International Conference on Education & Educational Psychology 2013 (ICEEPSY 2013)

Understanding the context of teacher professionalism in education systems undergoing transition – Kosovo case

Blerim Saqipi**, Tuula Asunta, Eira Korpinen*

University of Jyvaskyla, Department of Teacher Education, P.O. Box 35 (Viveca), FI – 40014, Jyvaskyla, Finland

Abstract

This qualitative case study examines teacher professionalism in Kosovo in light of its rapidly developing education system. The study involves 14 teachers at the beginning of their careers (1-7 years of experience) examining teacher thinking against the evolving stages of teacher professionalism, namely pre-professionalism, autonomous professionalism, collegial professionalism and post-professionalism. The study reveals that Kosovo teachers reflect strong dominance of pre-professionalism and autonomous professionalism while they demonstrate a weaker reflection of collegial and post-professional aspects of teachers' work. It provides insights for viewing teacher professionalism within a contextual frame including dimensions such as education context, historical as well as cultural background elements. The study concludes that changing teaching and learning practices in an evolving education system requires a culture of addressing external demands placed on teachers' work, processes that enable teachers to understand their role and expectations through developing communities of practice and collegiality.

Key words: teacher professionalism; contextual factors; historical background; social being, collegiality

1. Introduction

Teacher professionalism is defined as teachers' responsibilities to control and develop their own knowledge and actions for the benefit of the clients (Webb et al., 2004). This knowledge development and actions normally would derive as a consequence of pressures be it from policies or other forms of pressure such as community requirements and overall trends of societal developments. Educational systems around the world have been

---

* Corresponding author: Blerim Saqipi. Tel.: +377 44 199 147.
E-mail address: blerim.saqipi@uni-pr.edu.

subject to similar influences resulting from global changes and innovations (Webb et al., 2004). Such influences lead inevitably to changes in teachers' roles in certain educational systems or to expectations that societies raise for teachers in light of reflecting these global influences into local policies and practices.

One way of viewing teacher professionalism can be from the development perspectives. Hargreaves (2000) viewed teacher professionalism based on the teacher response to the demands of the profession over different time periods. Hargreaves (2000) argues in favor of four ages of teacher professionalism: **the age of pre-professionalism** (teaching as a technical simple craft of lecturing and recitation type of teaching with teachers who master the subject matter well); **the age of autonomous professional** (teaching being a matter of judgment and choice and to decide what is best for their students);the **age of collegial professional** (teachers and teaching involved in consultation, collaboration and collective efforts in the organization), and the **age of post-professionalism** (teachers and teaching engaged with the parents and wider community/responding to external demands). In light of this context, teacher professionalism should be seen as a still developing phenomenon in order to respond to best meeting the needs of the schools and students and a particular important element is to look at how the feature of these ages interrelate and respond to one another in different contexts.

1.1 Kosovo Education context

The Republic of Kosova has a territory of 10,908 square kilometres and is located centrally in the Balkan Peninsula. Kosova has more than 2 million inhabitants and about 60 percent of the population is under age 25 (UNDP 2006). Its population is multiethnic with 92 percent Albanian and 8 percent Serbs, Turkish, Roma, and other ethnic groups (Vula and Saqipi, 2009).

Like all the other segments of life in Kosovo, education links with historical and political developments. Kosovo belonged to the former Yugoslav Republic and was unavoidably influenced by political developments in the last two decades. The then Serbian regime had banned education for the majority (Albanian) population in Kosovo in 1990 which continued until 1999. As an alternative, Albanians established a separate 'parallel' education system financed by the Kosovo Albanian Diaspora. Private houses served as school and university facilities. Understandably, due to the circumstances and conditions in which teaching and learning was taking place, the quality of teaching and learning was significantly lower than normally possible. Teachers were working with a minimum and to no pay, classes were large and resources very limited. In addition, the political situation was not favourable for normal living conditions, and operating such an education system was deemed illegal by the then Serbian regime. As such, it was also a dangerous activity to be involved in be it as administrator, academic, or a student. The 'parallel' system ran until 1999 when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervened to stop the repression of the Serb regime and gave way to establishing law and order where peace prevails. Education in Kosovo in the 90s was viewed as an instrument for maintaining a national identity and the spirit of struggling for survival. It was one of the key tools for, in addition to educating young generations, ensuring social cohesion and commitment towards making Kosovo a peaceful and democratic country.

