



Teachers' perceived opportunity to contribute to school culture transformation

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Accepted: 2 October 2023 / Published online: 26 October 2023
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Abstract

Teachers' active role in school development has been recognized as important in school culture transformation. Leadership practices, such as distributed leadership and organizational support, aim to engage teachers and foster their participation and contribution opportunities. However, studies have shown that teachers' earlier experiences and beliefs shape their participation activities. To facilitate school culture transformation and the development of pedagogical practices, it is important to understand how teachers position themselves as school developers. This interview study aims to explore what kinds of views teachers express regarding school development work and teacher collaboration, along with how these views influence their perceived opportunity to contribute to school culture transformation. Altogether, 35 teachers from three schools in Helsinki, Finland, were interviewed. The analysis revealed five teacher profiles and, thus, five different ways of approaching school culture transformation: (1) *Visioner*, (2) *Responsibility Bearer*, (3) *Participating Observer*, (4) *Traditionalist*, and (5) *Stressed Withdrawer*. Teachers' orientation to school development work and received organizational support influenced teachers' perceived contribution opportunities. Furthermore, the identified profiles experienced the needed organizational support for school development work differently; for some, it was mainly common time for collaboration, while for others, it meant reorganized structures. The results indicate that diverse support is needed to engage the whole teacher community in school culture transformation and that school leaders need to pay attention to how the distributed leadership model benefits all teachers, not just the visionary ones.

Keywords Distributed leadership · Qualitative profiling · School culture · School development · Teacher collaboration · Teachers' professional agency

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Introduction

Current technological transformation in the form of digitalization and changes in the labor market has set demands for schools to develop their culture and practices in order to educate students for a rapidly changing world (Fullan et al., 2018; Kools et al., 2020). Both educational reforms and academic research increasingly emphasize future skills and competencies, such as critical thinking, creativity, and entrepreneurship (Lavonen & Korhonen 2017; Fullan et al., 2018; Lavonen, 2020). According to Facer (2011), schools should be not only “future proof” but also more proactive; moreover, they should adopt the role of “future builders,” all of which affects the entire school more profoundly than would the renewal of teaching and learning practices in individual classrooms alone. However, the present study concentrates not on the *what* and *why* aspects of school development but on the *how* and the *who*, examining teachers’ experiences of developing school culture in Finnish schools. The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers’ views on school culture transformation and how those views are connected to their participation in collaborative development work in their communities. This study examines teachers’ perceived opportunity to contribute to school culture transformation in relation to their professional agency and investigates the kind of organizational support required for all teachers to participate in such development work.

School culture influences teaching and learning practices (Papay & Kraft, 2017). Therefore, to develop teaching and learning, the transformation of school culture is crucial (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018; Jones, 2018; Papay & Kraft, 2017). A relatively large amount of research suggests that successful school culture transformation requires the shared effort of all school personnel and stakeholders (Korhonen et al., 2014; Dewitt, 2017; Jones, 2018; Papay & Kraft, 2017; Senge et al., 2012). Moreover, school culture transformation necessitates leadership practices that are anchored in school community participation and contributions and that support teachers’ sense of being heard (Jones, 2018; Senge et al., 2012). Bottom-up perspectives and employee-driven innovations are required because “management’s information is typically incomplete” (Kesting & Parm Ulhøi, 2010, p. 71), here because school leaders are seldom aware of everything that occurs in the classroom. However, teachers’ bottom-up perspectives are far from homogeneous; rather, teachers exhibit diverse orientations toward school culture development (Lockton & Fargason, 2019; Luttenberg et al., 2013; Molla & Nolan, 2020). While some studies emphasize how an internalized common vision fosters teachers’ engagement in transformation or supports the attainment of development targets (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018; Luttenberg et al., 2013), it would be important for school leaders and developers also to acknowledge that teachers’ diverse perceptions of their school’s development needs can enrich development work. These diverse perceptions can be seen as epistemic objects that are constantly evolving, while a common vision represents a boundary object that mediates and unifies these diverse views and mitigates collaborative development work (see, e.g., Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009; Knorr Cetina, 2001). When a

common vision of school culture transformation is approached from a boundary-object perspective, that vision is “stable enough to enable coordination across” the work community (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009, p. 10) while retaining the ability to meet diverse needs and be refined and modified when required.

In the context of the present study, school culture transformation refers to a systemic process of developing the school culture as a whole; in practice, this type of transformation is usually initiated by focusing on one aspect of school culture at a time, such as teacher collaboration or student evaluation practices. School culture transformation is a slow, iterative process; implementing enduring changes, in particular, requires time. A fast roll-out is impossible as teachers must be engaged in planning, implementation, and evaluation (Reinius et al., 2021; Gislason, 2010; Senge et al., 2012). Creating an atmosphere of trust where teachers can freely plan and innovate may also be time-consuming (Vangrieken et al., 2017). Moreover, joint planning and reflection time also constitute a critical resource: teachers require quality time in addition to quantity as it is unrealistic to expect them to produce excellent planning work after a regular school day; nor can all their collaboration time be spent on administrative issues (Carpenter, 2018; Hindin et al., 2007; Jäppinen et al., 2016).

