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A beginning teacher in emotionally intensive micropolitical situations

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Abstract

This narrative research focuses on two questions: how do emotions and micropolitics appear in a beginning teacher's work and, what kind of strategies does a beginning teacher use when negotiating emotionally intensive situations in the micropolitical context of the school? The research material consists of three narrative interviews with one beginning Finnish secondary teacher. The results illustrate the significance of school's micropolitics for a beginning teacher's work and the various relational and emotional aspects that are present when a beginning teacher tries to balance between school's micropolitics and a teacher's own values. In addition, the research increases knowledge about how beginning teachers learn to negotiate emotionally intensive situations and use various strategies in the micropolitical context of their work.

Keywords: beginning teachers, emotions, micropolitics, narrativity, relationships

1. Introduction

The previous international research on beginning teachers¹ is rather extensive. However, only few studies touch upon successful first years as a teacher (as an exception, Hebert & Worthy, 2001).

¹ We use the term 'a beginning teacher' (e.g. Craig, 2014; Pillen, Beijaard, & den Brok, 2013) in our research. Based on prior research literature, also terms 'novice teacher' (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009), 'early career teacher' (Hulme &

Instead, the challenges, concerns, tensions and problems of the beginning teachers have interested researchers in different parts of the world, e.g. Israel (Orland-Barack & Maskit, 2011), Netherlands (Pillen, Beijaard, & den Brok, 2013), United States (Shoffner, 2011) and North of England (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007). Research has also indicated the fragmented and casual employment experiences of beginning teachers (Hulme & Menter, 2014). The issue of beginning teachers leaving the profession in the first few years of their career has been considered as a global problem (Burke et al., 2013; Craig, 2014; Harfitt, 2015). Hence, attention has been paid on ways how to support beginning teachers (Estola, Syrjälä & Maunu, 2012; Gore & Bowe, 2015 ; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009), although it has also been pointed out that too often beginning teachers are left alone to cope with the challenges they encounter in their work (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010).

Research on beginning teachers has mostly related directly to classroom teaching and less attention has been given to the organisational traditions, habits and power relations (micropolitics) that the beginning teacher is confronted and has to negotiate with (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a). Yet, this organisational socialisation forms an essential task for a teacher as studies by Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a; 2002b) show: their research demonstrates how beginning teachers negotiate finding their place in the micropolitical context of the school. Our research continues this too rarely studied topic by emphasising the emotional dimension of beginning teachers' work in the micropolitical context of the school. This viewpoint is important, since at the expense of emphasising mind, cognition and rationality, emotions have long been left aside in educational research (Schutz & Zembylas, 2009). Yet, increasingly in recent years the significance of emotions has been acknowledged for example in the relationships and educational changes related to teachers' work, teachers' professional identity, learning, wellbeing, and exhaustion (see Uitto,

Menter, 2014), 'newly qualified teacher' (Ulvik & Langørge, 2012) and 'first-year teacher' (Hebert & Worthy, 2001) are used.

Jokikokko & Estola et al, 2015a). In addition, instead of highlighting the individuality and privacy of emotions, their social and interactional nature has been emphasised in research (e.g. Zembylas, 2007).

Drawing from a larger pool of research material, this article focuses in depth on narrative interviews with one beginning teacher. This particular teacher was chosen for this article because her first year as a teacher can be considered to be successful despite the challenges that she faced. Furthermore, her story does not include those characteristics and emotions that are often related to beginning teachers such as feeling inexperienced and uncertain. Studying individual stories of beginning teachers enables research to acknowledge that beginning teachers are not a homogenous group; they have different experiences and backgrounds before entering the field. The article focuses on two questions: how do emotions and micropolitics appear in a beginning teacher's work and, what kind of strategies does a beginning teacher use when negotiating emotionally intensive situations in the micropolitical context of the school?

2. Micropolitics and emotions in beginning teachers' work

Our theoretical understanding of teachers' work is based on the idea that it is moral by nature and its core lies in human relationships (Hansen, 1998; Hargreaves, 2000; Noddings, 2001). However, relationships with students, their parents, colleagues, head teachers and other staff members do not develop in a vacuum, but as a part of micropolitical contexts that include the social, political, and cultural conditions that determine teachers' work (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a).

Whereas prior research on beginning teachers has often focused on problems and emphasised beginning teachers' lack of competence and agency (the 'deficiency approach'), 'emotional exhaustion', 'survival' or 'coping', (see Johnson et al., 2014), we take a different approach in this article. Our emphasis is on seeing beginning teachers as active participants who have various skills and ways of acting in their working communities (see Kelchtermans & Ballet,

2002b). Although the micropolitical context of the school affects teachers' actions, emotions and relationships and, to a certain extent, regulates them, finding one's place as a teacher in the school's existing micropolitical context is not a passive adjustment; it takes place as part of a process in which a beginning teacher actively interprets and interacts with the context (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen & Hökkiä, 2015; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a). Thus, the aspects of school organisation, politics and culture necessarily interact with teachers' inner lives, values and internal qualities (Helsing, 2007).