Thus, the year 1999 marked an important point in the history of education in Kosovo. Violent circumstances ended, people were returning to their homes while NATO troops were marching in the country. Similarly, staff and students were returning to their old school buildings. Hope for a better quality education for all Kosovar students was restored. The emergency phase was soon over and Kosovo was established as an international protectorate under the United Nations (UN) governance. Under such circumstances, the education system required to be re-designed. It was aimed to support the development of a multicultural society and a peaceful country where members of all communities would co-exist peacefully and in harmony following a long dispute and difficult relations between certain communities.

Along with the gradual transfer of education competencies to local authorities, international partners active in the development of post-conflict state, supported Kosovo in designing a National Curriculum Framework in 2001 as a tool to shape teaching and learning practices in schools. This move was a major development in the education

system in Kosovo. For a long period, there had not been any development and change oriented thinking process. As such, it raised hope for improved student experiences and modernised teaching and learning in the schools. The overall aim of the post 1999 education development was aimed at societal development being a post-conflict environment. Development efforts in all the areas of life were aimed at developing a multi-ethnic society, cultivating environments where people would co-exist peacefully and establish the parameters for adhering to the wider European family political structures and society.

In the period of post-2008, the education system was largely focussed on providing improved facilities and resources for enhanced quality of education by building more school buildings and improving the infrastructure of existing schools. This was seen as a measure to develop the necessary conditions that would enable quality of teaching and learning. The school infrastructure was associated with the attempts to make education a tool for developing a knowledge society, education was made a national priority for Kosovo and all processes and developments efforts were supposed to lead to achieving the standards of excellence.

On the other hand, in 2011 a new School Curriculum Framework was approved at national level. The major reform that the curriculum is bringing to the teachers' desk is the competence-based approach to teaching and learning. In addition, the expectations is that schools and teachers will play a greater role on developing subject syllabi which were to date prescribed by national authorities and processes. The new curriculum drives teacher thinking towards outcomes-based approach.

In summary, during the post-war period, the educational system struggled between following modern trends and recovering from losses of the past (Vula and Saqipi, 2009). The tensions between the desire to change and at the same time clinging to nostalgia for the past are evident across education sectors actors in general in present day Kosovo. Nostalgia in the sense that the type of education Kosovo managed to uphold during but also before 90s was heroic and in some ways it was critical in saving the nation and maintaining the spirit of unity and prosperity amongst a suppressed population. Being that, people are closely attached to it, they believe in it. They believe in it for what it was.

2. Problem Statement

Despite the vast interest on student learning research, it is interesting to see the research on teacher learning is attracting research interest in the last decades (Beijaard, Korthagen &Verloop, 2007). Understanding teachers' working lives has become an important field of research internationally due to increasing complexities of work reality and increasing demands on teachers' job. Viewing teacher professionalism in the Kosovo context is to understand the interpretation of the professionalism in the context of the operational context of teachers as well as historical and social values that teachers hold about their role, school reality and job requirements. For societies undergoing transition, the concern for teacher professional identity takes on a larger significance since in the contexts where resources are scarce and human capacities for leadership for quality in education limited, teachers remain the important catalyst for the change and innovation.

3. Research Questions

This study is aimed at exploring the aspects of teacher professional identity in Kosovo and how this relates to the profile of teacher identity in the context of an education system in transition. The main research question for the study is: *"What is the link of understanding teacher professionalism in Kosovo with the contextual factors of teachers' work reality?"*

The sub-questions deriving from the main research question are:
- How do teachers perceive professional identity and teacher professionalism?

