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TEACHER POSITIONING IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION REFORM

MA thesis

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## ABSTRACT

The last few years have seen major changes in the Estonian education system. The education reform brought along changes to the system of providing upper secondary education, including the national curriculum. The current paper examines the way teachers position themselves and others in the context of education reform as a close-up, in-depth analysis of teacher interpretations of the curriculum reform might contribute to a better understanding of the reform process. The aim of the current qualitative study is to explore language teachers' interpretations of the new national curriculum. The paper will provide an in-depth qualitative study of eight interviews in order to explore the dynamics of positioning in relation to the national curriculum.

The Introduction provides an overview of the reform context as well as previous research into how this reform has been implemented. The first chapter then introduces social constructionism and Davies' and Harré's (1990) theory of positioning, the theoretical background of the study. This particular approach was chosen because it enables an analysis of teacher interpretations as active and dependent on the conversational context and the aims of the participants. Previous research into teacher positioning revealing fluctuation of and pragmatism in positioning is also discussed. The first chapter then presents the methodology used, namely, grounded theory. The second chapter centres on the empirical analysis of interviews with eight teachers of English as a Foreign Language. It analyses the interviewed teachers' reactions to change on the basis of the main positions adopted by teachers during the interviews, these being (1) distancing from the education authorities; (2) authorities as 'incompetent'; (3) teacher as an 'expert'; (4) fluctuating positions in relation to colleagues and students; (5) curriculum as 'in the background', 'nothing new', 'difficult to implement', or 'unattainable'; (6) teacher as a 'non-expert'; and (7) national examination as the goal of foreign language instruction. The analysis involves not only the positions created, assumed and rejected, but also the rhetorical devices used to achieve the positions. Conclusions are then drawn based on the findings.

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## **Introduction**

Estonia has been in a process of educational reform for some time now. The focal point of the reform in the public education system has been reorganising the network of schools (Aaviksoo et al 2012; Ministry of Education and Research, 2012). This was to be achieved through separating basic schools from upper secondary schools and closing down small upper secondary schools. There was to be a clear division between responsibilities of the state (financing of upper secondary schools) and the local educational authorities (financing of basic schools). The reorganisation was also designed to solve financing problems among other things with regard to teacher salaries. With the reform, issues of study materials, study support for special educational needs students, transport, student accommodation, etc. were to be solved. The reform was also supposed to reduce the work load of both teachers and students through the reduction of study content in subject curricula (Ministry of Education and Research, 2013a).

The curriculum reform is a part of the above-mentioned major changes in the education system. The new curriculum was adopted in 2010 alongside the new Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, replacing the older version from 2002 (State Gazette 2011a). This came into effect in January 2011 and with it, schools were given more freedom in designing their own courses. Also, all secondary schools had to design three elective branches for students to choose from. The two later versions of the Act (from September 2011 and May 2013) introduced only minor changes. In September 2011, student research papers were made compulsory for all students (State Gazette 2011b). Also, requirements for graduation for students from schools using Russian as the language of instruction were altered, so that they could choose to take the Russian exam instead of Estonian. In 2013, international examinations in foreign languages were accepted as replacement for the national examination (State Gazette 2013a). The last changes were

introduced in September 2013 (State Gazette 2013b). Upper secondary schools were no longer obligated to offer three elective branches.

The curriculum design process was also a part of the educational reform. Originally, according to the Act from 2011, every upper secondary school had to design three elective branches. The system of courses was changed so that of the 96 courses necessary for completing secondary education, only 63 compulsory courses were set out by the state. Each school had to design the remaining courses for all three elective branches (the national curriculum provided material for elective courses). Overlap between courses provided in elective branches was allowed but each branch had to have at least eight courses unique to that branch. In addition, every school had to design a minimum of 11 elective courses (Ministry of Education and Research 2011a). This means that a considerable part of the curriculum was to be designed by the schools themselves. While some schools had adopted three branches already on their own initiative, others had to design them. The minimum requirement was implementing the new national curriculum in Forms 1, 4, and 7 in September 2011; in forms 2, 5 and 8 in September 2012 and finally in forms 3, 6 and 9 and in upper secondary schools in September 2013 (Ministry of Education and Research 2013b). Many upper secondary schools chose to switch to the new curriculum one form at a time so that in 2011, many upper secondary schools started with the new curriculum. Others had to provide the whole new curriculum by September 2013.

The requirement of designing three elective branches had been the backbone of redesigning the curricula in upper secondary schools. The withdrawal of the requirement of three elective branches was announced in May 2013 and took effect in September 2013 (State Gazette 2013b). Urmas Klaas, Chairman of the Cultural Affairs Committee in Parliament, who explained the latest changes to the last Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act in Parliament, stated that the demand for the three elective

branches had become 'artificial' (Klaas 2013: para. 7). Changes that had been introduced three years earlier and had taken schools and teachers a considerable amount of time and energy to implement were now withdrawn.

The latest version of the national curriculum consists of two major parts: the general curriculum and 13 appendices (seven subject curricula, six elective courses, and integration) (State Gazette 2013b). The official aim of the new curriculum is to focus more on students and learning as opposed to teachers and teaching (Ministry of Education and Research 2013b). The whole curriculum is student-centred in its approach to learning. The reduction of student work load is meant to be achieved through decreasing subject content and the number of compulsory courses. The new curriculum is designed to provide more choice for the students through more elective courses. The learning process is seen as a whole: subjects are joined into subject areas, attention is given to cross-curricular integrative topics and integration of subjects, and specific competencies and learning outcomes are described (Ministry of Education and Research 2013c). Designing a suitable learning environment is given more attention, as is formative assessment. Formative assessment is defined as 'assessment during the learning process /.../ giving feedback /.../ motivating the student /.../ assessing the student's progress in comparison to his/her own earlier achievements' (State Gazette 2013b). The system for national examinations is reorganised into compulsory examinations in Estonian, Mathematics and Foreign Language for all students. For the majority of students in Estonia, this foreign language is English.

According to the national curriculum, instruction of foreign languages is level-based. Students can choose between B2-level and B1-level courses. Schools have to offer five compulsory courses; in addition, schools must provide two elective courses in the B2-level language and four courses in the B1-level language (State Gazette 2011a: para. 8).

The aim of foreign language instruction is achieving B-level language proficiency in at least two foreign languages (State Gazette 2011b:1). All learning outcomes are described based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The topics for course content are very general: 'Estonia and The World', 'Culture and Art', 'Environment and Technology', 'Education and Work', and 'People and Society' (State Gazette 2011b: 11).

The implementation of curricular changes has been studied by the Ministry of Education and Research (see Henno and Grandström 2012; Kirss and Paks 2012; Oja et al 2013). As teachers and school leaders are most closely connected to the implementation of the new curriculum, teachers' and school leaders' opinions regarding the new curriculum were studied in 2012 by Henno and Grandström. Oja et al focused on comparative analysis of data from the 2012 study by Henno and Grandström. Kirss and Paks explored language teachers' opinions regarding the new national curriculum. The study by Henno and Grandström (2012) focused on the curriculum design and implementation process, integration and co-operation, assessment practices, co-operation between teachers and school management, positive aspects of the new curriculum and problems in implementation. 1839 respondents provided feedback regarding the new curriculum via an online questionnaire. According to the study, 79% of the teachers surveyed were active in curriculum design<sup>1</sup>. 75% of teachers found positive aspects in the reform, most common being the student-centred approach (14.6%), choices for the teacher (10%), integration (8.9%), developing creativity (4.6%) and formative assessment (3.9%). Formative assessment is something teachers claim to have always done (10.8%), but it is considered time-consuming (27.2%). When asked about problems in the curriculum design process,

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<sup>1</sup> As Henno and Grandström have provided some data as percentages of teachers and some data as number of teachers, an effort was made to transfer data into percentages to ease comparisons.

71.6% of teachers defined problems. The most problematic were lack of time (12.4%) and resources (8.6%), workload for teachers (7.3%), difficulties with integration (4.7%), lack of information (3.6%), and formative assessment (3.5%). The same factors were identified in the subject curriculum design process as well.

In 2013, Oja et al re-analysed the data from the 2012 study by Henno and Granström in order to group teachers based on teachers' contentment with the reform. As cluster analysis (taking into account school type, language of instruction in school and teacher type of subject teacher versus form teacher) yielded no well-defined groups, Oja et al deduced groups according to teachers' levels of student-centredness based on one question focusing on students and their development.<sup>2</sup> They found that 32% of teachers demonstrate a high or medium level of student-centredness. Teachers who, on the basis of their questionnaire responses, are more student-centred also demonstrate more positive assessments of co-operation in school, and take the general curriculum more into account when designing subject curricula (Oja et al 2013).

Also, an expert assessment of the new curriculum in English as a Foreign Language was compiled in 2012 by Kirss and Paks. Based on their own expert analysis and a survey among 147 language teachers, conclusions were drawn regarding the new subject curriculum for foreign languages. There is a considerable overlap in opinions by teachers generally and language teachers specifically. The survey suggests that 75% of language teachers identify positive aspects of the reform, amongst these, the student-centred approach is listed by 15% of respondents, formative assessment by 10%, integration and creativity by 7%, and integrative topics by 5% (Kirss and Paks 2012: 5). Also, the problems listed are similar: lack of time (12%) and resources (10%), integration (6%).

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<sup>2</sup> The question itself is only described as 'question no. 39'. The questionnaire is not included in the appendices.

More specifically, language teachers see specifying learning outcomes as problematic (6%) (Kirss and Paks 2012: 8). Regarding the subject curriculum for languages, 66% of teachers reported positive aspects, among these integration (18%), wider choice of topics, more freedom for the teacher (9%), and a more individual approach (7%) (Kirss and Paks 2012: 9). Noticeably, only 28% of teachers would make changes to their subject curricula. A third of these teachers would change the number of courses; 15% would increase integration, and a tenth would change the topics/themes covered in courses (Kirss and Paks 2012: 10).