A successful school culture transformation requires diverse leadership practices, including the presence of both formal and informal leaders, distributed leadership, and teacher collaboration (Senge et al., 2012; Spillane, 2012). If teachers are not engaged in the development of their school culture and their professional agency is not supported, the long-term development of the school culture will be compromised (Biesta et al., 2015; Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017; Saari et al., 2015; Vähäsantanen, 2015; Vangrieken et al., 2017). Teachers can be assigned special roles to support the development of school culture and the transformation of pedagogical practices—for example, the role of a change agent or teacher leader (Nguyen et al., 2020; Senge et al., 2012; Wenner & Campbell, 2017) or an instructional coach representing education provider and working closely with schools in the municipality or district (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015; Vermeir & Kelchtermans, 2022; Woulfin & Rigby, 2017). Innovative teachers can also function in roles that combine both the aforementioned, but these roles are highly dependent on organizational support from both school leaders and education providers (Reinius et al., 2022). However, not all teachers can act in special roles. School leaders should consider how to support the professional agency of all teachers, thus engaging the entire teacher community in school culture transformation to ensure the implementation of new practices.

Teachers’ professional agency in the context of school culture transformation

When teachers’ professional agency is studied in the context of educational reform, it is common either to define their agency as strong or weak in relation to their perceived opportunity to contribute to such reform (Ketelaar et al., 2012; Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017; Pyhältö et al., 2012; Vähäsantanen, 2015) or to categorize their agency into diverse profiles according to their orientations toward change initiatives (Buchanan, 2015; Rajala & Kumpulainen, 2017; Varpanen et al., 2022). Both

approaches highlight valuable aspects of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, defining teacher agency on a linear axis from strong to weak is less straightforward than one might expect. Even if teachers perceive their opportunity to contribute to the shaping of school reform as weak, they might possess strong classroom agency (Pyhältö et al., 2012). Strong agency, on the other hand, is not necessarily related to innovative activity in school-level development work; in fact, it can exert a negative effect on such work if teachers fail to take ownership of the planned changes (Ketelaar et al., 2012). Furthermore, when teachers' agentic activity is categorized based on their orientations toward school reform or school culture transformation, research has emphasized that all teachers possess agency and that only the goal of their agentic activity varies (Rajala & Kumpulainen, 2017; Vähäsantanen, 2015; Varpanen et al., 2022). Thus, agency positions and orientations are situational (Goller & Harteis, 2017; Heikkilä, 2022; Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017).

Teachers' professional agency in the context of school culture transformation is intertwined with teacher collaboration (Heikkilä, 2022; Ketelaar et al., 2012; Pyhältö et al., 2012). If schools lack a collaborative culture of discussion and reflection, teachers easily become stuck in earlier practices, and new ones fail to take root (Biesta et al., 2015; Lockton & Fargason, 2019). Schools' leadership structures can either support or hinder a collaborative culture and teacher agency (Vähäsantanen, 2015), and if teachers perceive that their agentic position is weak in relation to school culture transformation and that their views are not heard, they will struggle to take ownership of collective development work, which leads to a decrease in innovation (Pyhältö et al., 2012) and the failure to spread new practices to the entire work community (Ketelaar et al., 2012).

Teachers' former experiences play an important role in school culture transformation and guide teachers' practices (Biesta et al., 2015; Hammerness, 2001; Keys, 2007; Lockton & Fargason, 2019; Molla & Nolan, 2020). According to Biesta et al. (2015), teachers' beliefs are intertwined with their professional agency and reflect their former experiences, while the future exerts a weaker influence over beliefs than does the past. Several studies have confirmed that educational reforms are often approached through the lens of past experiences and at the expense of future orientations (Luttenberg et al., 2013; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Rajala & Kumpulainen, 2017; Varpanen et al., 2022).

Teachers do not aim to resist school culture transformation or educational reforms as such; rather, they typically seek the purpose for the change from their own experiences and views (Luttenberg et al., 2013). If teachers' strong personal views conflict with the educational reform at hand, they may react by retaining even extremely conventional practices (Hammerness, 2001). Moreover, even experienced teachers do not always perceive the alternatives to current institutionalized practices (Lockton & Fargason, 2019). In the context of school culture transformation, it would be helpful for teachers to reflect on their own perceptions and work with entrenched beliefs that might even prevent them from acting according to their expressed convictions (Keys, 2007). Even though teachers' perceptions are formed from past experiences, they can reflect teachers' future projections in their present work environment (see, e.g., Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Priestley et al., 2013). In particular, the perspective of transformative professional agency highlights this future aspect and the intent to

develop one's own work environment in addition to one's professional competencies (Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017; Stetsenko, 2016). However, teachers' transformative professional agency depends on supportive factors, such as social affordances (Goller & Harteis, 2017; Vähäsantanen et al., 2019), organizational support (Reinius et al., 2022; Lockton & Fargason, 2019; Molla & Nolan, 2020), resources (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Biesta et al., 2017), and an aligned vision (Hammerness, 2001; Luttenberg et al., 2013; Vennebo & Ottesen, 2015).