- How do the contextual factors influence teacher professionalism?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to understand the role and scale of teacher thinking and behaviour in a context of major education reform. The influencing factors (frame factors), though standard for many education systems universally, are perceived as specific to the Kosovo education system and are meant to support the thinking of countries undergoing transition.

The answer to the research question will elaborate the potential success of the innovations aimed at improving the school system and overall societal expectations of the education system (as Kosovo is moving towards aligning with the European Union and developing as a democracy), in the long run, and the congruence of teacher thinking and orientations currently in Kosovo (as a model for countries undergoing such transition) with these ambitions under a set of frame factors.

5. Research Methods

This study is a qualitative case study. Qualitative research in broader terms is concerned with how individuals or groups targeted understand their own world as well as the world surrounding them and construct meaning in view of their experiences. The basic idea of conducting a qualitative research is that the meaning is socially constructed. It is socially constructed by the individuals involved and in the interaction with the world surrounding them. The approach to this qualitative research is recognized as belonging to anti-positivist approach (Creswell, 2007; Cohen, Manion& Morison, 2011). Creswell (2007) argues that the positivist/postpositivist approach has the elements of being reductionist, logical, an emphasis on empirical data collection, cause and effect oriented and deterministic based on a priori theories (p, 20).

Data collection consists of interviews with teachers and document analysis. The decision to do a qualitative study was made based on assumption that the truth is out there in people's mind and how they interpret it in their situation. A total of 14 teachers were involved in interviews who had been teaching from 1-7 years in schools. Teachers were selected based on the mixed random-convenient sampling. Teachers were interviewed in their schools at a time agreed with them. They were sent the information prior to the interview day with general information on the purpose of the interview. The detailed interview questions were not made known to the interviewees prior to the interview. The interview lasted between 30-60 minutes each. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes.

Interviews consisted of four main areas in addition to the general personal information data. The first area included questions related to (i) the challenges teachers experience in their professional practice particularly in their first three years of practice, (ii) their perception of a good teacher and good teaching, (iii) strengths and weaknesses of their work context as well as (iv) relevance of their pre-service training to their professional practice and demands of the profession. No follow-up questions of the type "Why?" were asked. This decision derived from the pilot interview in order not to pursue a certain reality of teachers' lives but rather understand the natural reality and level and maturity of teacher thinking as it occurs in a natural setting.

The data were analysed in two phases. In the first phase, data were analysed through the method of Content Analysis. Interviews were transcribed and scanned for initial coding of data based on the codes that were drawn from the theoretical perspectives. Strauss & Corbin (1990) describe this as open coding. The initial codes were assigned from 1 to 4, number 1 representing the age of pre-professionalism, number 2 representing the age of autonomous professionalism, number 3 representing the age of collegial professionalism, and number 4 representing the age of post-professionalism.

Prior to actual coding, a data-coding scheme was developed in order to develop a frame based on which particular pieces of data would be assigned codes in order to analyse teacher thinking against the framework of historical development of professionalism (Hargreaves 2000).

6. Findings and discussion

Looking at the idea of teacher professionalism reveals that currently teachers in every context would draw on all the four ages of professionalism. Table 1 reflects a summary of Kosovo teachers' reflection on the four ages of professionalism as categorized by Hargreaves (2000), namely the age of pre-professionalism, the age of autonomous professionalism, the age of collegial professionalism and the age of post-professionalism.