Finding one's place in the micropolitical context of the school, and especially efforts to affect unproductive work contexts and conditions as a beginning teacher (which is very much the case in this article), inevitably involves work on and through the emotions (Bullough, 2009). We understand emotions not just as teachers' private experiences, but as resulting from meaningful interactions between teachers and their working conditions (Zembylas, 2007). In addition, Bullough (2009) and Solomon (1990), among others, have indicated the connection between the moral and emotions; if people feel strongly about something, this feeling most likely means that it is important and meaningful for them. Furthermore, people value emotions in culturally determined ways (Hargreaves, 2001); they are triggered, interpreted and expressed by virtue of human membership in a particular group such as a nation, community, occupation or gender (van Veen & Slegers, 2006).

Previous research has shown that beginning teachers experience and respond to emotionally challenging work conditions in the micropolitical context of the school in different ways: some may withdraw and become cautious and timid, while for others these conditions act as opportunities for professional growth and learning (Bullough, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2005). Some teachers start using regressive coping strategies by employing high levels of routinisation and carefully managing problems. However, for others teachers' work becomes a 'form of energizing improvisation'. (Bullough, 2009, p. 37). The micropolitical context of the school plays a significant role in how teachers experience and respond to their work and its emotional intensity.

As Curry, Jaxon, Russell, Callahan, and Bicaïs (2008) highlight, becoming a teacher is a political endeavour including negotiations in complex organisations with multiple actors who may resist the ideas of beginning teachers. Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002a; see also Kelchtermans, 2009) have shown how beginning teachers (as part of their micropolitical literacy) develop a way of making sense of situations in terms of the working conditions they consider crucial for doing a good job. In line with this, they also develop effective strategies for negotiating and influencing their working conditions. These strategies are always connected to the local context and affected by social interaction as well as institutional structures, norms and cultures (Curry et al., 2008). In this article, we elaborate these strategies and negotiations: how they appear and how emotions are intertwined in them in stories of a beginning teacher.

Narrativity forms the theoretical and methodological framework of the study. We understand that while telling, people reconstruct and make sense of their lives and experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005). Narrativity makes it possible to understand the meanings constructed in the teachers' experiences related to emotions and the micropolitical context of the school (see Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a). As narratives are based on experiences, they work as mediating tools that contextualise emotions in broad social, cultural and political contexts (Riessman, 2008).

3. Research design

This article focuses on one beginning secondary teacher. We call her Vuokko (pseudonym).² Vuokko is not the most typical beginning teacher: at the time of the interviews she was already in her early thirties and had previously had another career before starting teacher education. In that sense, she could be described as 'an experienced new teacher' (Gant, 2009). The research design included three interviews in order to capture the changes and processes in Vuokko's narratives: the

² Vuokko's case is a part of more extensive research material collected in the EMOT research project.

first interview was done in Vuokko's first autumn as a teacher, the second at the end of the first year, and the third at the end of the second year. Vuokko was interviewed every time by the same trained research assistant, and the interviews lasted between 30 and 70 minutes.³ The interviews were narrative in nature: the idea was that Vuokko would be able to broadly describe her experiences (Hyvärinen & Löyttyniemi, 2005). However, the interviewer had an overall plan for the topics to be covered in each of the interviews (focusing on different relationships in teachers' work, the most positive and negative experiences in the work, and Vuokko's thoughts about her future). All three interviews had basically the same structure.

As is typical in narrative interviews, Vuokko did not describe her experiences as a beginning teacher in chronological order; her story moved rapidly in time and in place. Although Vuokko's narrative is based on her experiences, the relationship between the story told and the life lived is not a direct reflection, but a construction. She chooses what to say, which words and plot to choose (Riessman, 2008).

The Finnish authors⁴ transcribed and then analysed Vuokko's interviews by using different narrative ways of reading them. Firstly, we analysed the three interviews with Vuokko by the storyline of her process as a beginning teacher. This analysis followed the principles of holistic-content approach (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998), which meant that Vuokko's interviews were not read categorically but in the context of the whole story consisting of all three interviews. When analysing the interviews, we focused on those experiences and events in Vuokko's storytelling that discussed the micropolitical context of the school and/or emotions, as indicated in our first research question. We marked the various themes related to above mentioned issues in all the three interviews and followed how these themes appeared and developed

³ It must be noted that Vuokko was on maternity leave in the 2014/15 school year. Hence, actually at the time of the third interview, Vuokko had only been teaching for one year.