In the present study, teachers' professional agency is understood to be situational and thus supportable by diverse means, including distributed leadership activities. In addition, however, as Biesta et al. (2015) state, teachers' professional agency is intertwined with their personal views of teaching and learning and thus reflects their former experiences. The underlying question therefore concerns how elements of the school organization can support teachers' perceived agency in the context of the development of school culture and, especially, how teachers can be engaged in collaborative development work. Earlier studies have revealed diverse teacher profiles related to their professional agency and stance on school development. Moreover, such research highlights the connection between teachers' sense of contribution and their ability to align their own vision of good teaching and learning with the educational reform at hand (Hammerness, 2001; Luttenberg et al., 2013; Rajala & Kummulainen, 2017). In addition, teacher collaboration is an important aspect of innovative school development work (Ketelaar et al., 2012; Pyhältö et al., 2012), especially in iterative school-culture transformation processes. The present study contributes to this area of research by recognizing teachers' diverse perceptions of the importance of school development work, their collaboration in relation to development work, and their experiences of their agentic contribution opportunities in this context. Furthermore, by examining teachers' perceptions of their opportunity to contribute to school development, it is possible to illuminate an issue that has yet to be studied thoroughly: the organizational support provided to teachers. The importance of organizational support for teachers' professional agency in a school development context is recognized in several studies (Reinius et al., 2022; Biesta et al., 2017; Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Lockton & Fargason, 2019; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Vähäsantanen, 2015). However, organizational support is often employed as a single factor comprising several diverse components, including time, supervisor support, and material resources. In this study, we look beyond this large factor and aim to elaborate the kind of organizational support that diverse teacher profiles perceive is necessary for teachers to contribute to collaborative school development work. To consider the relevant aspects of organizational support for teachers' professional agency in present-day schools, we next explore how distributed leadership facilitates teachers' agency.

Distributed leadership facilitating teachers' transformative professional agency

From an organizational perspective, it is important to engage teachers in school development work and support their professional agency, sense of ownership, and collaborative knowledge sharing (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Fischer & O'Connor, 2014).

Distributed leadership is recognized as facilitating school development in general (Bolden, 2011; Lahtero et al., 2017). Ideally, distributed leadership represents leadership practices and *how* things are done instead of *who* does them (Spillane, 2005). In leadership practices, the emphasis should be on interactions between diverse actors in schools (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Spillane, 2005), thus supporting teachers' agency by offering channels to participate in planning and decision-making. However, teachers can often associate distributed leadership practices with the delegation of administrative tasks rather than the support of the entire teaching community via teamwork and the provision of opportunities to contribute (Bolden, 2011; Lahtero et al., 2017). Consequently, when teachers feel that distributed leadership is implemented poorly, the school climate may be adversely affected (Mayrowetz, 2008). However, when distributed leadership is used for school development matters instead of administrative tasks, it can foster teacher collaboration in general and ensure the efficient sharing of school practitioners' expertise (Harris et al., 2007; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane et al., 2017). Because distributed leadership promotes collaboration, it is important to maintain the quality of collaboration by directing it to deep reflections and discussions about the development of the school or teachers' professional expertise, instead of shallow talk and unnecessary meetings (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Ronfeldt, 2017). Furthermore, distributed leadership is intertwined with teacher collaboration and teamwork, and, when optimally implemented, it prevents teacher frustration (Carpenter, 2018), facilitates teacher engagement (Hallam et al., 2015; Vangrieken et al., 2017), and fosters teachers' professional learning (Papay & Kraft, 2017; Ronfeldt, 2017; Stacey, 2001).

Harris et al. (2007) emphasize the importance of considering why a distributed leadership model is used and what part of leadership is shared. However, recent studies in Finland demonstrate that teachers are not always aware of the reason for the use of the distributed leadership model or the benefits it could provide to them or their students (Lahtero & Salonen, 2022; Lahtero et al., 2017). In Finland, the distributed leadership model is often associated with teachers' (sometimes shallow) teamwork and the delegation of tasks by the school's management group rather than with the engagement and empowerment of teachers in common school development activities (Lahtero & Salonen, 2022). However, the current collective agreement for teachers states that all teachers in Finland are reserved three hours per week for common planning time, which is then used either for topics concerning the entire school or for teamwork. Nevertheless, even schools in the same district exhibit differences in the use of this common planning time and the amount that is reserved for actual planning work instead of administrative tasks. This can lead to situations where teachers' experiences of the school's development needs and their teaching and teamwork practices can differ from the official development vision disseminated by the school.

Research aims

The present study examines teachers' views on their professional agency regarding school culture transformation. Our aim is to understand teachers' perceptions of how their voices are heard in school development work. Earlier studies have emphasized

the importance of organizational support for teachers' agentic activities (Reinius et al., 2022; Lockton & Fargason, 2019; Molla & Nolan, 2020) but have not clearly specified what that support means for teachers with diverse conceptions of school culture transformation. The present study helps fill this research gap and clarifies teachers' stances on collaborative development work inside their work community. These issues were examined through the following research questions:

1. What kinds of views do teachers express regarding the school culture transformation?
2. How do teachers perceive their opportunity to contribute to school culture development work?

Methods

Research participants and data collection

The present study was conducted as part of a systemic school culture transformation project in the city of Helsinki, Finland. The three participating primary schools (grades 1–6) had voluntarily applied to take part in this co-development project, and the interviews used as research data in this study formed part of that project. The three schools were of similar size (medium-sized schools with 20–40 teachers). These schools, like all schools in Helsinki, followed distributed leadership principles, and their organizations contained school leaders, management groups, and diverse teacher teams. The distributed leadership model was already an established structure at the time of data collection.

We interviewed the participating teachers at the beginning of the co-development project during the 2019–2020 academic year before the COVID-19 pandemic. The total number of teachers interviewed at the three sampled schools was 35 (Table 1). The interviewees represented diverse teacher roles (class teachers, subject teachers, and special education teachers) and their length of work experience also varied. Some of the teachers we interviewed held special responsibilities at their school (belonging to the management team or acting as a tutor–teacher), but, at the time of the interviews, most were not committed to any additional duties. However, two to

Table 1 Number of teachers interviewed and their roles

School	Total no. of teachers interviewed	Interviewees' teacher roles		
		Class teachers	Subject teachers	Special education teachers
A	10	8	1	1
B	12	8	1	3
C	13	10	1	2

four teachers at each school had earlier belonged to the management team at either their current or previous school.