Based on these results, one could draw the conclusion that the curriculum reform has been unproblematic, with 75% of language teachers finding positive aspects in the reform and 66% of language teachers reporting positive aspects in the new subject curriculum (Kirss and Paks 2012). However, it is also evident that the picture is not so black-and-white as 69% of language teachers report problems in the curriculum design process (*ibid.*). Formative assessment and integration are seen both as positive and problematic. Therefore, the interpretations of teachers might be much more fragmentary and complex than is suggested by quantitative analyses. This suggests a close-up, in-depth analysis of teacher interpretations of the curriculum reform might contribute to a better understanding of the reform process. The aim of the current qualitative study is to explore language teachers' interpretations of the new national curriculum. The following research question was posed:

*What positions do teachers of English as a Foreign Language adopt to interpret the new national curriculum and its design process?*

The thesis will provide an in-depth qualitative study of a small number of interviews in order to explore the dynamics of positioning in relation to the national curriculum.

The thesis is divided into two main chapters. The first chapter introduces social constructionism and Davies' and Harré's (1990) theory of positioning, the theoretical background of the study. The first chapter also presents the methodology used, namely, grounded theory. The second chapter centres on the empirical analysis of a sample of 8 qualitative interviews (505 minutes of data). It will analyse the interviewed teachers' reactions to change on the basis of the main positions adopted by teachers during the interviews. The analysis involved not only the positions themselves, but also the rhetorical devices used to achieve the positions. Conclusions are then drawn based on the findings.

## **1. Theoretical Background and Research Methodology**

This chapter centres on theoretical considerations relevant to the present paper. Social constructionism (see Gergen 2009; Burr 2003) is the general framework that informs the present study. Positioning theory (see Davies and Harré 1990; Harré 2004) is the main theory that supports my analysis. This particular approach was chosen because it enables an analysis of teacher interpretations as active and dependent on the conversational context and the aims of the participants. Discourse analysis as a helpful tool in analysing positions is discussed. An overview of previous research into teacher positioning (in general as well as in reform context specifically) is also presented.

The second part of this chapter introduces the research methodology, grounded theory. Then, application of this method in this study in particular is discussed. The author introduces the sample, data collection and analysis process. Finally, the process of researcher reflection is described.

### **1.1. Theoretical Background**

#### **1.1.1. Social Constructionism**

Social constructionism provides a helpful framework for making sense of social phenomena. From a social constructionist point of view, reality, knowledge and truth are created, not discovered. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) argue that reality is not objective but rather created in social interaction. Burr (2003: 6) states that ‘within social constructionism there can be no such thing as an objective fact’. From the social constructionist perspective, there are only constructions of reality. Gergen (2009: 36) calls this the *game of truth* – truth is created through language use. Therefore, analysing the way we speak about phenomena helps us understand what kind of reality is being constructed. Burr (2003: 29-45) demonstrates that categories we perceive as 'given, fixed and immutable', are, in fact, 'socially derived and socially maintained', often through language.

For example, we perceive humans to be either male or female. However, the biological binary is given a variety of meanings in different cultural contexts and enacted differently in different interpersonal encounters. Moreover, gendered interactions contribute to the construction and maintenance of gender norms that are perceived to be 'natural' and immutable.

Burr (2003) explains that we actively construct accounts of events and ourselves. Our talk 'has specific functions and achieves purposes for us in our interactions with each other' (Burr 2003: 58). We can use various *discourses* to construct our accounts. Potter (1996: 105) defines discourse as *talk and texts as parts of social practices*. This very general definition emphasises that discourse is part of social interaction and action. Davies and Harré (1990: para. 6) specify that discourse is 'an institutionalised use of language and language-like sign systems'. Both definitions stress that discourses do not stand separate from action or social context. Also Burr (2003: 75) emphasises that discourses are bound up with action since they have 'implications for what we can do and what we should do.' Burr (2003: 64) defines discourse as 'a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, statements that /.../ produce a particular version of events.' There are multiple discourses and they construct the world from different perspectives. Discourses develop on different levels (institutional, political, cultural, small group level) and around various topics. Discourses 'can compete with each other or they can create distinct and incompatible versions of reality. To know anything is to know in terms of one or more discourses' (*ibid.*). The essence of discourses, then, is contradictory since they *enable* us to know something, and yet they *limit* us since we can know something only within a discourse.

Using discourses is bound up with rhetoric. Potter (1996: 106-108) invites us to consider rhetoric 'a pervasive feature of the way people interact and arrive at

understanding' as our social constructions are rhetorically organised. We cannot help using rhetorical devices and the use of rhetoric is not necessarily manipulative or even conscious. We construct arguments even in our daily interaction and do so without major premeditation. However, we also engage in conscious and strategic rhetoric. Potter differentiates between *offensive rhetoric* and *defensive rhetoric* used for constructing accounts of reality as 'factual'. *Offensive rhetoric* undermines alternative descriptions, and *defensive rhetoric* has the capacity to resist such undermining. Both offensive and defensive rhetoric are part of discourse. Potter divides discourse in two: *reifying* and *ironizing* discourse. *Reifying discourse* constructs 'versions of the world which are solid and factual', that is, this sort of discourse aims to create seemingly neutral 'facts'. In contrast, *ironizing discourse* undermines the 'literal descriptiveness of versions' (Potter 1996: 107), that is to say by using ironizing discourses, we make 'facts' seem less 'factual' and more related to prejudices, opinions, stake etc.

It cannot be stated, however, that any construction is possible at any given time. We are limited by the social world we live in. Some constructions have a better claim at being perceived as 'true' at any given time – they are 'dominant' and therefore are considered more 'right'. While understandably we need some agreement in our constructions for the social world not to collapse, some constructions can be limiting to the groups they concern. This is especially notable in the case of socially disempowered groups. For example, discourses surrounding minorities, the diseased, and the aged can be limiting for members of those groups. Seeing the dominant categories and discourses that go with them as constructions can initiate the creation of alternative visions and voices and empower members of those groups.

Dominant discourses derive their power from being in a position to define what is considered 'true' in a certain period or context. This knowledge of what is 'true' is created

in discourses and spread in social interaction – as people interact, they (attempt to) make their versions of reality and knowledge real: 'it is through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life that our versions of knowledge become fabricated' (Burr 2003: 4). All participants in social interactions are active agents and in every interaction, there is the possibility of choice even if it is not perceived so by the participants. As Davies and Harré (1990: para. 5) put it, 'the possibility of choice /.../ provides people with the possibility of acting agentially'. This agency is of vital importance: from a social constructionist perspective, every person can at least attempt to construct alternative realities.

Therefore, the use of discourses is inevitably tied up with the notion of choice. When we choose to use one discourse and not another, we exercise choice. This choice is not always conscious as dominant discourses seem self-evident and 'natural' ('the way one speaks on this sort of occasion', Davies and Harré 1990: para. 16). Moreover, it can be argued that choosing to use an *alternative* discourse actually strengthens the dominant discourse as the alternative is perceived as a deviation from the norm, not a challenge to it. Burr (2003: 122-124) argues for critically analysing discourses that frame our lives as a first step toward change. This is by no means an easy process but it does offer a way of exercising agency.

Burr (2003: 3-5) suggests that social constructionists share four characteristics: (1) a critical stance toward taken-for-granted knowledge; (2) historical and cultural specificity of knowledge; (3) knowledge as sustained by social processes; and (4) knowledge and social action as belonging together. Constructing reality and knowledge is an active process, where knowledge and action are intertwined in complex ways. What we know influences our actions, and our social *interactions* create knowledge.

Potter (1996: 103) offers the metaphor of house-building for the construction process. The tools we work with when constructing knowledge – words – are like bricks which 'are soft and vague in outline /.../ everything exists in a fuzzy and fluid state until crystallized in particular texts or particular interactions.' This means that words are assigned a specific meaning when used in particular contexts for particular means.

Also, an individual comes into being through social interaction 'not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted' (Davies and Harré 1990: para. 9). Individual *selves* are temporal and in a constant flux. This means our selves are not ready-made and fixed but are constantly being reconstructed. Harré (2004 :3) separates the individual *self* in three: the *embodied* self in a material world which remains constant, the multiple *autobiographical* selves – the parts in story lines one assigns to him/herself, and the *social* selves that one presents to others in interactions. In this view, a person is not a unitary whole but continually fluctuating and changing. Positioning theory is one productive theoretical framework that helps understand and explain this constant flux.

### **1.1.2. Positioning**

Davies and Harré (1990) use the concept of positioning to make sense of social interaction processes. Harré (2004: 6) defines positioning theory as 'the study of the nature, formation, influence and ways of change of local systems of rights and duties as shared assumptions about them influence small scale interactions'.

Let us first focus on the essence of these small scale interactions or *conversations*. Davies and Harré (1990: para. 5) see conversations as 'joint action for the production of determinate speech acts'. Actual conversations in the past and present are the site of the positioning process. These conversations are shaped by 'the joint action of all the participants as they make (or attempt to make) their own and each other's actions socially determinate. A speech-*action* can become a determinate speech-*act* to the extent that it is

taken up as such by all the participants' (Davies and Harré 1990: para. 5, original emphasis). Every conversation is a speech-action wherein participants attempt to achieve something with their words through the positions made available. However, not everything said in a conversation becomes an illocutionary act. Illocutionary act is a performative speech act that produces consequences, e.g. in saying 'I promise', the person defines the statement as a promise and, by uttering the words, takes on the commitments associated with a promise. A speech-action only functions as an illocutionary act if other conversers recognise it as such. In other words, it is not enough to claim 'I am a teacher'; other involved in the conversation must accept this positioning for it to become a reality.