⁴ Ann Deketelaere became involved in the study during the process of writing the article as an expert in micropolitics and early careers.

throughout the interviews. To strengthen the veracity of our interpretations, each of the three Finnish authors analysed Vuokko's interviews first independently. Based on this analysis and three researchers' findings, we constructed together a story about the plot of key experiences and events during Vuokko's first year as a teacher. Behind the idea of constructing this story, we acknowledged that people rarely provide chronological accounts (Mishler, 1997). Rather, telling stories is a sense-making process, which means that there is no ready story waiting to be told (Gubrium & Holstein, 2007; Mishler, 1997; Ochs & Capps, 2001). It is thus researchers' interpretation to organise a 'life story' by emplotting the story in time and thematically.

Secondly, after constructing the emplotted story, we decided to read and interpret the interviews with Vuokko also from another perspective. We noticed that in all the interviews, Vuokko told several emotionally intensive episodes related to students and colleagues. We selected three of these episodes for closer analysis. These three episodes represent some more generic phenomena in the data related to various relationships in Vuokko's work and the micropolitics of the school. This idea of focusing on particular episodes from interviews is also discussed by Conle (1996), who argues that in narrative inquiry, some stories are selected because they resonate with the researchers. The selected situations were specific, emotionally intensive conflict situations that especially described different relationships in Vuokko's work as a teacher. In general, Vuokko's interviews included numerous concrete and intensive descriptions of her daily work. For us this observation resonated with van Manen (1989) who argues that people tell their lives in the form of anecdotes. By adopting the concept of a 'narrative anecdote' (Weber, 1993; van Manen 1989), we reconstructed these emotionally intensive situations into anecdotes by keeping Vuokko's original wording as much as possible. We see the power of using narrative anecdotes twofold. First, narrative anecdotes are useful because they are evocative and resonate with listeners (Weber 1993). Secondly, narrative anecdotes are meaningful because they tell something particular while addressing the general (van Manen 1989, p. 247). That is why narrative anecdotes can be

used for theorising phenomena, not only for describing them. After the reconstruction of the anecdotes we focused on analysing the strategies that Vuokko used in these anecdotes when negotiating the emotionally intensive situations. This analysis followed the ideas of categorical-content approach (Lieblich et al, 1998) and thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008). On the basis of our second research question, we marked all the sections in the anecdotes that involved descriptions of Vuokko's actions in various micropolitical situations. Next we assigned these sections to relevant categories describing the strategies that Vuokko used in micropolitical situations. Although the categories were not predefined by a theory our theoretical understanding of micropolitics and emotions helped creating the meaningful categories.

To ensure ethical principles in this research, we have anonymised the parts that we use in this article. In addition, Vuokko gave written consent to the use of the interviews as research material. While writing this paper, we contacted Vuokko, and she helped us to clarify some issues that were unclear for us based on the interviews. Vuokko also read the final draft of this article and validated our interpretations by confirming she does recognise herself very well in the findings.

4. Results

In the following sections, we will present the results. The first of these sections is related to the first research question: how do emotions and micropolitics appear in a beginning teacher's work? The section introduces the constructed story of Vuokko's first year as a teacher. This section also introduces Vuokko's working community. The subsequent three sections relate to the second research question: what kind of strategies does a beginning teacher use when negotiating emotionally intensive situations in the micropolitical context of the school? We discuss this question by presenting three anecdotes from the interviews with Vuokko.

4.1 Joys, annoyance and loneliness in the middle of complex power relations of the work community

At the time of the interviews, Vuokko was a beginning music teacher in her thirties, who had a previous career as a musician. She had prior experience of teaching music in music schools.⁵

During the first two interviews, Vuokko worked as a substitute teacher in a special comprehensive school where primary and lower secondary school students (aged from about 7 to 15) had various learning difficulties or other special needs.⁶ The school was a medium-sized school with a dozen or so teachers. Many of the children had serious emotional and behavioural challenges.

In the interviews, Vuokko spoke warmly about music as a subject and about her students and how she actively attempted to find various means to support her students' learning. Throughout the interviews, she described particular episodes related to students concerning the importance of encountering students as unique individuals and sensing their emotions: 'You need to have sensitive antennae to know what is happening here' (first interview). The students sometimes were aggressive, and some dangerous incidents even occurred. Despite the enormous challenges with the students that Vuokko described in her interviews, she seemed to enjoy the unpredictability of her work. This warm attitude towards 'challenging' students could come from her own lived experiences as a student: in her third interview, she described herself as being, 'a really annoying child. I have always corrected teachers and been a holdout. I think it is lovely that students also have the possibility to say what they want to say. It [the teacher-student relationship] should not be only one-way communication'.

