teachers.

> "The Literacy hour and Numeracy hour was for a couple of years and although they had their place, actually it frustrated us all, […] Looking back now though I can see that actually from a skills point of view for the teachers, we taught the Numeracy and Literacy hours so specifically that we now have a huge amount of knowledge and from the children's benefit it is actually a good idea [...]" (EN-T5)

As the experienced English teacher (T1) states, "[...] once we'd shaken off the kind of straight-jacket syndrome the Strategies proved quite helpful". Loss of teaching autonomy was not necessarily described as negative. The Finnish teachers described curricular change towards a more open and flexible framework in quite neutral terms. The resulting increase in autonomy also meant an increase in additional tasks such as extending the curriculum and additional documentation.

So the increase in professional autonomy was not enthusiastically embraced by the Finnish teachers. Increased liberty was viewed as an additional burden as described by a related study (Webb *et al.*, 2004:90). However, the decisive point significantly seems to be that the Finnish teachers enjoyed sufficient personal autonomy to either engage in the additional tasks *or not*.

Ireland provides a different picture in the sense that the recent curricular reform is embraced by the teachers (from the youngest to the most experienced). There were however varying interpretations on whether the current Revised Curriculum gives rise to more flexible and open practice.

The case of the Greek teachers provides yet another configuration. The curriculum is highly prescriptive but this is neither experienced as especially empowering or having a negative impact on the working conditions and autonomy. Rather, it is quite naturally accepted as it is, despite the fact that most teachers emphasized the stress they suffer during their work day.

If there is some convergence between the different cases including especially Portugal, Spain and England, then it is with regard to "tiredness" of reform. Portuguese teachers in theory have a flexible and open curriculum, adaptable to their local school needs. However, the reforms are qualified as "just words" in the same way that Spanish teachers reject recent reform as misconceiving the real needs of schools. In England, the more recent trends such as New Labour's *National Primary Strategy* (2003) are seen as a return to earlier teaching methods or "coming full circle". In Spain, teachers reported on the one hand on the high impact of the *LOGSE* (Organic Act on the General Arrangement of the Educational System, approved in 1990) which established the structure of primary and secondary education. Recent changes introduced in educational policies however were just seen as cosmetic modifications reflecting the ideological preferences of the political party in power rather than reaching the deeper social issues involved.

In sum, how curriculum reforms are experienced by teachers depends to a strong degree on the history of the profession and the relevant cultural context of each case. There is no uniform relation between the type of reform and teachers' experience. However, a certain "policy-fatigue" was shared amongst a wide range of the participating teachers.

3) Changes in Teachers' Knowledge

Policy narratives across Europe highlight the move to a knowledge society with importance being placed on lifelong learning (Norrie & Goodson, 2005). It should not be too surprising however that teachers' own work-life narratives around their professional knowledge are more focused on to issues already mentioned as well as offering oppositional discourses around standards in initial and in-service training. In addition, changes in opportunities to learn from colleagues were discussed.

Teachers in Ireland, Portugal, Greece, and Sweden described the lack of tools and teaching techniques that would enable them to provide very diverse students with the same possibilities of advancing and learning. Especially in the case of Ireland, but also in Sweden and Portugal the lack of special needs training was sharply criticized. The teachers in the Spanish case were more specific—they saw that more knowledge of child psychology probably would help them. They also were quite explicit that more knowledge in group dynamics and social cohesion would be helpful. The Greek teachers mentioned a need for practical tips of "what" and "how to do in class" in order to achieve and maintain a predictable work routine explicitly rejecting theoretical knowledge.

The need for new strategies in relation to other "new" members in the school context was also brought up by some participants. In Sweden, for example, strategies to deal with the municipality were sought as well as help with parent involvement. The Irish teachers as well as the Greeks described relations with parents as a new variable of their work, which made them feel insecure. The English teachers discussed how increased self-management in schools and inter-agency working meant dealing with new roles such as the school bursar or teaching assistants.