Table 1: The reflection of Kosovo teachers against the four ages of professionalism[†]

Teacher	Age 1 – Pre Professional	Age 2- Autonomous	Age 3 – Collegial	Age 4 – Post- Professional
1	7	9	2	1
2	4	8	4	0
3	0	9	6	0
4	0	1	4	1
5	5	3	0	0
6	0	5	0	0
7	1	3	0	0
8	3	0	0	0
9	6	5	0	0
10	5	1	0	0
11	12	4	0	0
12	5	1	0	0
13	2	4	0	0
14	3	5	0	0
TOTAL	53	58	16	2

Among the teachers interviewed, six teachers reflected features of the pre-professional age. Six teachers involved in the research reflected more autonomous professional features in their thinking. Only one teacher demonstrated dominating features of the collegial professionalism. No one of the teachers involved in this study demonstrated dominance of the post-professionalism features. However, in general terms, overall teachers demonstrated a strong dominance of the pre-professional and autonomous profession age characteristics. This is an important indicator for teacher education and schooling in general in Kosovo in light of understanding the teacher development context and in terms of projecting development initiatives.

Another important element was to look at the ways and characteristics of the profile described under these four ages in order to draw on the elements that should be considered as priority development areas. Below is a summary of main themes that derive from teacher interviews (detailed interview analysis is presented in Annex A).

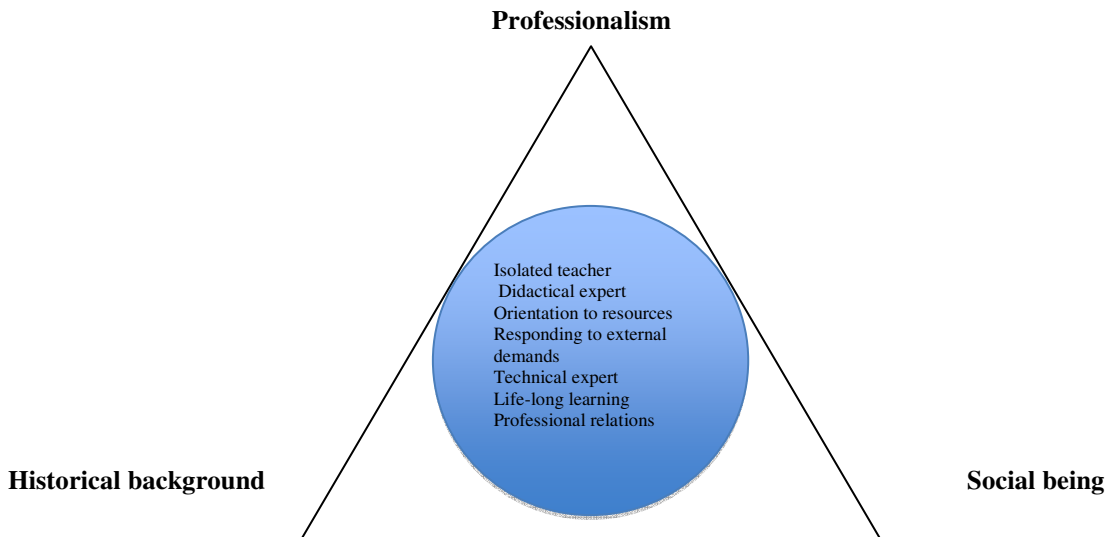[†] Numbers represent number of statements that appeared during the interview

Table 2. The summary of main findings of the research

Category	Themes (from teacher interviews)
Pre-professionalism	Teacher as technical expert Isolated teacher Lack of basic resources
Autonomous professionalism	Didactic orientation Professional relations Life-long learning Basic resources for teaching
Collegial professionalism	Professional collaboration in school Collaboration outside school
Post-professionalism	Responding to demands

Kosovo teachers viewed teaching from a perspective of task orientation and viewing it as a set of skills that are deemed to perform the activity. The professional relations appear to be emphasized more in terms of collaboration with individual teachers rather than a culture of collegial collaboration within a set of shared values and norms. Though there are elements of collegial collaboration that appear among teachers involved in the study still they appear more in terms of the collegiality restricted to the activities related to performing teaching duties rather than school development and organizational performance leading to better teaching and learning practices.