Vuokko's colleagues were not always supportive according to the interviews. Sometimes Vuokko said that she felt she was left alone in the working community. She was the only music teacher, so she was supposed to organise numerous school festivals by herself. She described how

⁵ It is quite common in Finland that student teachers have prior degrees or studies in other fields before starting teacher education.

⁶ In Finland, a master's degree is required for a teaching qualification. In this article, the term 'school' means a special school. Although inclusion is a general trend in Finland, there are still special comprehensive schools (grades 1–9, Finnish 1st graders start the school at the age of seven) for children with special needs.

she tried to ask for advice from the head teacher and deputy head, but received almost no help. Neither did the other teachers help her with the organising. On the other hand, she appreciated the pedagogical freedom: as the only music teacher, she could organise all the music lessons and festivals in her own way. According to Vuokko, the whole working community had split into various groups that were not able to co-operate. In the autumn term, Vuokko avoided going to the teachers' lounge during breaks and other free time; she went to the recreation room instead to be with the teaching assistants, with whom she had good and confidential relationships. In the second interview, however, Vuokko described that at the time (in the spring) also other teachers had started to join her and the assistants in the recreation room, the different groups had started to merge, and the co-operation between colleagues had improved: 'Some teachers have stayed in their cliques, but it has been really nice that most of the teachers have started to come to this common [recreation room]' (second interview).

One recurrent theme in the interviews with Vuokko was 'being called a girl'⁷, which Vuokko described as 'a crazy power game between adults'. This theme came up already in the first interview, as Vuokko related how she 'clashed with some other teachers' as she was diminished and downplayed by some of her female colleagues. Vuokko described how she, after sharing this issue with another colleague, 'took [her] own place' by trusting her professionalism as a music teacher and reacting immediately if someone started to belittle her. Vuokko returned to talking about 'being called a girl' in her second interview and stated that, 'it has completely finished'. Vuokko also told how she felt that she "had learnt to justify [her] own professionalism and [her] own role and expertise more to those few teachers who questioned [her] professionalism [because of her age and gender], and that mostly [she] felt appreciated by the other teachers". She further describes how after Christmas she "started to feel like part of the working community as a teacher and not only as the youngest member of the working community".

⁷ In Finnish, Vuokko used the term *tytötelly*, which means calling an adult woman a girl in a belittling tone or manner.

In the third interview, Vuokko explained that she was returning to work after maternity leave. She was asked to substitute for a primary school teacher in a music-focused⁸ class. Vuokko was going back to work ‘very eagerly’ and had very positive expectations about the atmosphere and the team spirit of her future workplace. Despite the highs and lows faced during her first year, Vuokko did not question her motivation for teaching. In the first interview after two months’ work experience, Vuokko described her work as ‘really nice’. She said, ‘I like this and I feel that this is my field’. In the third interview, Vuokko summarised her first year as a teacher by saying, ‘it was such an educative experience for me’ and ‘I really enjoyed that every day was different’.

In terms of micropolitics, a variety of aspects can be identified from Vuokko’s emplotted story: it seems that the working community is not very cooperative; people clearly have diverse and even conflicting views on issues. Instead of welcoming a newcomer as an equal member of the working community, some teachers attempted to use their informal power to put a beginning teacher in her place. However, on the basis of Vuokko’s story, the micropolitics was dynamic and changing as, in the spring term, the situation was different. During the year, Vuokko increasingly started to find her place in the working community and got to know the students and how to build confidential relationships with them.

To summarise Vuokko’s story from the perspective of emotions, we can conclude that various emotions characterise Vuokko’s first year as a teacher: joy related to her subject and students, annoyance with her colleagues and, in some cases, the entire micropolitics of the school, loneliness in organising school festivals, and enthusiasm towards returning to work after maternity leave. Vuokko does not refer to emotions, such as fear, shame, guilt or uncertainty, that are often reported as ‘typical’ emotions experienced by teachers, and especially beginning teachers (Helsing, 2007; Pekrun et al, 2002).

⁸ In Finland there are classes that are specialised in music. Students can apply for those special classes in the 2nd grade. These classes follow the regular national curriculum, but there are more music lessons than in regular classes.

Next, we begin to discuss particular narrative anecdotes selected from the interviews with Vuokko in order to discover strategies that a beginning teachers uses when negotiating emotionally intensive situations.