Indeed, conversations can unfold between participants so that the positioning of another is not accepted or even understood. So, for example, one may wish to position himself as 'victim' in a situation but can only do so when other accept this positioning. When others choose to position the 'victim' as 'a whinger', his positioning as 'victim' is noticeably more difficult to achieve. This process of negotiating positions is constant and therefore helps us focus on 'dynamic aspects of encounters' as opposed to the more static process of assuming roles (Davies and Harré 1990: para. 1).

'Roles' are seen as relatively stable but conversations may destabilize the assumed roles. In this view, contradictions in speech can be interpreted as 'conflicts'. Focusing on dynamic processes, on the other hand, helps us to see these sites of contradictions not as conflicts or oppositions, but as creative active construction processes (Søreide 2006). In this view, the agent in the conversation is not seen in a negative light as confused, undecided or oppositional but rather as active and engaged in a positioning process.

The outcome of a conversation, then, is not fixed as conversations are not static but change and evolve. Multiple speech actions can be accomplished in one saying, as is vividly shown by Davies and Harré (1990) in their analysis of a conversation revolving

around positionings such as nurse-carer, independent powerful man, helpless dependent woman, chauvinist, etc., as well as story lines and extensions of significance. Extension of significance, put simply, means significance attributed to an attitude or concept. Davies and Harré (1990: para. 22-23) propose two types of extension: indexical extension and typification extension. The former means attributing significance based on prior personal experience, whereas typification extension relies on association with a culturally established cluster of attributes.

Positioning also depends on other factors besides the agency of the subjects in conversation. For instance, we may not wish to speak derogatively of any group in society but simply position some groups unintentionally in a disempowered position because we use one of the discourses possible to us, not necessarily consciously thinking of the positioning process involved.

Positioning, then, is 'the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as /.../ participants in jointly produced story lines' (Davies and Harré 1990: para. 13). Positioning can be interactive (what one person says positions another) or reflexive (one positions oneself) (*ibid.*). Søreide (2006) provides an example of this when analysing teachers assigning positions to themselves and their colleagues. Teachers reflexively position themselves as 'kind and caring' while interactively positioning other teachers as 'typical teachers': strict, boring and humourless. In order *to position* oneself in a conversation, *a position* is necessary. The concept of subject positions provides for that. A subject position is a part, a position made available for the participant in conversation. Søreide (2006) demonstrates that subject positions can be relatively stable within one discourse; for example, recurrent subject positions appeared in her study of teacher discourse.

Harré (2004: 6) specifies three conditions for achieving meaningful interactions. Firstly, interaction is shaped by *the implicit pattern of the distribution of rights and duties* or, in short, *positions*. Every position carries with it rights and duties, and assuming this or that position also lends certain rights and duties to the person. Davies and Harré (1990: para. 11) also stress that when assuming a position in conversation, the person also takes on an emotional commitment and the moral system developed around the position.

Secondly, *local repertoire for socially admissible acts* limits the number of ways in which one can act in any situation. This indicates that in any given situation, there are only a limited number of acts that are socially acceptable at that time, in that local culture. The acceptable ways of talking in school are one example. It is acceptable in Estonia for a teacher to tell students to 'quiet down, now' but considered quite rude for the student to say that to the teacher, or, for that matter, for a teacher to say that to another teacher. While seemingly limiting, this concept does account for the diversity of human interaction across cultures and times.

Finally, in every interaction we can find one or more *story lines* that shape interaction. In evoking a story line, the speaker makes possible manifold positions. The three aforementioned aspects, *positions*, *illocutionary forces*, and *story lines*, are organised into the 'positioning triangle' (Harré 2004: 7). These can mutually determine one another. Positioning triangles are not fixed, they are open to reorganisation. Indeed, Davies and Harré (1990) show there are multiple possibilities for interpretation in any conversation.

Davies and Harré (1990: para. 16) emphasise five aspects that need to be taken into account when analysing how positioning is done: (1) words contain images and metaphors, (2) participants in conversation need not be aware of the (power of) images and therefore consider their words simply 'the way one speaks on this sort of occasion', (3) this understanding of appropriate and commonplace ways of speaking may vary from one

person to the next, (4) positions are cumulative fragments of a lived autobiography and also (5) parts of story lines. This means we use rhetorical devices available to us, not necessarily in an intentional manner.

Assigning and adopting positions is part of how we talk about our lives, the stories we invoke. Positioning, however, is not fixed. Other participants in the conversation may choose to pick up or resist the positions or parts assigned to them. This process is dynamic and again, one can exercise choice. Søreide (2006: 534) differentiates between negative and positive positioning that emphasises this characteristic of positioning. Negative positioning happens when the speaker rejects a position, and positive positioning means a person identifies with a position. In other words, when one participant interactively positions the other, those being positioned need not accept the positions assigned to them. Indeed, 'several conversations can be proceeding simultaneously /.../ any version of what people take to be a determinate speech act is always open to further negotiation' (Davies and Harré 1990: para. 21).

The power of positioning theory is that it enables us to 'direct our attention to a process by which certain trains of consequences, intended or unintended, are set in motion' (Davies and Harré 1990: para. 22). The value of this approach is that it enables us to analyse complex situations in a way that does not see conflicting statements as signalling confusion, ambivalence or inconsistency on part of the speaker but rather as signs of an active constructive process. It is a flexible analytical tool for making sense of contradictory topics and situations. Indeed, using positioning theory has provided useful and fruitful insights into radically different fields and topics ranging from gerontology (Jones 2006) to counselling and conflict mediation (Winslade 2005; Winslade 2006), from information seeking behaviour (McKenzie 2004; McKenzie and Carey, 2000) to European integration (Slokum and van Langenhove 2004) and from philosophy to education.

### 1.1.3. Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a valuable tool for studying positioning processes. In any conversation, we use discourses available to us. Discursive markers may signal positions and for this reason, attention should be given to discourse. Potter's terms reifying and ironizing discourse were discussed in brief earlier on. Reifying discourse, in essence, attempts to construct something as a fact. This can be applied to both categorisation (constructing something as a thing with specific qualities) and action (constructing an action as routine or exceptional) (Potter 1996: 111). Ironizing discourse, on the other hand, attempts to construct descriptions as lies, delusions, mistakes, flattery, deception and misrepresentation (Potter 1996: 112). Descriptions (of facts, events, positions etc.) can be undermined by reference to *stake*, that is, signalling the specific interest of someone, to show they are interested. Also, descriptions can be constructed to head off the imputation of stake, termed *stake inoculation* by Potter (1996: 125). In a situation where the speaker him/herself may be suspected of stake, *stake confession* may function as disarming. Potter claims that stake confession is particularly effective as it places others in an interactional position where stake has already been conceded and reference to stake would therefore, in a way, be useless.

Another concept that proves useful in discourse analysis is *category entitlement*. Potter (1996: 133) defines category entitlement as treating 'certain categories of people, in certain contexts /.../ as knowledgeable'; meaning that belonging to a certain category of people (e.g. teachers, doctors) is sufficient to account for the person's knowledge of this specific domain. Again, such entitlements can be built up or undermined in a variety of ways.

Categories vary in their 'right to speak' as well. In this sense, discourse is bound up with power as discourses used mediate power relations. While those with less power have

'nothing to say', must remain silent or speak only when spoken to, powerful groups have access to a wide and varied range of discourses. In essence, they can, to a certain degree, control discourse. Therefore, power not only shows 'in' discourse but is the force 'behind' discourse (van Dijk 1989: 21-22). Therefore, for example, education authorities, being in a power position in relation to teachers, have greater rights to define discourse. However, to every power there is a counter-power or resistance, which makes the enactment of power a social interaction.

Van Dijk (1989, 2002) introduces the 'ideological square' to analyse how power relations work between social groups. To put it very simply, the square consists of two dimensions – Us versus Them and Good versus Bad. The way we speak emphasises 'Our good things and Their bad things and de-emphasises (mitigates, hides) Our bad things and Their good things' (Van Dijk 2002: 148). Several discourse markers signal positioning within this square, all with the aim to focus attention on positive information about Us and negative information about Them. Such devices include syntactic features (the use of active to emphasise responsibility for action and passive to de-emphasise such responsibility); lexicon (positive/negative words about Us/Them); local/sentence meaning (being vague/indirect or detailed/precise); global discourse meaning/topics (selecting or emphasizing positive/negative topics for Us/Them); schemata/conventional forms of global discourse organization (emphasizing Our Good things and Their Bad things); rhetorical devices (metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, euphemism, irony); speech acts (e.g., accusations/ defenses); and, finally, interaction (interrupting or forbidding turns of Others, disagreeing with Others, nonresponding to questions) (van Dijk 2002: 147). These discursive markers can be used very subtly.

The range of discourse tools available is impressive. Giving a detailed description of all the tools is not possible here and, therefore, the above discussion has mentioned only elements of discursive tools used in the present analysis.

#### **1.1.4. Teacher Positioning and Education Reform**

Positioning theory has been used in education research to study various themes, for instance classroom interactions (Anderson 2009), constructions of teacher identity (Søreide 2006), teacher effectiveness (Sosa and Gomez 2012) and, to a certain degree, teacher positioning in reform context (Moore et al 2002; Luttenberg et al 2011; Ketelaar et al 2012; Fanghanel 2007). Research into teacher interpretations of and identity construction during education reforms that uses other methods than positioning theory can help complement our understanding of teacher positionings in education reform. For this reason, also studies that are not based on positioning theory will be examined in this section.