Context, culture and biographical factors are obviously crucial in shaping professional identity and disposition towards work and career (Flores and Day, 2006). Teachers are persons living and working in specific settings: settings with historical, social and cultural qualities which influence teaching, learning, professional development as well as their identity. The changing nature of teachers' work context in Kosovo is certainly seen as a major determining factor in the area of teacher professionalism. Understanding professionalism needs to be seen in the frame of what roles teachers are expected to take in their workplace as well as what are the conditions and circumstances in which the work of teachers is embedded.

Figure 1. Understanding teacher professionalism in context of change

Professionalism

Isolated teacher
Didactical expert
Orientation to resources
Responding to external demands
Technical expert
Life-long learning
Professional relations

**Historical background**

Social being

The role of the collegial and school culture becomes even more important. Individuals are not only part of groups but they are defined by the groups they belong to (Haworth, 2008). Looking from the perspective of the role of the context in outcomes of education, there is not necessary direct cause and effect connection between good teaching and successful learning (Day and Gu, 2010, p21). The success needs to be rather seen under the constraining and supporting factors concerned with teacher development and successful student learning. Kosovo is a particular example of when conditions and resources are both seen as a major factor as well as used as a tool to support the change of the situation. Teachers in one hand declare that resources represent one of the most influential factors in teachers' work. On the other hand, policy makers consider resource development and availability as a major support tool for changing teaching and learning. Thus, in the period of 2008 onwards, major investments were made in infrastructure and equipment with the purpose of providing necessary resources for changing the culture of schooling.

7. Conclusions

Kosovo has been targeting education change at the level of teacher professionalism however that led to, unintentionally, ignoring the domains of social and historical background of teacher work realities. Education reform in such a context in transition should be viewed not only from the idea of what type of teacher professionalism is aimed at but also paying the due attention to the underlying historical and social background that drive the existing professionalism. Teacher professionalism is certainly not to be viewed through a linear way but rather through the careful examination of contextual frame in which teachers work reality is embedded. Teacher identity and professionalism is not conceived only within an individual practitioner's thinking and reflection, but it is rather viewed through the core values and beliefs that have traditionally been linked to the role of the teacher (Haworth, 2008).

Figure 2. Viewing teacher professionalism in education systems in transition: the role of the contextual frame
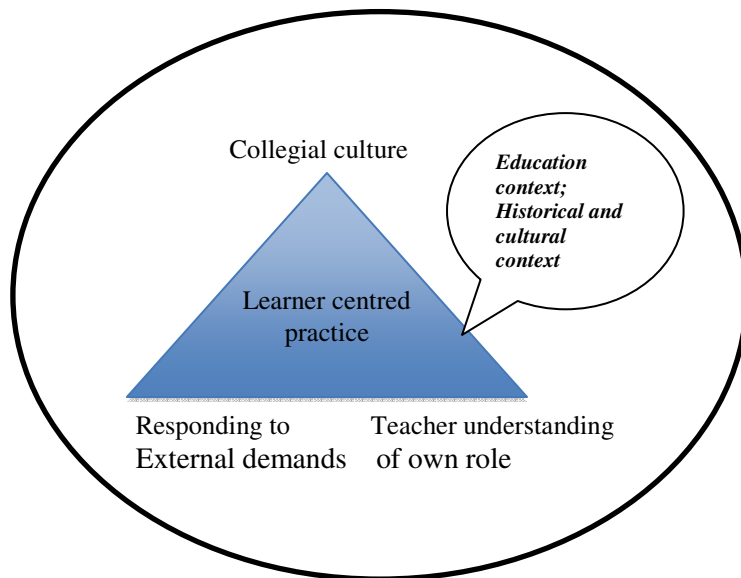
Contemporary teachers work in conditions where continuous change, cultural dispersion and increasing diversity in all the areas of life are common and permanent (Nevalainen and Kimonen, 2009). Kosovo education system is aiming to shift towards learner-centered and competence oriented teaching and learning practices. The new school curriculum is demanding teachers to behave in a manner that they have not been trained to and the expectations on the education system have shifted towards societal and skills development approach (Kosovo Curriculum Framework, 2011). Being as such – a system undergoing transition –the system should address teacher professionalism from a broader perspective rather than viewing it form the narrow perspective of technical skills development. Education system holds chances for successful educational change if it develops processes that lead towards teachers understanding their own role, responding to the external demands for change, and developing collegial collaboration cultures at school level.