4.2. *How should you touch a student, if at all?*

The following anecdote that we call “touching student as a problem” illustrates a situation in which Vuokko and her colleague negotiate the issue of touching a student. The anecdote is from the early part of Vuokko’s first interview:

This same teacher with whom I had some conflicts earlier was always criticising the way I touch students. There is one girl in her class who always comes to hug me, and it does not bother me at all. I always open my arms for the girl, and we always hug when we meet in the corridor, and everything is fine. This girl does not want to hug her own teacher, and once when I was picking up the student from her [the other teacher’s] class, she [the teacher] made it very clear to me what the right way of touching a student is: she stroked the girl’s hand and told me that was how you should touch students, saying ‘this is legal’. [Vuokko changes the tone of her voice when she says this.] I just looked at her, and then when the girl came again to hug me and other students came too, I hugged them all. Of course I never hug students if they don’t want it, but when they need it, I think it is fine. In the school, there is usually always another adult present [in this special school an assistant is usually present in the classroom] in case someone would say something like ‘the teacher is touching the students there’. But I think people are afraid of touching, and many students come from homes where parents only touch with a fist, so I think it is only good if these children learn that there are other ways to touch too; that it can be something safe. Often holding students

will calm them down, as they know that they can't do anything to themselves or others; however, I wouldn't like to be in those situations.

This anecdote that discusses relationships with students and colleagues is emotionally intensive in describing a morally dilemmatic conflict situation and including emotionally loaded expressions (e.g. the other teacher 'made it very clear to me'). The anecdote describes a tension between the views and educational practices of Vuokko and the other teacher. This tension illustrates how colleagues can interpret and negotiate differently the micropolitical rules of the school and the rules of teachers' work in general. This example makes visible the micropolitical reality of the school that Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002b) describe by stating that 'the school as an organisation lives by certain traditions and habits, or more or less subtle power relations between (groups of) school members, with different interests' (p. 107).

Whereas, according to Vuokko, her colleague emphasises the 'proper' way of touching a student as a teacher and clearly intends to also teach this way to her younger colleague (demonstrating to Vuokko what kind of touching is allowed), Vuokko prioritises the student and highlights her own sensitivity to the student: if the student comes and wants to hug her, she will hug the student. Micropolitically, how teachers negotiate their own views in relation to particular situations produced by the everyday life of the school is an interesting issue. In the anecdote, Vuokko's thinking and actions are questioned by a more experienced teacher, but Vuokko also questions this teacher's 'rule of touching', not verbally, ('I just looked at her') but by continuing to hug the students. Based on this anecdote, Vuokko did not at all reconsider how to act towards the students, although she did consider touching and its justifications from many different viewpoints. In this conflict situation, Vuokko's clearly bases her micropolitical actions and strategy on what she considers to be the best for the child. Vuokko thus clearly follows her own professional and moral ideology without questioning it, but still reflecting its justification.

The above anecdote illustrates the complex emotions that touching a student can evoke in teachers' inner negotiations with themselves. Vuokko talks about touching as safe and how children can be calmed by holding them. However, it also raises the possibility of being misunderstood as a teacher when touching students, which may lead to teachers fearing touching and hence avoiding touching (Andrzejewski & Davis, 2008). Additionally, it raises the issue that teachers have to take a stand on touching students at a more general level as well, and that it is not an unambiguous matter. Vuokko's micropolitical strategy concerning touching includes sensitivity: touching only if and when the child wants so. Vuokko thus acknowledges that touching is a very sensitive matter and that one has to know the limits of what is allowed. Pillow (2003) has pointed out that touching children in the school context is a 'risk' and it has become to a certain extent taboo. In consequence, there is a lack of attention to and understanding of the potential of human contact to enrich classroom interaction. In general, the anecdote illustrates the embodied nature of teaching and how touching can have pedagogical meaning (Estola & Elbaz-Luwisch, 2003). Furthermore, it illustrates how touching as a topic can be a very sensitive and emotional matter for teachers.

4.3. *Whose responsibility it is to organise school festivals?*

In Vuokko's story, preparations for school festivals are some of the key episodes, which clearly illustrate the micropolitical practices of the school, as they concern the whole working community. During the first two interviews, Vuokko talked a lot about the school festivals and that she was expected to bear alone the responsibility for organising them. The next anecdote that we call "organising school festivals" is related to organising the school's spring festival⁹ and whose responsibility it was to organise it.