Before attention is given to how teachers position themselves specifically in reform contexts, we must first determine the relationship between policy and teachers. Research shows that policy is not simply mediated into local contexts, but *created* in local contexts by teachers (see Adams 2011, Luttenberg et al 2013). Ball (1994: 19) warns us to be wary not to assume 'the adjustment of teacher and context to policy but not of policy to context'. This invites us to consider how education policy is altered in local contexts by teachers, meaning that there is a productive relationship between policy and teacher interpretation of policy. Teachers bring about the adjustment of policy to context through their positionings and professional actions. When analysing education reform, it must be taken into consideration that it takes place in a social environment. Also, it must be kept in mind that teachers are not passively carrying out reforms handed down to them. Rather, they actively

position themselves in reform context and therefore participate in policy construction processes (see Adams 2011; Ball 1994; Luttenberg et al 2013).

It might prove helpful in analysing this reciprocal relationship between policy and teachers to look at policy, including education reform, as *social construction*. Adams (2011) analyses how *policy as social construction* stems from *policy as discourse*. Policy as discourse stresses the interplay between policy text and discursive practices around it – the creation of text, means of importing it into the professional world, and subjective realisations of policy which rely on social, cultural, economic and historical factors (Adams 2011). This view on policy takes into account the active role of teachers in realising discursive policy texts in professional practice. Policy as discourse makes possible only a limited number of responses. In other words, '[policies] create circumstances in which the range of options in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed' (Ball 1994: 17). However, within these limited options teachers have an active role as 'attempts to represent or rerepresent policy /.../ allow for play in and playing off of meanings. Gaps and spaces for action and response are opened up or reopened as a result' (Ball 1994:17). These 'gaps and spaces' allow for agency and 'creative social action' by teachers (*ibid.*). Subjects exercise choice from the discourses available to them (Adams 2011: 61). To some degree, teachers are free to interpret official policy. When teachers interpret policy, they position themselves as well as policy texts. In this way, policy becomes a site of a positioning process. *Policy as positioning* offers a mechanism by which professional activity can be construed 'not as a *response* to policy imperatives but rather as the means by which policy itself is continually formed and re-formed' (Adams 2011: 64, original emphasis). We can begin to make sense of teacher positions in reform context if we take this into account. As teachers actively and creatively reposition themselves, they give new meanings to policy texts. In other words, *policy as discourse* is

altered in the process of teacher positioning since positioning influences interpretation and implementation of policy. The intertwined policy as discourse and policy as positioning combine into *policy as social construction* (Adams 2011).

*Policy as social construction* is a complex matter as it involves both policy text and discursive practices surrounding it (positioning processes). Luttenberg et al (2013) introduce a valuable differentiation between '*positioning discourse*', that is, discourse that comes from the outside and attempts to position the teacher (e.g. policy text), and '*teacher positioning*' as 'unique and changing standpoints of the teacher' where meaning is seen to come from within (Luttenberg et al 2013: 297). The view of policy texts as actively positioning the teacher is a useful addition to Adams' *policy as discourse*. The two positioning processes (by policy and by teacher) are seen to take place simultaneously, which means the process of positioning is reciprocal. Teachers continually and actively position themselves in relation to policy and reconstruct their teacher identities. This is confirmed by Vähäsantanen and Etelapelto (2009: 16) in their analysis of 16 teachers' orientation towards a major educational reform in Finnish vocational schools, as teachers 'negotiate a position on the reform by means of active identity work'. Luttenberg et al present a case study of a teacher in reform context as proof of this reciprocal process. They demonstrate that the teacher attempts to turn the reform in a preferred direction, rejecting some elements and implementing some – resulting in the teacher's *own* reform as opposed to the intended reform. The conclusion drawn – that 'ongoing dialog between the teacher and the positioning discourses' ultimately lead to 'changes in the development of the teacher and in the reform' (Luttenberg et al 2013: 307) – is in agreement with Adams' analysis of policy as social construction.

Keeping in mind that enacting reforms is an active positioning process, we now turn our attention to how teachers position themselves and others, both in reform and other

contexts. Discourse analysis is a tool often used to determine how positions are created, adopted and rejected. Research into teacher positioning has determined a variety of discourse strategies, including rhetorical devices, used in positioning processes (Søreide 2006; Fanghanel 2007; see also Cohen 2007).

It is noteworthy that there is very little overlap in rhetorical devices defined by different researchers. This could be due to the different foci of research, but could also be attributed to the different analytical levels applied by the researchers. Søreide (2006), for instance, analyses how teachers construct teacher identities using positioning. Her main focus is narrative resources employed in achieving positions. Søreide demonstrates how five teachers use as many as 36 subject positions as narrative resources to create 4 recurring teacher identity constructions. There are subject positions that are more common in teacher discourse, the three most common being 'teacher as oriented towards student's well-being', 'teacher as oriented towards co-operation', and 'teacher as oriented towards social climate in class' (Søreide 2006: 532). These assist in creating teacher identity constructions of 'the caring and kind teacher', 'the creative and innovative teacher', 'the professional teacher' and 'the typical teacher' (*ibid.*). In other words, teachers use narrative expressions in order to create positions both for themselves and their colleagues. In Søreide's (2006) analysis, attention is given to recurrent themes and positions.

Fanghanel (2007), on the other hand, focuses on more specific discursive markers of alignment (accepting a position) or disjunction (distancing from or rejecting a position) with positions in her study of teacher positionings in relation to a policy innovation text. The policy text used in the study is analysed for discursive markers (an agentless regulatory text relating a '*shareable vision*'), as are the subsequent interviews with six respondents. Alignment is signalled by accommodating interpretations of the text, perceived feasibility of the agenda, and positive connotations signalled by choice of lexis,

especially metaphors. Disjunction, on the other hand, is signalled by negative interpretations, oppositional positionings, the perceived impossibility of the agenda, and a number of rhetorical devices such as questions, appeals to realism, humour and derision, underscoring the cosmetic function of the text, and ironic hyperboles (Fanghanel 2007: 195-196).

While Fanghanel's specific discourse markers are very concrete, Cohen's (2007) analysis of teacher identity construction focuses on implied meanings which are inferred from the words uttered as well as the surrounding social situation. While Cohen does not explicitly declare that she uses positioning theory as a theoretical framework, her findings regarding teacher identity talk are relevant here. She notes that in their identity talk 'the teachers strategically positioned themselves in relation to others and institutional practices' (Cohen 2007: 79), suggesting teacher rhetoric signals positioning in relation to other teachers as well as social context. Cohen notes, importantly, that teacher identity construction is achieved both through explicit and implicit meanings, directing attention to the subtlety of the construction process. Teachers are shown to negotiate different discourses (Cohen 2007: 80). Six recurrent discourse strategies were found to be relevant to identity construction: reported speech, mimicked speech, pronoun shifts, oppositional portraits, inference of others' beliefs, and prescriptive language (Cohen 2007: 84). It is evident, then, that a vast array of discursive tools can be used in creating positions, ranging from specific rhetorical devices to wider narrative structures, and from explicit statements to subtle implied meanings.

The positions created through these discursive tools, however, are not fixed and stable. Rather, research shows teacher constructions and positioning to be in fluctuation (Søreide 2006; Fanghanel 2007; Ketelaar et al, 2012; see also Moore et al 2002). Fanghanel, in her analysis of teacher talk and policy text, exemplifies that the process of

positioning is active and dynamic, and not always unproblematic. She demonstrates that teacher positioning towards a policy innovation text is 'fragmentary' and that teachers position themselves 'on a continuum oscillating between 'alignment' and 'disjunction' (Fanghanel 2007: 197). Importantly, Fanghanel (2007) shows that positions can be 'intrinsically self-contradictory' and 'fluid', that is, a teacher can adopt many and contradictory positions. Vähäsantanen and Etelapelto (2009) define three main teacher orientations to reform – resistant, approving and inconsistent orientation. The latter seems to indicate, again, an oscillation between two extremes. Ketelaar et al's (2012) findings in their analysis of 11 teachers' positioning in relation to education reform also suggest there are a multitude of possible combinations of positioning. Søreide (2006: 540) states that 'the fluctuation of constructions is not a sign of ambivalence, confusion or indecision but of active and constructive relationship to narrative resources'.

Such contradictory positions seem to be a common feature of teacher positionings. The fact that positionings are not unitary, not even within the talk of one respondent, cannot easily be dismissed as simple signals of an active construction process. Moore et al (2002) faced the same problem in their analysis of 80 teachers' interviews where even such a substantial sample for a qualitative study did not yield clear teacher types. Instead of a typification or continuum of teacher types, Moore et al suggest positioning to be addressed as *eclectic* and *pragmatic* in case of teachers in education reform context. They relate that all teachers seem to be making eclectic choices in positioning; however, the underlying principle for these choices seems to be pragmatism. Moore et al define two types of pragmatism: *principled pragmatism* where proactive teachers self-present as decision-making individuals; and *contingent pragmatism* where reactive teachers are making largely enforced adjustments. Identifying the underlying principle of (either principled or contingent) pragmatism helps to explain how teachers adopt such varied and contradictory

positions. Moore et al stress that this is so in the context of British education reforms where the discourse of pragmatism is enforced by the authorities. Nevertheless, pragmatism seems to be a helpful concept in making sense of contradictory positions.