The thematic interviews were about one hour long, and the interview framework was constructed to provide us with a comprehensive view of the school culture and development targets. The framework included the following themes: (1) background questions, (2) the school's development targets, (3) collaboration and teamwork, (4) professional development, and (5) specific features of the school culture. The school leaders helped the researchers organize the interviews by reserving a quiet place in the school building and organizing a substitute for the teacher being interviewed. This helped the interviewees fully concentrate on the situation at hand and describe in as much detail as possible the school culture, work practices, knowledge-sharing processes, and teamwork.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed in three phases (Fig. 1). *The first coding phase* followed Saldaña's (2013) holistic coding and thematic coding principles. Because the data included 35 interview transcripts, holistic coding was chosen as an approach because it suits large data sets, hence allowing the first phase of analysis to concentrate on larger themes related to the development of school culture and knowledge-sharing practices. This coding phase illustrated the themes the interviewees mostly used when describing the development work at their school. After this analysis phase, we defined the relevant themes for this study and continued the analysis according to the research questions. The wider themes chosen for further analysis were organizational support (including current practices and structures), teachers' practical collaboration, and different kinds of hindrances to school development. With the help of these coded excerpts in this first coding phase, we continued the analysis with categorized quotations.

The analysis continued with *the second coding phase*, in which we analyzed in more depth the interviewees' perceptions of their opportunity to contribute to the school culture transformation. This coding phase was inspired by the professional

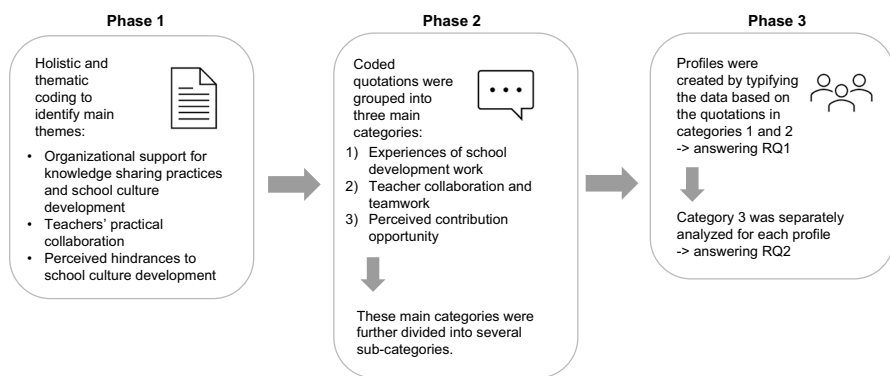


Fig. 1 The phases of data analysis

agency dimensions in the survey instrument developed by Vähäsantanen et al. (2019), and we regrouped the coded quotations into three main categories: experiences of school development work, teacher collaboration and teamwork, and perceived contribution opportunity. The quotations in these main categories were further elaborated by dividing them into subcategories.

Finally, to obtain a more profound understanding of teachers' diverse views and perceived opportunity to contribute to school culture transformation, we conducted a *third coding phase*. In the previous phase, the analysis revealed that the interviewees' views and experiences varied extensively, and to allow us to explore these diverse views comprehensively, we decided to typify the interviewees. This typification was qualitative in nature and relied on data quotations coded into the first two main categories: (1) experiences of school development work and (2) teacher collaboration and teamwork (Fig. 1). This analysis identified diverse profiles regarding the interviewees' views of school culture development work and collaborative practices at school. These profiles enabled us to respond to the first research question (What kinds of views do teachers express regarding the school culture transformation?). Furthermore, to answer the second research question (How do teachers perceive their opportunity to contribute to school culture development work?), we examined the data coded into the third main category (perceived contribution opportunity) separately for each profile.

Ethical considerations

The participating schools voluntarily applied to the development project and were informed that it would also include research data collection. Furthermore, the teachers were invited to the interviews, and participation was voluntary. The interviewees were provided with an informed consent form, which they signed. Special care was taken to protect the anonymity of the research participants: the schools are called schools A, B, and C, and the interviewees have been anonymized using codes (A1, A2, etc.). The study complies with the ethical guidelines of the humanities and social and behavioral sciences, and the data were collected, processed, and stored according to European Union General Data Protection Regulations.

Results

The present study attempted to answer two research questions examining teachers' views on school culture transformation and their perceived opportunity to contribute to this transformation. The extensive interview data showed that the interviewees' views varied widely, and the analysis led to five profiles: *Visioners*, *Responsibility Bearers*, *Participating Observers*, *Traditionalists*, and *Stressed Withdrawers* (Table 2). The main differences between the profiles consisted of the importance the interviewees assigned to a common school culture and its development. *Visioners* highlighted the importance of a common school culture for which everyone should strive, while, for example, *Traditionalists* felt that teachers could choose themselves

Table 2 Typified teacher profiles based on teachers' views of school culture development and the meaning they attributed to collaborative practices

Profile	View of school culture development	Meaning assigned to collaborative practices
Visioners	The aim should be the development of school culture, and everyone should be engaged to participate because development activities are part of everyone's work	Collaboration should be used for pedagogical development
Responsibility Bearers	School development work is important, but not everyone can be forced to participate in a similar way	Collaboration is important both in practical matters and also for sharing knowledge
Participating Observers	Management group and school leaders are responsible for school development, teachers can participate through teamwork and meetings	Practical collaboration is beneficial for teachers
Traditionalists	Traditions are important as well as sharing tips and practical ideas	Practical collaboration is beneficial for teachers
Stressed Withdrawers	One's own time is spent on survival, others can find time to develop	Practical collaboration only if necessary

whether to participate in common development work, and *Responsibility bearers* emphasized that teachers could not be forced to participate with similar levels of effort. Furthermore, the meanings the interviewees assigned to collaborative practices reflected these differences. For instance, while *Visioners* highlighted collaboration designed to develop the school from a pedagogical perspective, *Participating Observers* emphasized practical collaboration, such as sharing educational material or planning common events like excursions outside the school.