In addition, at the risk of oversimplification, the teachers' narratives demonstrated a struggle to know what teaching and education entails in today's society. This was

highlighted in the Finnish case where participants questioned the line between "teaching" and "educating" children. Whereas "teaching" refers more to the simple transmission model of knowledge, the "educational" model is more encompassing as it concerns moral education, fairness, equity and justice. As the teachers claimed, increasingly they needed to know "a little bit of everything". The Finnish, Spanish, English and Swedish teachers all posed the question of where to draw the line in the division of labour—and thus required knowledge. Depending on which responsibilities teachers were willing to take on (and which were abdicated by families) notions of professional knowledge and skills varied highly.

Initial education. Governmental policy narratives often focus on the upgrading of teachers' education and knowledge as part of a knowledge arms-race within the global economy (Norrie & Goodson, 2005). In contrast, the teachers' work-life narratives often offered critical opinions on their initial education. In all participating countries, access to the profession is now tied to a higher education degree. The quality of higher education and the relationship between theoretical academic knowledge and practical competencies however were raised as problematic especially in Portugal, Spain and Greece. The following quote from the Spanish early career teacher asked to evaluate her initial training is illustrative

> "The other day they called me from the university. []'We're doing a survey'. [] And the guy asked me, 'Well, from one to ten, [how] would you mark the education you've received?' []… And I realized I was marking with 3, 4… [] The guy was like this: 'Bloody hell! You didn't like it much, did you?' And I said, 'You can be sure that if I decide to start studying again I won't go back to your university.' [] Super-boring… Only the classes with musicians were fun. [] But when we were doing didactics of everything, and they were like super-boring didactics. So bad. We didn't do practical classes until the last year. I mean, very badly organised." (ES-T1)

Many of the teachers stressed the fact that the actual learning happened on the job, in the practice of working with pupils. This not only refers to actual class work but also to organizational procedures and administrative issues. The judgements vary of course between the individual teachers but always rather within the negative spectrum.

On the job and in-service training. Congruent with the rather low opinion on initial education was the description of learning primarily on the job. What differs across the countries is not the importance that teachers attribute to learning on the job but rather the degree to which this was facilitated or backed up by formal procedures.

The English teachers maybe provide an extreme case of plentiful in-service opportunities, where one teacher even noted that excessive skills training actually interfered with her teaching. In contrast, the Spanish teachers described the difficulty of receiving in-service training that does not fit the standardized courses, at the same time they underlined the necessity and importance of external experts coming into the school instead of sending staff off to individual courses. In Portugal a massive national upgrading program has been put in place recently in order to update the training of those mature teachers in the system that lacked a *licenciatura* (university

degree). However teachers were now criticizing not the availability of courses but their low quality and irrelevance for their teaching practice. Likewise the Greek teachers criticised in-service training as not very useful including their similar "academic equation" programme. In Finland, three days of training annually are required by a collective labour agreement. Teachers here complained that this type of training is not necessarily or practically useful. What the Finnish class teachers call for is, as they put it, "applicable" and "useful" knowledge.

This analysis highlights the diverse opinions offered on in-service training, throughout the national reports.

Learning from colleagues. Policy narratives discuss flexible team working as a feature of the knowledge society. The work-life narratives also brought to a fore the issue of changing collegial collaboration. In some countries new staff roles such as SEN specialists, teaching assistants, Learning Support Assistants, or Leisure Time Pedagogues (Sweden, England, Ireland) among others have come into the schools, changing the positionality of teachers.

Different mentoring schemes were also in evidence. For example in Ireland, government legislation means senior staff are obliged to tutor younger teachers and collaboration was clearly inscribed in the curricular reform (Revised Curriculum, 1999 together with the Primary Curriculum Support Programme). Class level meetings and other formal measures such as reserved time (within school hours) for meeting between colleagues are guaranteed. In England team-teaching and increased staff co-operation are a feature of the changing school landscape. The Finnish teachers showed a high degree of collaboration between colleagues. It forms part of their professional culture, albeit it is not required. Finnish teachers enjoy the freedom to engage in close planning, preparation and teaching but this is not compulsory.