⁹ In Finnish schools, the end of the autumn term is celebrated in a Christmas festival in December, and the end of spring term in a spring festival in May or early June. In addition, different schools arrange other festivals, for example to

My contract of employment finished a week before the school ended in spring. There was a teachers' meeting where some other teachers asked, 'Vuokko, how have you arranged the upcoming spring festival?' [Vuokko changes the tone of her voice when she says this.] I first told them that my contract will finish before the festivals, so [I asked them] 'how are YOU planning to arrange the festival'? Well, of course I couldn't turn away like that but I let them sweat for a while before I told them that we [Vuokko and the students] had been practising some songs. Their next question was about 'who would play the piano' [Vuokko changes the tone of her voice when she says this.] and again, I first told them I have no idea. Of course, I had agreed with another teacher that she would play. And their next question was whether there was a piano in the hall. Well, I then agreed with this teacher [who was going to play the piano] that he would take the piano there.

The anecdote focuses on the teacher's relationships with her colleagues. On the basis of the way that Vuokko describes this situation, it seems that the atmosphere was emotionally rather tense; one can nearly sense the anxiety of the colleagues that Vuokko is feeding. A great deal of micropolitical rules are not explicit; teachers learn them by participating in the way the school does things (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a). While in the previous anecdote, the unwritten micropolitical rule concerning touching a student was expressed by one teacher and was most definitely also related to her own professional rule as a teacher, the micropolitical rule that appears in this anecdote is clearly related to the traditions and habits of the whole school culture. Vuokko's anecdote is one example to illustrate how a beginning teacher learns that, as a music teacher, she is expected to organise the school festival alone, even though her contract will end before the actual date of the festival. Prior

celebrate Independence Day, etc. The whole school (and usually students' parents too) attends these festivals, in which students perform in music performances or plays.

research has shown that beginning teachers are often those in the school who are asked to do extra tasks or organise special events (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b). For beginning teachers, these tasks can appear as a possibility to fully show their abilities or a sign of inequity between different teachers (Jenkins, Smith, & Maxwell, 2009). In the above anecdote, this inequity shows in how Vuokko emphasises that she was expected to organise the festival quite by herself. Another sign of inequity lies in how her contract ended a week before the end of the school year, which means that she did not get paid for the summer holiday months,¹⁰ and still, according to Vuokko, she was expected to organise the festival that would take place at a time when she was no longer under contract.

Despite her contract being ended, Vuokko took care of organising the festival. However, the anecdote is micropolitically revealing, as Vuokko tells that she consciously kept her colleagues uncertain about this organisation. She used the power she had as a music teacher in the micropolitical context of the school: it seems to be an unwritten rule that the music teacher is responsible for organising the festivals. Her use of that power becomes visible in how she keeps her colleagues uncertain and does not immediately reveal that she has, in fact, been planning the festival, rehearsed music pieces with the students and also made other arrangements. This example of Vuokko's power in the micropolitical situation reminds us that, even though she was a beginning teacher, Vuokko did not just passively undergo the situation; she actively found ways to use her power in her interactions with the colleagues (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a). Blase (1988, see also Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b) has distinguished proactive and reactive micropolitical strategies, the former aimed at maintaining the situation and the latter changing the situation and influencing the conditions. In this case, Vuokko used both: she clearly made visible and questioned the micropolitical rule of the school. However, in the end she enabled the school to maintain its unwritten micropolitical rule as she does what is expected of her.

¹⁰ This situation is quite common in Finland for substitute teachers.

4.4. *What should you do when a colleague acts inappropriately?*

In the second interview, Vuokko recalled organising the Christmas festival in the anecdote that we have named: “inappropriately acting colleagues”.

Christmas festival arrangements were thrust upon me and, of course, as I am a music teacher, we had practised only music performances. Some days before the festival, the teachers started to complain that there are too many music performances and no one would be able to listen to so many songs. They asked ‘could there be something else too’ [Vuokko changes the tone of her voice when she says this.] When I heard that, I really had difficulty containing myself and I was thinking ‘Why haven’t you arranged anything else? I am a music teacher, after all.’ A teacher said that ‘I am not trying to blame you, but I am just worried’ [Vuokko changes the tone of her voice when she says this.] And then, when the students were keenly practising the songs, the teachers who had complained about this came to listen to a rehearsal. Some students were very nervous, but I knew that they would do fine when it came to the crunch. And then when we started, the children singing and me accompanying them on the piano, one of the teachers said, ‘Stop! This is terrible rubbish’. I was thinking, ‘Hell, no! They say something like that in front of the students?’ The children had been so enthusiastic – there was one boy who was very shy and he had summoned the courage to play the glockenspiel, and then someone says that it sounds horrible and you must not play this in the Christmas festival. I said that we should all calm down and then later on after thinking a little more I asked if the ninth-graders would join the children. It all went OK, and even these teachers came to thank me afterwards for arranging it all, but I still think, ‘How dare they say that in front of the ildren’.