Although this profiling already constitutes an important finding, it did not produce a comprehensive answer to our research questions; rather, it was used as a tool to organize the results. The next sections describe each profile in detail, thus building a picture of the kind of views of school culture development work and teacher collaboration possessed by the teachers in these profile groups. Furthermore, we describe how the teachers in each profile perceived their opportunity to contribute. These experiences of being heard and being able to participate and contribute to school culture transformation differed between the profiles, thus strengthening the profiling result.

Visioners

Visioners formed the second largest group, with nine interviewees. Moreover, many of these teachers either belonged to the school management group at the time of the interview or had earlier been members in either their current or previous school (Table 3). Most of these interviewees had functioned as teachers for 5–18 years, while only two possessed over 20 years work experience in the profession.

This teacher profile emphasized the importance of the continuous school culture transformation and comprehended the development work performed by schools as consisting of teachers' professional development, common practices supporting common school culture, and target-oriented development work supporting students'

Table 3 Background information of Visioners

School	Pseudonym	Teacher role	Special development role	Length of teacher experience in years
A	A1	Class teacher	Belonged to mgmt. group in previous school	5
	A5	Class teacher	Currently in mgmt. group	10
B	B7	Class teacher	Currently in mgmt. group and tutor-teacher	14
	B9	Class teacher	–	5
	B10	Class teacher	Previously in mgmt. group at this school	23
	B12	Subject teacher	–	18
C	C2	Class teacher	Currently in mgmt. group	5
	C5	Special education teacher	Previously in mgmt. group at this school	26
	C13	Class teacher	Tutor-teacher	6

learning. For *Visioners*, creating and developing a common school culture was valuable as such, but these teachers also expressed a vision of what should be developed and why (e.g., co-teaching because it supports both teachers and students, or student evaluation because a novel approach would better support students' self-direction skills). *Visioners* recognized that teachers' professional development was important from the school perspective and were eager to develop themselves as well. Many wanted to both deepen their expertise and extend it to new areas, even to the extent of beginning school management studies or doctoral studies, for example.

For *Visioners*, school culture development work was part of teachers' regular duties, and they described what they considered to be the ideal situation of teacher collaboration in the spirit of the professional learning community (PLC). Here, they emphasized knowledge sharing and pedagogical collaboration to support teachers' professional development and reflect on teaching and learning practices at their school. Furthermore, they emphasized a more structured way of sharing knowledge and collaborating and highlighted co-teaching as an excellent tool for knowledge sharing. For them, teacher collaboration also supported their well-being.

I think it is so nice to plan [the lessons] together. And if we share responsibility so that the other one is in charge [of the lesson], it is great to see colleague's plans or teaching. Absolutely, you get a possibility for professional growth when you learn from others and see their practices. But also, when you can share your ideas and thoughts and your colleague becomes inspired by them, you will get a boost to your self-efficacy, and your feeling of your professional competency is also boosted. In addition, we have had a rather tough year with some student issues, and it has been a great asset to share challenging issues with a colleague. . . . But yeah, maybe the main issues have been the possibility of sharing knowledge and developing one's professional competencies. (C2)

[It would be good to have] more teacher teams that would really reflect that [school development]. Like a dedicated school development team that would always think about what we can do better, as it [the development] won't stop anywhere and we could then, for example, take one new issue per year to make the ordinary days go better. (B9)

Even though *Visioners* were, at least to some extent, rather idealistic, they were aware of the practical hindrances and current situation at their school. As B7 put it, "we could use more of the common planning time for development work [instead of just informing others]." *Visioners* paid attention to school structures and practices and how such structures and practices could either support or hinder teachers' contributions; moreover, they highlighted the importance of team meetings and the use of common planning time for actual planning rather than for information sharing, which could be achieved via email. Although they were discouraged by unsupportive practices, they strived, however, to find alternative ways to plan together, even though it would sometimes mean performing planning work via email. However, their vision entailed teachers using common planning time for pedagogical development work that would both support their everyday work with students and also facilitate their professional development and the development of school culture. Most

considered their opportunity to contribute to the development of school culture to be good, especially if they were part of the management group.

Responsibility Bearers

Responsibility Bearers formed the largest group of interviewees, with over half having worked as a teacher for over 20 years. Furthermore, almost half this group were members of the school management group at the time of the interview or had been earlier (Table 4). Most *Responsibility Bearers* described their eagerness to further develop their professional expertise by deepening their knowledge in some special areas, such as digital pedagogy or special education needs.