The Spanish situation made it clear that staff collaboration depends highly on the people involved and does not involve formal procedures (a similar situation was described in the case of Sweden). In Portugal and Greece especially a picture was created of collaboration with teachers remaining on the level of *ad hoc* exchanges that do not really manage to make any dent in what is still a very individualistic profession. Teachers reported learning a lot from their colleagues but this knowledge remained highly personal and did not travel within the wider institutional context of the school or the system. Thus although individual teachers learn, their knowledge largely remains locked-in; it does not get inserted into the formal mechanisms of teacher education or in-service training where experienced teachers would feed back into the education of the new generations of teachers.

Besides these different types of collegial interaction, one can also describe the varying atmospheres among staff. The most competitive situation was described in the Greek report. Whereas at the other end of the scale the Finnish teachers report a very flat hierarchy based on discussion and shared responsibilities. In the Greek school, a hierarchical situation was described where the head delegated decisions without discussion, in a climate of competition. Here a Greek teacher explains:

> "There are frequently intense situations created between colleagues. Unfortunately we have the situation that if one tries to do something more than

> the other, it is as if we would take a medal, or we would gain some reward…. A lot of times, certain colleagues do not collaborate with each other, when they have the same class…Each one tries to make whatever he can from his own side, to show himself as a good teacher, and he doesn't collaborate with the other colleague, in order to make a name just for himself. To be distinguished by the parents. And in front of the director..." (GR-T1)

A sort of superficial cooperation was also observed in the English case. The standardized Strategies have implemented a common language between teachers facilitating exchange of teaching units—but as one teacher remarked, this should not be confused with school solidarity within the teaching staff. Several teachers commented they had too much paperwork to spend time interacting with other colleagues. The English teachers also allude to the tensions that can build up between teachers and different assistant positions where age can clash with qualification (younger but higher qualified teachers versus older but less qualified assistants).

3) Professional Re-configuration

At this point, the teachers' work-life narratives of professional re-configuration will be explored. How restructuring and teachers' professional knowledge is related the re-configuration of the teaching profession in the different national contexts? Responding to this question will weave a further layer into our understanding of primary teachers' knowledge at work.

As the teachers' accounts demonstrate, there exist a variety of professional ideals. Professional re-configurations are more varied than being reducible to de-professionalization or professionalization trends. In societies where parents and pupils are changing, increasingly there are tensions between those teachers who orient their goals around a more traditional vocational, social service model versus those who adopt more openly a performative view of their occupation with an emphasis on efficiency and managerial skills. This is well documented in the literature between "democratic" vs. "managerial" (Sachs, 2001) or "social service" vs. "commercialised professionalism" (Hanlon, 1998).

Clearly, the English teachers confirmed that their knowledge has shifted towards compliance with government directives and documentation. Although the English teachers may have had some reservations about the development towards a *more* standards driven practice, it has become reality. Retrospectively the teachers grudgingly support many of the changes and see them as creating a more accountable, modern, professional teaching force.

This is the extreme example however, the other *Profknow* countries describe re-configuration as a less violent process. In the Swedish or Spanish experience, this turn to a managerial understanding of the profession is quite remote. The mid-career teacher in Sweden noted,

> "*Teacher:* I am very concerned about the children, that they should feel well, and feel happy in school. I have seen this as number one, and I still do,
> *Interviewer:* Nothing has changed?
> *Teacher:* No" (SW-T2)

Taking into account the challenging situations of the Spanish (as well as Swedish) school, professional ideals of these teachers were oriented towards making a difference in the harsh conditions that define the reality of the school and the neighbourhoods. The tensions and conflicts between the children foreground the social relations in the work of teachers; academic content and possible performance measures come in second. Knowledge was seen as being rooted in the challenging situation of the school and primarily concerned with how to guide or re-conduct social dynamics and social cohesion. Rather than being concerned with attainment results, Spanish and Swedish teachers were struggling with questions of social cohesion and how to guarantee a sufficiently supportive environment where learning could happen. Learning and being a professional was primarily seen in the Swedish and Spanish context as being tied to an open process of individual and collective self-reflection (Schön, 1983). Teachers did however have the possibility to take their own decisions and become an active agent for educational reform and societal change.