Previous research has identified several contributing factors to teacher positioning. Most commonly defined as relevant to teacher positioning is prior experiences (Søreide 2006; Fanghanel 2007; Moore et al 2002; Ketelaar et al, 2012; and Vähäsantanen and Etelapelto 2009). Prior experiences are part of sense-making – the process of actively fitting the innovation within one's personal experiences and framework – a factor discussed by Ketelaar et al (2012). This can be achieved as accommodation (the framework is altered), assimilation (new ideas are fitted into the framework), tolerance (accepting change without modifying the framework) or distantiation (rejecting change). Ketelaar et al (2012) analyse relationships between altogether three factors that contribute to teacher positioning in reform context: sense-making, ownership, and agency. Ownership of an innovation is expressed by teachers as support of and necessity for the innovation. Agency is defined as being in control of one's actions. Vähäsantanen and Etelapelto (2009) also discuss agency and ownership as vital to reform success. In addition, they list sense of professional self, social affordances, prior work experience, and expectations as contributing factors (Vähäsantanen and Etelapelto 2009). Pragmatism is another recurrent factor (Moore et al 2002; Fanghanel 2007). Fanghanel (2007: 200) stresses that respondents 'invoked very pragmatic reasons' for their stance towards the education innovation. Finally, Fanghanel (2007) lists epistemic (respondent's beliefs about knowledge) and ideological (respondent's systems of beliefs) filters in addition to experiential and pragmatic filters.

These factors also influence each other. For example, factors discussed by Ketelaar et al (2012) – sense-making, ownership and agency – were shown to combine in multiple,

and, sometimes, unexpected ways. For example, it might seem straightforward that high agency is a positive factor. Contradictorily, some teachers demonstrating high agency expressed experiencing hindrances in implementing the reform whereas some low-agency teachers articulated wanting to have a voice in team decisions. Interestingly, high levels of agency combined with low level of ownership led to a rejection of the reform, suggesting that if the teacher does not feel the reform to be 'his/her own', it can lead to distantiation from the reform.

The factors in positionings discussed above lend themselves well to Moore et al's (2002) division between principled and contingent choices. For instance, both ownership and sense-making (Ketelaar et al) can be either principled or contingent. The same can be said for ideological factors (adopting ideologies willingly or contingently), teaching orientation (principled or contingent choices), and expectations for the future (perceiving oneself to be making choices or adjusting to situations). Moore et al's (2002) division, then, seems to be a useful analytical concept to employ.

While there are considerable differences in teacher positionings, Vähäsantanen and Etelapelto (2009: 23) do present some views on the reform shared by all of their respondents, namely that teachers see the reform as opening up possibilities for learning and professional development but they resist the top-down nature of reforms, see the reform as rushed and information regarding the reform as inadequate. Finally, teachers see the reform as a means of cutting costs.

Positioning is a process that acquires its meaning in social context – positions are always adopted, assigned or rejected *in relation to* somebody in the conversational context. As discussed earlier, positioning can be reflexive (positioning oneself) or interactive (positioning another). The complexity of positioning is illustrated by Sosa and Gomez (2012) in their analysis of teachers who position themselves as 'effective'. They relay that

teachers who reflexively position themselves as 'effective teachers' do so in relation to other teachers seen in their view as 'inept', but also in relation to students. Similar processes are demonstrated by Søreide (2006), Fanghanel (2007) and Cohen (2007).

In relation to any position, there are two main processes in action – identifying (oneself or another) with a position or distancing (oneself or another) from a position. For these basic processes, different researchers may use different terms; however, the process remains the same. For instance, Søreide (2006) exemplifies how teacher identity constructions are achieved through 'positive positioning' (identification with a position, termed 'alignment' by Fanghanel (2007)) and 'negative positioning' (opposition to and distancing from a position, termed 'disjunction' by Fanghanel (2007) and 'juxtaposition' by Cohen (2006)). Teachers can apply positive positioning both to themselves (e.g. positioning themselves to be 'kind and caring' teachers) and their colleagues (e.g. positioning their colleagues as 'typical teachers'). The same applies for 'negative positioning'.

Research shows that teachers are active in the process of negotiating tensions between such relational positions. Both reifying discourse and ironizing discourse, to use Potter's terms defined above, can be used to validate one's positioning. Furthermore, positionings are not straightforward but can serve several goals. For instance, Sosa and Gomez (2012: 596) show 'effective teachers' position students interactively as 'individuals in a socio-cultural context', 'fully capable of academic achievement' and 'responsible for their school success' (Sosa and Gomez 2012: 596). These positionings achieve two goals. In addition to positioning students, teachers position other teachers at the same time as *not* seeing students as 'individuals', 'capable' and 'responsible'. Sosa and Gomez conclude that the teachers' positioning of students offers the students the possibility to be 'decision makers in their success' – which in turn makes them successful teachers. In other words,

positionings are intricately interwoven and influence each other. A similar process is described by Cohen (2007: 90) when she shows that the same teacher identity claim can work in different ways – so that for example the identity claim of teacher as collaborator can function as confirming professional identity, enabling learning and facilitating building a community. Several identities were indeed adopted by all of her respondents.

Strikingly, the voices of those who bring policy to life – the teachers – are shown to be absent from the discussion of planning and implementing reforms. Vähäsantanen and Etelapelto (2009: 30) suggest the focus of reforms should be on empowering individuals to exercise ownership and agency. Cohen (2007: 92) proposes giving teachers opportunities to engage in identity talk as a way of bringing their voices more prominently into discussions about education.

## **1.2. Research Methodology**

The present qualitative study adopts a social constructionist approach and, more specifically, uses grounded theory. This chapter discusses the principles of grounded theory, with an emphasis on this method's particular approach to the research process. The author introduces the sample and methodological considerations specific to the present work.

### **1.2.1. Grounded Theory**

The current qualitative study was conducted using grounded theory, which is one type of social constructivist research. Both stress that knowledge depends on how we construct the world and both are interactional (see Charmaz 2006; Gergen 2009; Burr 2003). This approach was originally introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 and has been developed further by Charmaz. Grounded theory presupposes the creation of a theory

that is strongly *grounded* in data – data precedes theory. Data is not collected to confirm or disprove a theory, but theory arises from data. The whole research process is data-driven.

This approach stresses that creating a theory is not a linear process (Charmaz 2006: 10). Rather, in this method, theory evolves during the research process 'through continuous interplay between data analysis and data collection' (Strauss and Corbin 1994: 273). The grounded theory method enables the researcher to go back and forth between data collection and analysis. In other words, data collection and analysis are simultaneous processes: data is constantly analysed and the analysis informs further data collection. Charmaz (2006: 14) compares the way grounded theory methods work to a camera – like the lenses in a camera bring scenes into focus, grounded theory methods enable the researcher to bring the research problem into ever clearer focus.

Charmaz (2006: 11) explains the research process in ten steps. After setting the research question, data is collected and initially coded. Then, initial memos are written, which is followed by more data collection. This process is simultaneous with further coding and memo-writing. Indeed, the next step in the process is advanced memo-writing. This is followed by theoretical sampling to enable seeking specific new data to saturate the categories. Hirsjärvi et al (2007) explain saturation as having enough data to draw theoretical conclusions. In grounded theory, however, saturation of a category means no more new data emerges about a specific category. Charmaz (2006:12) describes saturated data as 'detailed, focused and full /.../ They reveal participants' views, feelings, intentions and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives.'

When categories are saturated, they can be adopted as theoretical concepts. Sorting and integrating memos about concepts is the final step. However, it must be kept in mind that at any point, further data may be needed and sought. In short, data is collected, then

analysed, and then, based on analysis, more data is collected to refine the emerging theory. This process keeps circulating until theory emerges from data.

Grounded theory is highly suitable for studying interpretations, the centre of this study. It offers the researcher the freedom to explore the full range of opinions, views, interpretations etc, thus letting the theory *emerge* from the data. The process of data collection and analysis supports gaining a deeper view of the phenomenon under study. Charmaz (2006: 15, original emphasis) notes that '*how* you collect data affects *which* phenomena you see'. All research methods shape the studied phenomena through data collection; however, in grounded theory, the researcher is urged to stay close to the data through constant analysis.

When studying teacher interpretations and positionings specifically, it is impossible to presume what kind of interpretations may arise. For that reason, adopting grounded theory methods supports exploring a wide variety of possible interpretations as the methodology supports seeking various and even contradictory interpretations. Therefore, grounded theory offers a flexible methodology for analysing teacher interpretations and positionings.

## **1.2.2. The Research Process**

### ***1.2.2.1. Sample***

Qualitative studies tend to use small samples. The goal is reaching an understanding of the phenomenon, not generalising results (Hirsjärvi et al 2007: 168-169). For this reason, the number of participants is considered sufficient when data reaches saturation (Charmaz 2006). The sample in the present study consists of eight interviews, all in all 505 minutes of interview material. Recurrent themes and positions started to emerge early on in the analysis process. Eight interviews were considered sufficient to draw

conclusions about teacher positioning in reform context as these provided enough data for patterns of positioning to emerge.

Due to resource limitations, a convenience sample was used in this study. However, an effort was made to include participants from different settings into the sample to allow a diversity of opinions and interpretations to emerge. For this reason, participants were selected from different types of schools (small and large schools, urban and rural schools, schools facing closure, 'elite' schools, and private schools). The choice of schools derives from the assumption that teachers working in different settings would have different experiences that shape their interpretations. An attempt was made to include schools that use Russian as the language of instruction; however, the author could not find willing respondents to participate in the study. The final sample was combined during the interviewing process to explore emerging ideas and leads given by respondents, as is advised in grounded theory.

Ethical considerations influence the research process as well. First, gatekeepers (headmasters of schools) were approached to obtain permission to contact potential respondents. Then participants were contacted via email. All participants were informed of the goals of research and assured of their anonymity and confidentiality. To ensure the respondents' anonymity and confidentiality, participant profiles only provide very general information about the respondents.

#### ***1.2.2.2. Data Collection***

Interviewing has so far been the main method of data collection in qualitative studies (Hirsjärvi et al 2007: 192). Interviewing acknowledges the active role of both the interviewer and the interviewee in constructing meanings (*ibid.*). Charmaz (2006: 27) confirms that an interview is 'contextual and negotiated /.../ The result is a construction – or reconstruction – of a reality.' Furthermore, interviewing enables exploring central topics

of the research problem without limiting possible responses or directions. According to Charmaz (2006: 28), grounded theory and intensive interviewing are similar in being 'open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted'.