This group of teachers wished to develop their school and felt that both teaching and learning practices at school required improvement; however, they expressed no concrete vision of what should be done and why. Nevertheless, *Responsibility Bearers* emphasized that their colleagues were experts in their field and that many of them would possess valuable knowledge to share. *Responsibility Bearers* differed from *Visioners* in their orientation toward their peers: *Responsibility Bearers* emphasized that school culture development work should encompass various forms of participation and contribution. Even though they eagerly participated and worked toward a common school culture, they felt that teachers should enjoy pedagogical freedom. A few teachers in this profile also had a labor union background and mentioned that there was only a certain amount of work in addition to teaching-related duties that could be required from

Table 4 Background information of Responsibility Bearers

School	Pseudonym	Teacher role	Special development role	Length of teacher experience in years
A	A4	Class teacher	Previously in mgmt. group in this school	22
	A6	Class teacher	Responsible for digital pedagogy	18
	A7	Class teacher	–	30
B	B4	Special education teacher	–	31
	B5	Special education teacher	Currently in mgmt. group	28
	B6	Class teacher	Previously in mgmt. group in this school	29
C	C1	Class teacher	–	12
	C3	Subject teacher	–	10
	C4	Class teacher	Currently in mgmt. group	20
	C6	Class teacher	–	20
	C7	Class teacher	–	2
	C9	Class teacher	–	24
	C11	Class teacher	Currently in mgmt. group	9
	C12	Class teacher	–	22

teachers. Nonetheless, these teachers often demanded more from themselves than from others when it came to school development work.

Like *Visioners*, *Responsibility Bearers* valued teacher collaboration and emphasized the importance of knowledge sharing. For this profile, knowledge sharing meant everyone sharing skills and information on their own area of expertise rather than the development of a common school culture in a PLC spirit. However, some mentioned that it would be beneficial to have time for joint reflection and, thus, work together toward school culture transformation. Some older teachers in this profile were especially worried that the newcomers at their school received insufficient support from their peers and would be unable to voice their opinions if teacher collaboration was inadequately supported.

Let's say that, partly because many [teachers] have been here for a very long time, they have started to have certain kinds of roles. . . . It slows development down a bit because there are [teachers who] stand still and so, and also those who want to do things faster. Maybe, maybe, let's say that, regarding the development work, the younger teachers do not have such good possibilities to get their voices heard. That they are thinking that those old teachers act like they know everything, and things have always been done like this. (B5)

Responsibility Bearers appeared to value teachers' team meetings and teamwork, often describing them with terms like "inspiring" (C1) or "valuable" (B13). For this profile, teacher teamwork was important because it offered not only dedicated time to plan and perform school development work together with peers, but also time to reflect and "have a sort of value and vision discussion" (B13). They also highlighted the importance of sharing their expertise and often mentioned co-teaching as a straightforward means to achieve this. However, *Responsibility Bearers* emphasized that they were not in a position to dictate to their peers; thus, if a colleague failed to participate in the same way as others or continued with their own idiosyncratic practices, they did not feel that they could intervene. Furthermore, what they really experienced as a hindrance to their opportunity to contribute to development work was the autonomy of teachers in Finland. *Responsibility Bearers* implied that if their peers were uneager to participate when developing, for example, co-teaching or digital pedagogy, they had no power to force them.

And if there is a teacher who does not collaborate, the lack of collaboration is reflected in their students. And the students end up in an unequal situation. Or that the digi-pedagogical competencies that we talked about, well, the easiest would be to affect it by recruiting and highlighting cooperation skills [and digital competencies]. In that way, we can get collaborative teachers here. Another option is to force [collaboration] by making similar schedules [for teachers in the same grade]. But if the collaboration is not natural for the teacher, then it is like pulling teeth to collaborate with a colleague like that. Even though you would be excited about collaboration, if the other one is always like "motivate me" and stands with their arms crossed. (C12)

Participating Observers

Participating Observers formed the third largest profile, with seven interviewees; however, all the teachers in this profile were from schools A and B. Over half this group possessed less than 10 years' work experience, and only one interviewee belonged to the school management group (Table 5).

Participating Observers described school development work and teacher collaboration in rather similar ways: for them, both mostly entailed practical collaboration. Moreover, while they recognized the existence of deeper pedagogical development work, they did not always see how it affected them or whether it was even useful. The teachers in this profile emphasized the balance between work and private life and aimed to take care of their own well-being, which, according to their interview talk, often appeared to conflict with time-consuming school development work. Some of these teachers described themselves as followers: they liked to be involved but not to generate ideas; furthermore, they stressed the importance of not becoming overburdened with work-related issues.

Maybe I'm more into skipping at this moment [when it comes to school development work]. Yeah, I'm like excitedly involved, but maybe not that much of an ideator. I'm more of a practical person. So that if there are concrete things to do, I can ideate, but . . . that I'm not any visioner otherwise. (A3)

For the teachers in this profile, the main priority at work was to concentrate on their own teaching and thus to teach as well as possible; school development work was performed if there was time. Interviewees with a *Participating Observer* profile described how a lack of time hindered teachers' collaboration in common development work. Because they wanted a rather strict separation between work and private life, even concerning common planning and planning their own teaching, they highlighted teachers' lack of sufficient time to participate in activities other than their own work duties. Simultaneously, some described how formal channels, such as team meetings, were important for school development work. However, some of these teachers mentioned that the purpose of teacher teamwork was unclear to them, which might explain the practical collaboration approach that they emphasized.

Table 5 Background information of Participating Observers

School	Pseudonym	Teacher role	Special development role	Length of teacher experience in years
A	A2	Subject teacher	–	6
	A3	Special education teacher	–	6
	A9	Class teacher	–	6
	A10	Class teacher	–	4
B	B1	Special education teacher	–	5
	B3	Class teacher	Currently in mgmt. group	16
	B8	Class teacher	–	21

I have never understood the logic behind it [teachers' teamwork] and what the actual meaning and point of it is. Yeah, I understand that the teams are divided into bigger entities that are needed for school development and that the teams discuss those issues and write annual reports and stuff, but . . . But I think that the teams do have only a little influence on like [the school's] everyday life and changing the structures at school. That it is more like let's do this, and that's it. (A10)

Traditionalists

Traditionalists formed a rather small group, consisting of just four interviewees, of whom all possessed well over 20 years work experience (Table 6). None of these teachers were members of the schools' management group at the time of the interview, nor had they been earlier.