In the above anecdote, Vuokko's colleagues (of whom one is the same teacher as in the touching anecdote) questioned her professional expertise in front of her students, and at the same time also humiliated the students. Vuokko is criticised by her colleagues, but she stands to defend her students and in the end finds a meaningful compromise to the situation.

The anecdote focuses on the teacher's relationships with her students and colleagues; there are many voices present in it. It demonstrates how silence can be a micropolitical strategy for beginning teachers in emotionally intensive situations. Although the words and expressions Vuokko uses ('Hell no!' and 'How dare they!') reveal that the situation with the colleagues was very emotional for Vuokko, it seems she did not say anything directly to the other teachers, managing to defend her students and similarly to act without her colleagues losing face. Also, when her colleagues complained about the festival having only music performances, Vuokko tells how she kept silent, even though she had difficulties not responding by pointing out that she was a music teacher after all. In addition to being a micropolitical strategy (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a), silence can also be considered a strategy of emotional labour (e.g. Liu & Zhang, 2015) when teachers have to control their emotions according to social norms and expectations, as well as the consequences of this process (Hochschild, 2003). Emotional labour may also be underpinned by ethical and humanistic dimensions (Oplatka, 2009). Teachers take on emotional labour (e.g. hiding their emotions) for the benefit of the child (Jakhelln, 2011). This clearly seems to be the case in this anecdote. As another micropolitical strategy, Vuokko uses compromise: Vuokko found a solution to the problem posed by conflicting views concerning the Christmas festival by asking older students to join the singing.

The anecdote shows how, for Vuokko, the situation appears emotionally intensive from the viewpoint of her professional moral as a teacher – how students are and should be treated. Hence, the anecdote reveals something about what is possible in the working community: teachers can act in ways that are not tactful towards students.

5. Discussion

This article focused on the emotional dimension of a beginning teacher's work in the micropolitical context of the school by showing how emotions and micropolitics appear in a beginning teacher's work and what kind of strategies a beginning teacher uses when negotiating emotionally intensive situations in the micropolitical context of the school. To research in depth how a teacher makes meaning of emotionally intensive situations is one way to understand the various relational and emotional aspects that are present when teachers try to balance the school's micropolitics and a teacher's own values. Vuokko's first year as a teacher, from the perspectives of emotions and micropolitics as well as the anecdotes, clearly showed the significance of micropolitics for a beginning teacher's work: teachers have different views and values in the school, and they use formal and informal power to influence and/or protect their views and goals (Blase, 1991).

Vuokko's first year in profession included constant negotiation on how she should think and act as a teacher. These kinds of negotiations are certainly typical for any beginning teacher but may be intensified in a challenging work environment. In the three interviews, Vuokko's enthusiasm towards her work did not disappear. Vuokko's story interwove the relationships with the students and colleagues. In these relationships, Vuokko became more aware of the micropolitical context of the school and learnt to negotiate her own place. Although it seems that the interviews with Vuokko were full of demanding situations, she did not describe her first year as a 'survival story'; she had a strong confidence in her own abilities as a teacher. As Hebert and Worthy (2001) point out, literature characterising the first year of teaching has mainly described it in a negative manner, using terms such as 'frustration', 'anxiety', and 'self-doubt'. Although Vuokko had plenty of challenges during her first year as a teacher, she described her work in positive terms and trusted her own abilities as a teacher. The emotionally intensive situations that Vuokko faced during her

first year as a teacher challenged her professionalism in many ways. However, when discussing these situations, she mostly focused on describing how she managed to act according to her own moral ideology, finding a balance between micropolitics and her own ideals and meaningful and constructive micropolitical strategies in difficult situations.

Instead of focusing on beginning teachers' lack of competence and agency (the 'deficiency approach'), 'emotional exhaustion', 'survival' or 'coping', (see Johnson et al., 2014) this article showed how a beginning teacher is able to 'read' the micropolitical context of the school and find meaningful ways to act in emotionally intensive situations. Thus, emotionally intensive and challenging situations can be considered possibilities to learn and grow professionally, which seemed to be the case with Vuokko (see Bullough, 2009). As Tricarico, Jacobs and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) argue, there is a need for more of these 'counternarratives' that share stories about beginning teachers who do 'succeed'.