Teacher competencies and professionalism must reflect certainly the skills and readiness to analyze all these circumstances and make judgments and adjust their practices to their particular situation (Neimi and Jakku-Sihvonen, 2006). In order to develop an education system in societies in transition through teacher commitment and professional collaboration, the system needs to adopt a teacher centered approach that places teacher at a situation to examine own beliefs and practices in light of role expectations and historical and cultural values that shape current education and schooling principles and practices. Implementing change, sustainably, that addresses the cultural and sociological processes of education and schooling requires the development of communities of practice that share common goals and understanding of role expectations in their particular work realities. Addressing teacher skills as isolated and as technical inevitably leads to longer transitional processes that will eventually demand greater efforts and pressure to be able to respond the global developments in teaching and learning as well as demands placed on the particular work context of teachers.

8. References

Beijaard, D., Korthagen, F., Verloop, N., (2007). Understanding how teachers learn as a prerequisite for promoting teacher learning. *Teachers and Teaching.* Vol 13. No. 2. Pp 105-108.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education.* New York: Routledge.

Day, C., and Q. Gu. (2010). *The new lives of teachers.* New York: Routledge.

Flores, A., M. and C. Day. (2006). Contexts which shape and reshape a new teachers' identities: A multi-perspective study. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 22:219-232.

Hargreaves, A. (2000). Four ages of professionalism and professional learning.
*Teachers and Teaching: History and Practice.*6 (2), 151-182.

Haworth, P., (2008) Crossing borders to teach English language learners. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*. Vol 14, No. 5-6. 411-430.

MASHT. (2011). Kosovo Curriculum Framework. Prishtina: MASHT (http://kkapk.armods.com/en-us/kurrikula.aspx)

Nevalainen, R., & Kimonen, E., (2009). A comparative analysis of teacher competences in England and Finland. *In M.T. Tatto & M. Mincu (Eds). Reforming teaching and learning: Comparative perspectives in global era.* Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Niemi, H., & Jakku-Sihvonen, R. (2006). Research-based teacher education. In R. Jakku-Sihvonen & H. Niemi (eds). *Research-bnased teacher education nin Finland. Reflections by Finnish teacher educators. (pp. 31-50).* Turku, Fi: Finnish Educational Research Association. Research in Education Sciences 25.

UNDP (2006). Kosovo human development report. Retrieved on 20 April 2013 from http://www.kosovo.undp.org/en/Kosovo-Human-Development-Report

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Vula, E., & Saqipi, B. (2009). Education in Kosova – struggling between following the modern trends and recovering from the past. International Studies in Education. Volume 10, Issue 1. http://iise.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/newsletter/ise200905.pdf

Webb, R., Vulliamy, G., Hämäläinen, A., S., Kimonen, E., and R. Nevalainen. (2004). A comparative analysis of primary teacher professionalism in England and Finland. *Comparative Education* 40, no. 1: 83-107.