This teacher profile considered the school a safe haven from societal changes and yearned for the past and a more peaceful environment for teaching and learning. They perceived school development work as an activity that others could do but that it did not demand their participation. In school B, this idea was even supported by the school leader, as B2 described:

The principal does not even assume that we old teachers would renew things fast; she understands perfectly that we do not go along with all the new issues, but that we are the ones bringing in the tradition . . . and that we see over that digital hurly-burly.

However, these teachers did not oppose school development work per se. For instance, they discussed their own professional development plans, especially the teachers from school C, and mentioned that teachers constantly develop their skills and knowledge. Nonetheless, for them, this professional development work was mainly based on individual needs and was not intertwined with the development of school culture. In addition, the teachers in this profile did not describe any conflicts with their peers; on the contrary, they valued their colleagues despite the diverse conceptions of current school development topics, such as digitalization or co-teaching.

Regarding their own contribution opportunity to the development of school culture, *Traditionalists* held the opposite view to that of *Participating Observers*. Even though

Table 6 Background information of Traditionalists

School	Pseudonym	Teacher role	Special development role	Length of teacher experience in years
B	B2	Class teacher	–	34
	B11	Class teacher	–	30
C	C8	Class teacher	–	31
	C10	Special education teacher	–	23

Traditionalists participated in teamwork and sometimes even praised it, they did not recognize that it provided any value to them personally. For them, it was simply an activity that was part of their work; that is, it was an obligatory component of their duties, but something that they could cope very well without. *Traditionalists* emphasized informal channels, such as one-to-one peer relations, that helped them improve their teaching and maintain good personal relationships. As their view of school culture development was not particularly transformative, it can be claimed that the greatest hindrance to their contribution was their own lack of interest. This disinterest was reminiscent of aspects of the balance between work and private life that *Participating Observers* sought to achieve by withdrawing from hectic development work.

Stressed Withdrawers

The smallest profile, *Stressed Withdrawers*, included just one interviewee (Table 7). The teacher in this group possessed only a few years work experience, which could at least partly explain their lack of energy to even consider school development. This teacher did not mention any professional development plans either, and teacher collaboration was also a rather nonexistent issue for them. According to their descriptions, teacher teamwork sometimes felt like a waste of time.

Sometimes, it [teamwork] has felt a bit frustrating. Somehow, I have felt that I could use this time for something else. . . . The discussion has been dragging on for too long, especially lately, and it has felt like we have again been talking about these same issues while there is something more important to do. (A8)

This teacher felt powerless regarding the school practices and structures that affected their own work. Based on the interview, this teacher's views of school development work were not so much concerned with the value they placed upon it as with their ability to manage their work. The *Stressed Withdrawer* lacked adequate self-protection practices and sufficient energy to contribute, even though they participated in formal meetings and teamwork.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine teachers' views on school culture transformation and how they perceived their opportunity to contribute to such development work. We identified five teacher profiles regarding the interviewees' views on the development of school culture and the meanings they assigned to teacher collaboration.

Table 7 Background information of Stressed Withdrawers

School	Pseudonym	Teacher role	Special development role	Length of teacher experience in years
A	A8	Class teacher	–	2

The analysis revealed that the teachers highlighted diverse aspects of school development and that their views on collaborative development work also varied (Fig. 2), which is in line with earlier studies emphasizing teachers' diverse visions of good teaching and learning (Hammerness, 2001; Rajala & Kumpulainen, 2017) or their varying personal strategies when facing educational change (Luttenberg et al., 2013; Molla & Nolan, 2020). In addition to such previous research, our analysis revealed differences between the five profiles in teachers' perceptions of their opportunity to contribute to development work and the channels used for contributing. *Visioners* and *Responsibility Bearers* highlighted both formal and informal channels while *Participating Observers* mentioned formal and *Traditionalists* informal channels.

Our results also highlighted differences in the profiles regarding teachers' perceptions of the hindrances to their opportunity to contribute to school development work (Fig. 2). These factors varied between personal (not interested/insufficient energy), practical (lack of time), status oriented (cannot command peers), and structural (how teachers' schedules are organized). Earlier studies underline that if distributed leadership practices fail to highlight collaborative ways of working, the model has not been implemented correctly (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Harris et al., 2007; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane, 2005; Spillane et al., 2017). Our findings go further by indicating that simply facilitating collaboration is insufficient, as the teachers perceive the target of collaboration in diverse ways. Moreover, our results demonstrated differences in the aspects of organizational support that members of the