In this study, data was collected using semi-structured individual interviews. Interviews were conducted from January to May 2013. Interviews took place in the teachers' own classrooms at their schools, with the exception of one interview which took place at a conference centre. Interviews were audio-recorded with participant permission, and later transcribed.<sup>3</sup> The teachers were given a choice as to what language to use during the interview. Six out of eight teachers chose to use Estonian. These six interviews were then translated into English by the author. The transcripts were used in the coding process. In addition to interviews, data was collected from post-interview correspondence with participants as well as official documents such as Ministry of Education and Research materials and legal documents.

### ***1.2.2.3. Data Analysis***

In grounded theory, initial data collection is followed by coding. Charmaz (2006: 43) explains coding as 'naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes and accounts for each piece of data'. Coding, then, is like giving a piece of data a name or a label. For example, a piece of data '*I like learning something new*' could be coded as the teacher's view of the reform as 'a learning process' or the teacher 'adopting a positive attitude'. Charmaz compares codes to bones 'from which we build the skeleton of our analysis' (*ibid.*). Following her advice, the transcripts were coded with initial codes and later categories were developed from these codes. Categories are clusters of codes that are related to each other. For example, all codes relating to the reform as 'a

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<sup>3</sup> All in all, 8 interviews were conducted. However, as one interview was not recorded due to a technical problem, only 7 interviews were transcribed. The one interview was written up as a 3-page summary based on interview notes; the summary was then sent to the teacher for review and comments.

learning process' are combined into one category. Charmaz stresses keeping the coding and categorising processes active by concentrating on processes in the data. This ensures that processes gain visibility (2006: 92). This is also highly suitable for analysing positioning in teacher talk. Discourse analysis was also used as a helpful tool in analysing positioning. The transcripts were analysed for specific discursive markers that signalled positioning.

Charmaz (2006: 72) recommends memo-writing as it 'prompts you to analyze your data early in the research process'. After initial codes were applied in the present study, the first memos were drafted. These explored emerging ideas. Memos are condensed summaries of data and the researcher's interpretations about data. They enable bringing together the data and the creative insight of the researcher. They help record the analysis process but they are flexible in the sense that when new data emerges, memos can be updated to include this new information. The author of the present paper also wrote extensive memos all through the research process.

Then, a second set of interviews took place, this time exploring ideas and codes that had emerged from the first three interviews. Again, these were transcribed and coded. This exemplifies the circular analysis and data collection process. The amount of data allowed the author to move on to axial coding to explore relationships between categories, and to compare and contrast emerging categories. The process is continued until categories become saturated. Saturation is achieved when 'gathering new data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories' (Charmaz 2006: 113). However, to achieve full theoretical saturation would have meant including far more respondents involved in the reform process (education authorities, school managements, students, etc.) into the analysis. This is clearly beyond the scope of the present paper. As the context of the education reform changed considerably during the research process (the withdrawal of the requirement of designing three elective branches in

each upper secondary school), further research into the positioning processes is clearly needed as respondents may have reconsidered their positioning in relation to the reform in the light of the recent changes.

#### ***1.2.2.4. Researcher Reflection***

Grounded theory presumes that the researcher takes an active role in simultaneous data collection, analysis and reflection concerning the researcher's own interpretations, presuppositions etc. Charmaz (2006: 10, original emphasis) states that

we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices /.../ any theoretical rendering offers an *interpretative* portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it.

We as analysts cannot stand outside the social world, but we can reflect on the way we arrive at our interpretations. It must be kept in mind that the interaction in an interview is created together by the researcher and the interviewee. The author analysed all interviews regarding the interaction process to assess her rapport with the respondents, and to establish how she herself might have influenced interpretations. The author introduced herself as a teacher who has experience with the curriculum design process. This might be the reason why teachers were very willing to communicate their thoughts on the reform process. The teachers needed little prompting in the interviews and discussed issues of concern to them at length. The author was very careful to avoid leading questions and asked clarifying questions to make sure she had understood the interviewees and their opinions correctly.

Turn-taking in conversation was analysed based on the transcripts. The conversations were dominated by the teachers with long turns; the interviewer's turns were short (mostly one or two lines). The turns were also analysed by colour-coding. The turns were coded blue when participants accepted the interviewer's comments/summaries (e.g.,

Interviewer: *'as you said they don't know how they have to learn it'* Respondent: *'exactly'*) and red when the respondent offered a different interpretation. When analysing the transcripts in that manner, it was evident that the turns were mostly blue. However, some codes were ambiguous.

At that point, the transcripts were colour-coded again, this time adding green codes to indicate turns when the interviewed teacher specified the interviewer's interpretation. It became apparent that previously red turns could be interpreted as specifying. In addition, some cases of blue (agreement) codes were followed by green (specifying) indicating that teachers felt comfortable in presenting their own opinions and, indeed, often specifying the wording.

The author kept constantly analysing her own views and assumptions regarding the issues and topics that arose in interviews. This analysis required consciously taking a step back and comparing the interpretations to data.

## 2. Teacher Positioning in Education Reform Context

Teachers actively position themselves in the conversations in multiple ways, that is, they shift between positions, demonstrating that positioning is a dynamic process. Intentionally or not, they position themselves differently depending on the topic and their relation to the topic. What is noteworthy is that teachers actively position not only themselves, but also others: the authorities, colleagues, and students. Main positions that emerged in the analysis are: (1) distancing from the education authorities; (2) authorities as 'incompetent'; (3) teacher as an 'expert'; (4) fluctuating positions in relation to colleagues and students; (5) curriculum as 'in the background', 'nothing new', 'difficult to implement' or 'unattainable'; (6) teacher as a 'non-expert'; (7) national examination as the goal of foreign language instruction. These positions are intricately interwoven and mutually determining (that is, a position can either strengthen or undermine other positions related to it). Assuming or rejecting positions has actual consequences for teachers and the way they implement the education reform.

In what follows, short respondent profiles are presented. Profiles are compiled so as not to reveal any sensitive information about respondents. Therefore, only very general descriptions are given. Then, attention is turned to the positions that emerged in analysis and how these positions are constructed through various discursive devices.

Respondent A has 15+ years of teaching experience. She started teaching during her last year of studies at the university and has continued since. She has taught English in forms 1-12 and also has experience in adult education. She is currently employed at a private upper secondary school. She is very motivated to keep improving her language skills as well as teaching skills.

Respondent B has 10+ years of teaching experience. Starting off as a class teacher, she quickly switched over to teaching English. Her main experience comes from basic

school and upper secondary school is a new challenge to her. She works in a small country school where the upper secondary school is expected to be closed down.

Respondent C has 25+ years of teaching experience. She has taught all ages of students ranging from form 3 to higher education level. She is currently teaching only upper secondary level students in a strong upper secondary school in the country. She is also part of the school management and leads the subject section of the county.

Respondent D has 10+ years of teaching experience. Out of that, she has been teaching English to upper secondary level students in an 'elite' school in a large Estonian town for 5 years. Her main concern is introducing culture of English-speaking countries to students.

Respondent F has 20+ years of teaching experience. Mainly, she has been teaching upper secondary level students but has recently taken on classes in basic school as well. She is currently teaching in a strong upper secondary school in a small town.

Respondent G has 20+ years of teaching experience. She worked in an 'elite' school in a large Estonian town for an extended period of time, but for the last four years has been teaching upper secondary level students in an upper secondary school in a small town. The school has seen student numbers drop in recent years. The teacher is concerned about the students' low level of language skills.

Respondent H has 15+ years of teaching experience. Out of that, she has been teaching English for the past ten years both in basic school and upper secondary school. She is currently teaching in an upper secondary school in a small town in Estonia. The school has approximately 20% of Russian-speaking students.

Respondent G has 20+ years of teaching experience. She is currently teaching upper secondary level students in a large school in a large Estonian town. The teacher is very motivated to create course content that takes into account student interests.

Quotations from interviews are given in italics. The following punctuation, based on the Jeffersonian system as described in Potter (1996), is used in interview transcriptions:

(( <i>text</i> ))	author's clarifying comments
[...]	omission
[ <i>text</i> ]	overlapping speech
<u>stress</u>	stress
(.)	short pause
(3)	long pause (in seconds)

## 2.1. Distancing

The most common position that emerged in the analysis is the position of teachers in opposition to education authorities. This general positioning is achieved through two types of positions: (1) teachers as 'us' versus education authorities as 'them' and (2) teachers as 'down here' in relation to education authorities 'up there'. This positioning, evident in six interviews analysed<sup>4</sup>, distances the teachers 'us here' from the education authorities 'them up there' as oppositional groups as well as along a vertical scale, which suggests a perceived power hierarchy.

Four main rhetorical devices are used to in positioning in relation to the authorities. Firstly, pronoun shifts are employed to refer to subjects being positioned in conversation: teachers themselves, education authorities, colleagues and students. Secondly, rhetorical questions are used to undermine the expertise of the authorities. Thirdly, choice of lexis is influential in creating positions. Finally, use of irony helps teachers to position authorities. These devices as analysed in more detail in relation to specific positionings.

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<sup>4</sup> As was mentioned earlier, 8 interviews were conducted but only 7 interviews could be transcribed. Therefore, only 7 interviews were subjected to discourse analysis.