Appendix A

Detailed interview analysis

Pre-professionalism in a developing context

Category	Theme	Detailed findings
Pre-professional age	**Teacher as technical expert**	Teacher as manager
		Teacher as manager of class
		Teacher provides good explanation
		Teacher know what a class is
		Teacher transmitter of knowledge
		School organizes quizzes often
		Lack of equipment challenge
		Not sure how manage, organize class at beginning
		Grade 3 do not hold pencils
		Teacher directing a child
		Teacher attempts to have student achievement
		Teacher talks about managing to have students read and write
		Teacher talks about importance of discipline
		Repetition used in class
		Teacher should be prepared, quiet, behave
		Teachers take examples to help understanding …
		Teacher talks about importance of clear lectures
		Know whether students are learning important

		Cooperation, communication with students important
		No difficulties in work
		Achieving set objectives important
		To educate children primary role
		Difficult to focus children/used to play
		Teacher talks about student record books
		Teacher believes has no problems
		No monthly/annual plan
		I wish to keep discipline
		Teacher dressing properly important
		Knowing the computer important
		Teacher talks about presenting in class
		Teacher feels has no problems
		Noise in group work
		Teacher as democrat, flexible – style
		Good teacher knows the subject
		Teacher happy, free, close – style
		Concern over fair assessment
		Teacher attempts for fair assessment
		Discipline of students and respect first priority
	Isolated Teacher	Parents not interested
		Communication with parents difficult
		Noisy students a challenge
		I tried for 2 years to work with special needs student
		Parents not helping understand who students are
		Jealousy amongst teachers
		Lack coop with teachers
		Parents do not know their children
		Parents do not accept reality
		Good coop with peers and do tests together
	Lack of basic resources	Lack labs weakness of school
		Talk of text books only
		Teacher talks about class length
		School cleanliness a challenge

Autonomous professionalism in a developing context

Category	Theme	Detailed finding
Autonomous professional	**Didactic orientation**	Cooperate with students regardless of their problems
		Learned how to organize classes at University
		Try to use contemporary methods
		Being a teacher is quite difficult
		Interventions in teacher grading students inappropriate
		Teacher who attend trainings trying new things
		Lack of organizing activities
		Teachers should be creative
		Teacher plan classes at home

		Teacher puts activities suitable for them
		All children providing opinions
		Children express themselves
		Teacher using creative strategies
		Not an easy job
		Teacher as facilitator
		Link lesson with everyday life
		A year until students got used to my/different methods
		Teacher keeps file for every child
		Teacher using different methods
		Teacher as facilitator
		Difficulty in understanding what students want
		Using many methods important
		Professional development helps
		Free writing activity for students
		How to solve a problem
		Following a unified lesson plan a restriction
		Teachers stimulate students in different forms
		Integrate traditional with the new
		Teacher focuses on what is best for students
	Professional relations	Lack of cooperation within prof
		Colleague giving idea for a lesson
		Cooperation with school director positive
		We cooperate with parents
		Exchange ideas with peers on instructional choices
		Coop with colleagues not so good
		Teacher talks how we should not think of ourselves only
		Focus on the family background important
		Consulted with other teachers on how to teach
		Teachers collaborate
		Consult with other teachers
		Cooperate with colleagues to solve teaching problems
		Observe others teaching important
		Cooperate only with some colleagues
		Five teachers cooperate
		Teachers/colleagues serving as model
	Life-long learning	Non-trained teachers continue with their old way
		Teachers should learn continuously
		Teacher ready for new knowledge
	Basic resources for teaching	Lack of resources makes work difficult
		Teachers have necessary resources (non-public school)
		Teacher pays for my own resources
		Lack of resources a weakness
		Create own TLM

Collegial professionalism in a developing context

Category	Theme	Detailed finding
Collegial professionalism	Professional collaboration in school	Cooperate with other teachers needed Joint monthly staff meetings Planning together for supplementary classes Colleagues cooperative Useful coop with colleagues, professional bodies School working plan for monthly PD sessions Colleagues ready to help Teachers support each other Wonderful coop with colleagues Good cooperation with pedagogical staff Integrate lessons in school
	Cooperation outside school	Cooperate with stakeholders Cooperation with colleagues from other schools Coop with colleagues helped overcoming challenge of working with parents Staff training helps to implement a new program

The missing post-professionalism

Category	Theme	Detailed finding
Post-professionalism	Responding to demands	Wants to be equipped to respond to 21st century demands More links to classroom reality since change is very fast