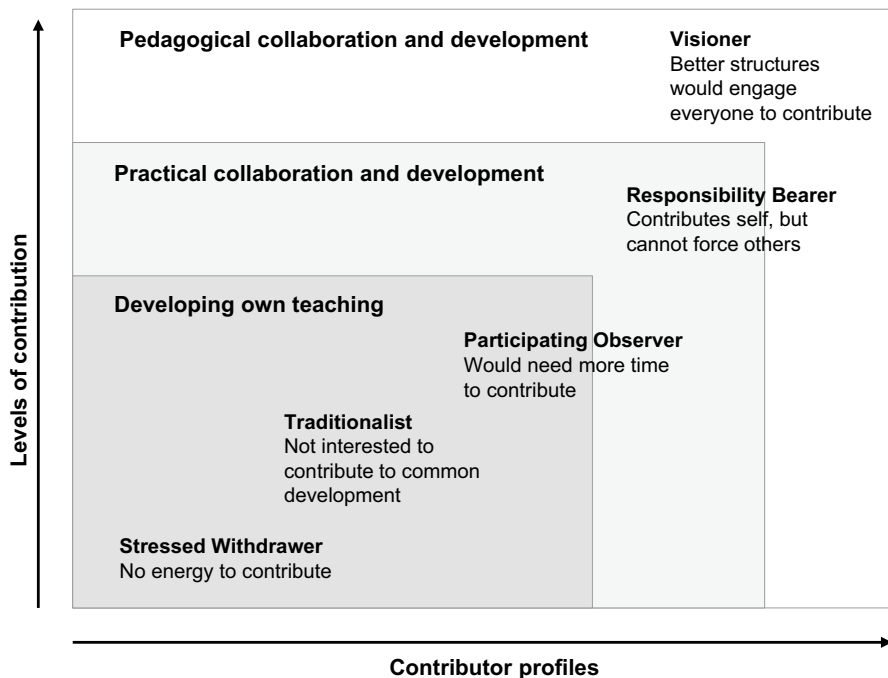


Fig. 2 School culture development profiles based on views of the essence of development work and perceived opportunity to contribute

various profiles claimed would foster their opportunity to contribute. These aspects of support (personal, practical, status oriented, and structural) cannot all be easily provided by better distributed leadership practices; rather, they demand diverse approaches that also acknowledge teachers' professional agency.

Teachers' perceived opportunity to contribute to school development is intertwined with their professional agency. For example, Pyhältö et al. (2012) state that, even though teachers might perceive their opportunity to contribute to school development work as low, they can still experience high professional agency regarding their own teaching practices. Our results indicate this as well, and the group of *Traditionalists*, who resisted development work towards unified practices, were a clear example of this because they expressed high professional agency when discussing their own teaching. By contrast, one teacher in our study, the *Stressed Withdrawer*, seemed to be an example of a teacher who felt their agency threatened in their own classroom because of some common practices and insufficient organizational support. This unfortunate experience underscores the importance of organizational support for early-career teachers (Oolbekkink-Marchand et al., 2017) as according to our profiling the experience of being able to contribute to school development matters was also partially intertwined with the interviewees' career length. Early-career teachers without management group experience were mainly *Participating Observers*, while mid-career teachers were primarily profiled as *Responsibility Bearers*. By contrast, those teachers with over 20 years of working experience were scattered among diverse groups, although the profile of *Traditionalists* only included teachers with extensive experience. Interestingly, the profile of *Visioners* was the most heterogeneous from a career length perspective, but characteristically many members of this profile belonged to the management group, as did rather many *Responsibility Bearers*.

To conclude, our study concentrated on teachers' general views on school development work instead of their approach to a certain educational reform or development work regarding their own teaching practices. Moreover, it identified connections between perceived opportunity to contribute and the diverse kinds of organizational support required. Even though the literature recommends that, for school transformation to succeed, the school community should aim to form a unified vision of the school's development targets (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018), different kinds of teacher profiles and diverse views are nonetheless required. Moreover, if the entire teacher community is to be engaged, the quest for a unified vision of the school's development targets should not stifle or repress the broad range of development ideas that teachers possess. The importance of critical views inside the work community has been recognized in the research literature, as such views challenge development work leaders and force them to take account of divergent opinions when planning development activities (Luttenberg et al., 2013). It is important to develop leadership practices, school structures, and teachers' professional competencies in such a way as to gradually engage in school culture development also those teachers who do not always perceive teamwork or collaborative school development work as an important part of their job description.

While the present study investigated the phenomenon in a unique context, and while it produced novel findings related to teachers' opportunities to contribute to

school development, there are nonetheless aspects of our work that are relevant for future research. For example, it would be important for future studies to investigate how teachers' opportunity to contribute to school development can be facilitated in actual school culture transformation projects and educational reforms and how teacher profiles can be utilized when leading such projects.

The current study nonetheless contains some methodological limitations. Despite our extensive interview data, the interviewees formed a rather select group. The participating schools had voluntarily applied to participate in a development project that included teacher interviews. Thus, the school leaders were active in development work, which might have further influenced teachers' experiences. However, not all the teachers interviewed were enthusiastic about school development, which indicates that the data were reliable. Moreover, three of the five profiles were rather large groups, giving credibility to the results. By contrast, *Traditionalists* and *Stressed Withdrawers* were smaller profiles, probably because teachers with views typical of these profiles were less eager to participate in the interviews. This might limit our analysis of these two profiles compared with the larger profiles. In addition, the interviews were conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic; thus, the proportion of teachers in each profile or their experiences after these exceptional school years might be different today.

Acknowledgements We would like to thank Netta Tiippana and Jenni Laurell for their contribution in data collection.

Authors Contribution All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by HR. The first draft of the manuscript was written by HR and all authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding Open Access funding provided by University of Helsinki (including Helsinki University Central Hospital). This work was supported by the Strategic Research Council of the Academy of Finland [Project Growing Mind, Grant Numbers 312527 and 336064].

Data availability The authors do not have permission to share data.

Declarations

Ethical approval University of Helsinki Ethical review board in humanities and social and behavioral sciences Statement 20/2018, accepted 6.6.2018.

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