The teachers' position themselves in juxtaposition to the authorities through the use of 'us' versus 'them' contrast. According to van Dijk's (2002) ideological square, the ingroup ('us') is perceived as positive and the outgroup ('they') as negative, as is also evident in the teachers' comments about 'them'. The authorities are seen as a uniform whole, referred to as 'they': *'couldn't they think that far ahead', 'they could somehow coordinate these topics', 'they don't account for the reality', 'couldn't they decide even that'*. This positioning of 'us' versus 'them' is so predominant that the teachers do not explicate who this 'they' is, and yet it occurs in all 7 interviews subjected to discourse analysis. Even though it is not always explicitly stated who 'they' refers to, it can be derived from the conversation context that in different situations, 'they' is taken to mean the Ministry of Education, Innove (the national examination centre) and also local education authorities. Teachers do not differentiate between the different authorities but position them as a unitary whole.

However, there are some exceptions to this rule. When relating instances of actual contact with the officials, the positions that are adopted are somewhat different. When contact with 'them' has been negative, the idea/picture of a unified whole remains: *'we have asked oh it's ok you'll find out [...] there has been nothing'*. But in instances of positive contact (receiving information, clarifications etc) this unified whole is broken up into specific people. Suddenly 'they' becomes 'she' or 'he', a person with a name. In contrast, there is one case where the teacher positions 'them' as partners in conversation: *'when we've had conversations with the Ministry people everybody understands it doesn't make sense to develop these three curricula ((in that school))[...] thanks to this we've been able to start this conversation'*. Here, the teacher positions herself as an equal partner in conversation. Also, it is noteworthy that here, the common denominator 'them' refers to actual individual people rather than a perceived group of people. Moreover, even though the authorities in

the interview are referred to as 'them', there is no evidence of distancing on a vertical scale, that is, the teacher does not position authorities as 'up there'.

In addition to the positioning of 'us' versus 'them', teachers also position themselves on a vertical scale ('down' versus 'up') in relation to the authorities, suggesting a power hierarchy in the education system. The vertical scale is expressed explicitly by teachers through such phrases as *'the framework that was sent to us from up there'* and *'all the time laws come down from the top'*. The vertical distance is also expressed implicitly in phrases such as *'we were given instructions'* and *'we were told'*, suggesting that the teachers see themselves in a position of someone who can be told what to do. The use of passive here enables the teachers to position themselves as passive receivers of orders. This could be seen as diminishing the responsibilities associated with the teacher's position as it implies teachers not being in control of orders given. Also, the actual authority doing the supposed 'ordering' remains obscure. This positioning is also implied in statements relating to the tasks delegated to teachers and to school: *'the teacher in Estonia is burdened by so many other things'* and *'everything is delegated to school'*. Note, here, too, the use of passive which positions the teacher as passive as opposed to active. Here, additional weight is given to the statements through implying the sheer number of tasks delegated. The vague phrases 'so many other things' and 'everything' remain general. The teacher's personal experience is extended to apply to all teachers and all schools in Estonia. The statements are framed as general truths about Estonian teachers and schools, and are therefore more difficult to challenge.

One teacher expresses herself very honestly concerning her perceived position in the education system: *'I have to obey anyway I'd obey if they made them ((the laws)) so that we wouldn't need to adapt everything'*. This positioning is doubly interesting. On the one hand, the teacher positions herself as someone who has to obey the authorities, thus

suggesting she is in a position to take orders from somebody in a power position in relation to herself. On the other hand, this positioning enables her to remain defiant and empower herself through positioning the authorities as 'incompetent' and incapable of doing their work properly as 'their' work has to be redone in school.

Teachers do not discuss explicitly whether this distance is a negative or positive experience for them. Implicitly, it is in one case interpreted as positive: *'as long as everything is ok on paper'* there is no contact with the Ministry or other authorities. The respondent positions herself in the mutual relationship between the school and the authorities as follows: *'if they bug us we have to bug them back'*, which places responsibility for *initiating* this sort of working relationship on the authorities and teacher actions are *re-actions* to the authorities.

However, teachers express disappointment about the authorities implementing top-down reforms: *'all these reforms they cannot be forced', 'laws are sent down and why redo them all the time'*. These affect the work of teachers in a negative way as implementing changes is time- and cost-intensive. Also, top-down reforms can make the teachers feel robbed of agency and ownership of the reform (evident, for example, in the statement *'still as a working teacher I don't see the point ((of compulsory changes))'*). Seven out of eight teachers stressed how the curriculum reform is creating considerable financial stress: *'the state and ((local authorities)) are making our budget smaller and smaller'*. One teacher expressed this rather critically: *'((carrying out reforms and changing the curricula)) is not cost-intensive because teachers do it for free (.) so it's not cost-intensive it's very cheap [...] maybe not consciously but subconsciously teachers are seen as cheap labour'*. The claim about teachers being seen as *'cheap labour'* is in the passive, which makes it difficult to undermine. However, since it is a very strong claim, the teacher mitigates it by stating that it might be a subconscious rather than a *devious* (in the teacher's words) attitude

towards teachers. In another interview, a teacher ironically stated that teachers implement the changes and carry out additional tasks as *'naturally unpaid work [...] all within the 35 hours'*. This ironic comment was later withdrawn by the teacher so as not to seem to be whining, and, therefore, to maintain a positive teacher identity. Similarly, Vähäsantanen and Etelapelto (2009) found that teachers object to the top-down nature of reform and see it as a means of cutting costs. All in all, teachers may find positive aspects in distancing from the authorities but they do oppose the way they are subjected to top-down reforms.

There is one case, however, where the teacher does not position herself as 'down here' in relation to the authorities. In this one case, a teacher working in a private school positioned herself as *outside* the system: *'the school is an island and you are on this island and students are there with you [...] I don't feel I'm missing out'*. This exemplifies that the teacher does not see her position in the education system as a hierarchical (down as opposed to up) but as distant and independent. This could be explained by her being employed in a private school. Her positioning of herself as separate from the system helps her to maintain independence in the face of the reform, and, indeed, she positions herself as defiant in relation to the changes: *'you can say you're doing this ((national curriculum)) and actually do your own thing or you can just say you do your own thing and that's it'*.

It is apparent, then, from this analysis of teacher talk that teachers position themselves as the 'positive ingroup' (teachers) in opposition to the 'negative outgroup' (authorities), as is suggested by van Dijk (1989, 2002). Also, Fanghanel (2007) discusses how oppositional positionings signal opposing the reform. In addition, analysis of teacher talks demonstrates a vertical power hierarchy exists in the education system. The teachers' general positioning of 'us down here' as opposed to 'them up there' places them in a difficult position. The reform was sent *'down'* to the teachers, they *'were given instructions'* and now, teachers are in a situation where they have to manage an educational reform from

a seemingly 'inferior' position. In what follows, positions that help teachers maintain a positive teacher identity, offer critique of the reform or reject some changes are examined.

## **2.2. Authorities as 'Incompetent' as Opposed to Teachers as 'Experts'**

The positioning of teachers as 'experts' is achieved hand in hand with positioning the authorities as 'incompetent' and 'out of touch with reality'. Clearly, the teachers interviewed rhetorically organise their text so as to convey a negative image of 'them' as 'incompetent' and a positive image of 'us' as 'experts'. This combined positioning seems to be an important resource for teachers to maintain positive teacher identities as it allows the teachers to claim more expertise than the authorities, which lends credibility to their critique of the reform. Also, orders from someone 'incompetent' are not as binding. In a way, it could be said that positions are turned and the 'up' – 'down' scale is less important since the experts are 'down here' and 'up there' are incompetent authorities.

The strategic positioning of the authorities as 'incompetent' was used by five teachers. Rhetorical questions, use of irony and choice of lexicon all help to interactively position the authorities as 'incompetent'. Rhetorical questions were used to cast doubt on the authorities' competence: *'If they like making laws that much why not make them so that we wouldn't have to re-make them', ' why couldn't they tell me straight away that it's going to change in a year's time couldn't they think that far ahead', 'have the people who came up with the idea for the research paper which is a good idea have they ever thought about how they are going to do this in real life'*. These questions serve to position the authorities as short-sighted, out of touch with reality and incapable of making laws that do not need adjusting. Use of irony casts doubt on the authorities' ability of making even the smallest of decisions: *'maybe they couldn't decide even that'*. Choice of lexicon also indicates authorities are seen as 'incompetent' as, for example, they *'couldn't think that far ahead'*

(that is, one year). Similar devices (rhetorical questions, appeals to realism, irony) were defined by Fanghanel (2007) as signalling disjunction.

The general positioning of authorities as 'incompetent' is achieved through various subject positions. Teachers position authorities as lacking expertise: '*hope remains nothing stupid will happen ((regarding the exam)) [...] and I don't know if we have specialists who could compile this exam [...]the ((last)) exam paper was full of errors*'. Here, casting doubt on authorities' expertise is strengthened by the teacher's 'lived experience', an exam paper riddled with errors. Also, the authorities are seen as 'out of touch with reality': '*they said the exam corresponds to the curriculum we all know the exam to this day does not correspond to the curriculum*', suggesting the teacher has more expertise than the authorities who have designed the exam. Another example is the reform process as seen by the teachers: '*nobody has ever asked (.) those questions they have only thought about the what but they haven't thought about the how*'. This positions the authorities as 'incompetent' in designing the reform so that it can be implemented 'in reality'. Again, this positioning lends support to the teacher's critique of and resistance to the reform. The authorities are further portrayed as 'short-sighted' in the reform design process: '*why couldn't they tell me straight away that it's going to change in a year's time couldn't they think that far ahead [...]now all of a sudden this change I find that it is not thought through on the state level*'. Here, the positioning of the reform design process as 'not thought through' strengthens the position of the teacher as someone righteously critical of the reform. Another example is: '*this came later and now we're going to redo it*'. Here, emphasis is given to what the teacher in her position will experience due to the authorities' 'incompetence' as her work will have to be redone. These subject positions combined into the general positioning of the authorities as 'incompetent' suggest teachers actively seek to undermine the authority of the 'up there' position. Positioning the authorities as

'incompetent' lends teachers some degree of power in a situation where they might experience their position to be 'inferior'. It allows the teachers to reframe their perceived positioning in relation to the authorities as the position of 'incompetence' is not desirable.