The Finnish and the Irish cases could be cited as further examples where teachers enjoy a "certified" high level of autonomy for organizing their work. What stood out as the defining feature of the Finnish case was precisely the individual freedom of teachers to decide on their practice together with the headmaster of the school. In contrast again however, stands the case of Greece. Here, it is the increase in parent-power that has been influential in the re-configuration of teachers' work-lives.

In closing this section it is important however to underline that these dualities between "managerial" versus "social service" oriented models of the profession do not say anything about how the involved teachers value the implied levels of autonomy and control. Teachers' voices make clear that simple dichotomies between the "good" and desirable "social service," democratic model versus the coercive, managerial and repressive professionalization "from above" are hard to maintain. Teachers are themselves a heterogeneous group that come to appreciate the different sides of the coin. Teachers do not always desire more autonomy. "Yet, just as autonomy can be harnessed as a form of control or steering, so control can enable the exercise of autonomy. [...] there is a real sense in which rules and procedures, for example, can be facilitative" (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2007:210). As already mentioned, the Finnish case indicated that the higher responsibility of an increase in autonomy can be experienced as additional burden (Webb *et al.*, 2004:92). And the other way around: as observation in the school in Catalonia made apparent, teachers' autonomy can also be misused in terms of passive resistance to agendas of change.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter aimed to report on primary teachers' *work-life narratives* of change over time. The 22 biographical case studies opened up a wide variety of different experiences, exposing the highly individual and personal stories of each of the participants. At the same time, despite the very diverse biographies involved it was also possible to single out common patterns across Europe. Teachers seem to share a certain range of core concerns which indicate modifications in their professional expertise. How to secure learning when faced with an increasingly demanding,

heterogeneous student population, how to negotiate changing relations with children and parents and how to deal with the “imagined” or “real” loss of a previously taken-for-granted status traverses all cases. These primary concerns draw our attention to schools that have altered profoundly due to the changes in students. Students come to school now with social problems which teachers did not have to take care of before. They have to be prepared to take care of these new necessities and policy reform finds it problematic treating these issues as they cannot be resolved purely in schools—if they can at all be resolved even at the level of national policies. In the past teachers felt more secure of their professional mission (to teach reading and writing and to facilitate selection and social mobility). These demands have changed and teachers have had to re-configure themselves. Part of teachers’ work is now to educate and equip children for an insecure future with respect to work and knowledge. Analysis of the teachers in the different European contexts highlighted how the individuals, the profession and governments are responding to these similar wider societal changes through similar and diverging educational reform measures.

The *Profknow* project juxtaposed *policy* and *work-life narratives* of restructuring. This highlighted the strong variation in how reforms have interacted with teachers over time across the national cases. England is exemplary of a context where there is tight knitting between authoritative intervention and concrete working conditions. Policy narratives are closely coupled with work-life narratives. On the other hand, we have cases such as Portugal or Spain where policy exists but does not travel to teachers practice as neatly. There exist considerable margins to interpret, accommodate and engage with state policy. In these cases the variety and differences with which teachers recounted their experiences of “restructuring” make it questionable to speak of “a” single process. In these cases *policy narratives* are viewed as de-coupled from work-life narratives. In the case of Finland policy narratives have had little impact on government policy and teachers have not encountered strong reform. Between these extremes, Sweden, Ireland, and Greece followed their own trajectories with some reforms being more closely related to teachers’ professional reconfiguration than others.

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Jörg Müller
Center for the Study of Change in Culture and Education, CECACE

Caroline Norrie
Education Research Centre
University Of Brighton

Fernando Hernández, Juana M. Sancho, Amalia Creus
and Verónica Larraín
Center for the Study of Change in Culture and Education, CECACE