Our research increases knowledge of how beginning teachers learn to negotiate emotionally intensive situations and use various strategies in the micropolitical context of their work. Based on the results, we identified four different strategies for how Vuokko negotiated emotionally intensive situations: (1) *A strategy related to the beginning teacher's personal professional ethics*. Vuokko aligned herself with the children in the ethical conflict situations; her professional ethics clearly guided her to care for and protect students from harm and respect their integrity, even in situations where colleagues did not share her views. Colnerud (1997) writes about the social norms of collegiality, which may bring teachers into conflict with their own professional ethics (e.g. caring for and protecting students). Norms and loyalty to colleagues keep teachers from defending pupils. In Vuokko's case, this type of socialisation did not seem to take place. (2) *A strategy related to channelling the negative emotions raised in conflict situations into meaningful action*. Earlier research has shown that unpleasant emotions such as 'moral anger' as a consequence of witnessing violations of justice, humanity and dignity, (in Vuokko's case anger towards the teachers who

humiliated the students), can motivate individuals to act against injustices and to look for fairer solutions to unjust issues (Batson et al., 2007; Holmes, 2004; Lorde, 1984; Lanas & Zembylas, 2014; Zembylas, 2007). Vuokko came up with a compromise in a situation where colleagues complained about the bad quality of the programme in a school festival. (3) *A strategy of silence*. Vuokko talked about feeling irritated and angry in the situations where colleagues questioned her ways of thinking and action, but on the basis of her story, Vuokko chose to say nothing instead of expressing her anger verbally in the situation. This strategy illustrates how the working community can have a culture of silence: certain negative emotions are not brought up and especially beginning teachers may remain silent about such emotions that could threaten their position at work (Uitto, Kaunisto, Syrjälä & Estola, 2015b). (4) *A strategy of implicit questioning and making visible some of the unwritten rules of the school*. This strategy showed in how Vuokko questioned and made visible the school's unwritten rules, such as whose responsibility it really is to arrange the school festivals and what the right way of touching a student is. This strategy clearly confirms that finding one's place as a teacher in the school's existing micropolitical context is not just a passive adjustment but takes place as part of a process in which a beginning teacher actively interprets and interacts with the context (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a).

The results of this article raise some new insights related to beginning teachers and the globally acknowledged concern on teachers leaving their job during the first years of their career. Emotionally intensive situations are an inevitable part of any teacher's work, but they may be especially challenging for a beginning teacher who is still learning different ways of approaching these situations. Vuokko was not necessarily a 'typical' beginning teacher, in the sense that she had already had a previous career and she was older than many beginning teachers are. This made us wonder whether it is easier for a 'more experienced' beginning teacher to be a 'change agent' in the working community and combat harmful socialisation norms of the school. In Vuokko's case, she did not really seem to become provoked or distressed about the negative emotions, although many

of the challenges that Vuokko experienced could have been overwhelming for some beginning teachers. This is an interesting question in some countries (e.g. Finland) where the current trend is to favour young candidates who have just finished upper secondary school in the entrance exams for teacher education. Student teachers with different life experiences and varied backgrounds could bring a different orientation to teacher education and also schools could benefit from having teachers with different backgrounds and expertise. Based on this research, it is also worth considering whether more experienced beginning teachers have a lower risk of emotional exhaustion or teacher attrition.

In order to support especially beginning teachers' understanding of the micropolitical realities of the school and the emotional and relational dimensions related to it, these aspects should be integrated into the teacher education curriculum and the different contents of both pre- and in-service teacher education. Special emphasis should be based e.g. on analysing how emotionally loaded (often difficult and stressful) situations are related to teachers' moral identity and how it is possible to channel even negative emotions into meaningful action in various micropolitical situations. If teachers have possibilities and abilities to reflect and deal with the emotionally difficult situations, challenging situations can turn into significant professional learning experiences. However, it is not enough that teachers are given the knowledge and skills to understand and deal with the emotionally intensive situations taking place in the micropolitical context of schools. The school community's micropolitical rules should be more visible, open, inclusive and negotiable, allowing for the inclusion of new ideas and perspectives. As head teachers play a significant role in affecting school culture and micropolitics, these issues should be present in their in- and pre-service education curricula as well. In general, there is a need for increased awareness of the close connection between emotions and micropolitics as part of teachers' professional learning and growth.

This research was based on narrative interviews with only one beginning teacher, which can be seen as a limitation. However, research that includes large samples of beginning teachers may not be able to capture all the richness that is related to this early phase of a teacher's career. When we evaluated the reliability of the research, the principles of ethics and a participatory approach were used as criteria (e.g. Heikkinen, Huttunen & Syrjälä, 2007). By constructing Vuokko's story about the plot of key experiences and events during Vuokko's first year as a teacher and by focusing on anecdotes (instead of short quotations from the data) it was possible to pay attention to the context and also historical continuity of the story. We attempted to be as transparent as possible when describing the research material and also asked Vuokko to read and comment on our interpretations (see Heikkinen et al., 2007). We strongly argue that these kinds of studies are needed more to examine in-depth the heterogeneous group of beginning teachers and their meaning making processes in order to develop means for both pre and in-service teacher education to support beginning teachers and their retention.

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