Teachers position themselves as 'experts' in relation to the authorities and the reform. All teachers suggest they know what to teach their students. The following statement carries two positions: *'I am under the impression that this curriculum was compiled well like the teachers who work in school know nothing about teaching English'*. The authorities implied in the passive '*was compiled*' are positioned as 'incompetent' in relation to teachers who work in school and know what to teach. The teachers' expertise is implied through creating a position ('teachers know nothing') and then distancing oneself from it. 'Teachers know nothing' is positioned as an absurd false belief, again one that cannot be repudiated by the authorities. Exemplary is the positioning '*still as a working teacher I don't see the point ((of compulsory changes))*' which also draws on the implied position of the authorities as 'out of touch with reality' as well as positioning the teacher as an expert through her active work as a teacher. Stressing belonging to the category 'working teacher' entitles the teacher to critique the reform (also see Potter 1996). This positioning enables her to deem sees the changes pointless.

The combined positioning of teacher as 'expert' and authorities as 'incompetent' allows the teachers to challenge the curriculum reform. The analysis of teacher positioning reveals that, indeed, positioning is not mere 'playing around with words' but has real implications for what teachers do in their classrooms, in other words, how they implement the reform. Most clearly, defiance regarding the reform is expressed in relation to grammar instruction. According to the new subject curriculum for foreign languages, language structures are to be taught in context (State Gazette 2011c: 9). This has created some confusion for the teachers in interpreting the curriculum and came up as a topic in all

of the interviews. Ketelaar et al (2012: 280) stress that lack of clarity in reforms may force teachers to make sense of the innovation based on their own frames of reference, and this seems to be the case here. It was generally interpreted to mean that grammar must not be taught any more. Grammar knowledge will not be tested in the national examination as a separate skill any longer and, therefore, teachers interpret the changes so that '*grammar shouldn't be taught any more*' and grammar structures should not be included into subject curricula. Teachers relate they have decided not to include grammar structures into subject curricula (not to contradict the national curriculum) and this seems to be a contingent pragmatic decision in accordance with Moore et al (2002). It is noteworthy, however, that teachers still indicated teaching grammar structures as a separate topic. This signals tolerance of the reform (changes are introduced without modifying personal frameworks, see Ketelaar et al, 2012).

In summary, teachers position themselves as 'experts' in relation to authorities as 'incompetent'. This lends credibility to the way teachers position themselves towards the new national curriculum.

### **2.3. Positioning in Relation to Colleagues and Students**

While positioning in relation to the authorities is consistent throughout the interviews, positionings toward colleagues and students vary. Pronoun shifts are the most prominent feature of achieving positioning in relation to colleagues. Teachers can either identify with or distance themselves from other teachers. For instance, teachers signal identifying themselves with other teachers in the school through pronoun use: *we the whole (.) all the teachers at the school did it together*'. The pronoun 'we' can also signal positioning oneself as belonging to the same group with other language teachers: *maybe language teachers are more creative [...] we didn't find anything completely new there*'. This positioning of 'us' (for example, '*we all know*', '*we have to bug them back*', etc.) gives

more authority to the teacher's claims, as what is being stated is positioned not as a personal opinion but referring to all teachers.

However, teachers also employ pronoun shifts to distance themselves from their colleagues. For example, one teacher positioned herself as innovative in relation to other teachers interpreted as '*older*'. Another position assumed is distancing from 'other' teachers who do not complete the required paperwork: '*I'm sure there are teachers who don't even know what this work plan is*'. One more example of positioning oneself as apart from others is evident in '*they said write again I said no I will not write any more*'. Here, the teacher positions herself as active as opposed to 'others' who remain passive in communicating with the authorities. In accordance with van Dijk's ideological square, 'they' ('others') are positioned in a negative way whereas 'me' is positioned as positive. The distancing from the subject position of the 'others' clearly perceived as 'negative' allows teachers to maintain a positive self-image. Søreide (2006) also demonstrated how this process of positive positioning of self as a 'kind and caring teacher' and negative positioning of others as 'typical teachers' functions as a resource for creating positive teacher identities.

Teachers set themselves apart from their students through pronoun use '*now we know exactly what they still need*' or '*they themselves don't use their rights or opportunities*'. Teachers use the power of knowledge to position themselves as 'experts' in relation to students. This suggests that a hierarchical power structure exists in school, one where education authorities are 'incompetent' but in a position of power, teachers as 'experts' on language instruction have to obey authorities but are one step up the ladder from the students. Also, students are explicitly positioned as responsible for their learning (and examination results) by seven of the teachers interviewed. Teachers of schools that have seen student numbers drop ('*there is no selection any more*') report changes in levels

of students' capabilities and see it as a major problem, as *'we ((teachers)) cannot take them ((students)) to that level'*. Achieving standards set out in the curriculum is impossible also when students *'don't do their part'*. As student levels and motivation are positioned as matters out of teachers' control, it enables teachers to maintain positive teacher identities in a system where teaching is assessed based on students' examination results. Only one teacher uses the pronoun *we* to refer to herself and the students: *so we did this on the side [...] the whole course we do grammar [...] these two years we're building vocabulary'*. This suggests a different positioning in relation to students – one of equal partners working together. The teacher self-reports taking student interests into account in designing course content – something that would be expected in case of equal partners ('us') working together.

In general, then, teachers create and assume a multiplicity of positions both for colleagues and students in relation to themselves. These positions support teachers' claims (opinions are positioned as 'our' opinions) and help to maintain positive teacher identities.

#### **2.4. Positioning Towards the New National Curriculum**

Teachers assume a variety of positions in relation to the curriculum reform. Here, the fluctuation between positions is most evident as oscillations between positions appear in each interview. The positions regarding the curriculum design process vary from 'awfully useful' to 'completely useless', as all teachers position the reform both as 'necessary' and 'useless' in some aspects. Four positions emerged specifically in relation to the new curriculum: curriculum as 'in the background', curriculum as 'nothing new', changes to the curriculum as 'difficult to implement' or 'unattainable'. Specific aspects of the curriculum, however, were also positioned as 'positive' and 'easy to implement'. This suggests teachers adopt eclectic pragmatic positions in relation to the new national

curriculum. First, positioning in relation to the process of curriculum design will be analysed, then positioning the curriculum and its implications will be discussed.

#### **2.4.1. Positioning the Reform Process**

All teachers position the reform process as 'useful' in some aspects. It is common to position the reform as 'enabling learning' and 'enabling co-operation'. Positioning the reform in this way helps the teacher to focus on positive aspects of the reform. Phrases such as *'on the one hand it is nice I like to learn something new [...] I have learnt so much about ((specific topics))'* and *'it was awfully useful this time because teachers learnt so much about other subjects'* signal that teachers position the curriculum design process as a learning opportunity and themselves as 'life-long learners'. A more cautious positioning of the reform is *'every experience is useful isn't it'*, the tag at the end signalling possible doubt and seeking confirmation. Co-operation was also seen as a positive aspect of the reform process in the present study, as teachers had to work together because *'we had to come up with some kind of curriculum for the whole school that allows each subject well (4) to survive the changes'*. Here, the teacher positions herself and other teachers as 'united against a common enemy', helping each other to survive the changes. While co-operation is positioned as positive (stressing each, suggesting accounting for every subject taught at school and, therefore, every teacher), changes to the curriculum are at the same time positioned as threatening. Similar positions regarding learning and co-operation have been identified in previous research as well ('learner' and 'collaborator' identity, Cohen 2008:84; teacher identity construction as 'creative and innovative', and 'oriented towards co-operation', Søreide 2006: 532-533; reform as a learning opportunity and enabling co-operation, Vähäsantanen and Etelapelto 2009: 22).

Even though such positions with positive connotations are created, the majority of positions created for the curriculum reform process can be interpreted as carrying negative

connotations. The reform is positioned as 'top-down', 'artificial', 'too complicated', 'unnecessary', 'time-consuming', 'resource-intense', and as 'a farce'. Teachers also relay a lack of information in the reform process. There is considerable overlap in negative aspects of reform identified by Vähäsantanen and Etelapelto (2009), namely, the reform was seen by teachers to be top-down, a means of cutting costs, and teachers stated they lacked information in the reform process. These more critical positions are stated both explicitly and implicitly.

The positioning of the reform as 'top-down' was discussed earlier in connection to positioning the authorities as 'up there'. The teachers position the reform as contradicting their 'expert opinions' about language learning and teaching. Dividing the learning process up into courses seems 'arbitrary' or 'artificial' to teachers because *'language learning is an integrated process'*. Although dividing subjects into courses is understandable to teachers in the general framework of the curriculum, dividing language learning and teaching into courses is positioned as strange for language teachers: *'why is it necessary', 'it doesn't make sense'*. One teacher said *'of course I don't put the textbook to the side and use only extra materials just because the topic changes'*. Here, the teacher can draw on her reflexive positioning as 'expert' to make decisions that seem to be contradictory to the curriculum. The teacher positions herself as defiant and positions the 'topic change' as insignificant in relation to the textbook (exemplified by the phrase *'just because'*). The positioning of teacher as 'expert' allows teachers to position division of language instruction into courses as 'artificial'.

As dividing language learning into courses is positioned as 'artificial', student choices in course selection can be positioned as illogical. Students opting out of courses is seen to *'leave a gap'* in the learning process. Furthermore, even though *'theoretically they could opt out'* no student ever opts out of English as this is an exam subject for most.

Teachers also related hiding the choices – courses are designed so that students are either unaware of their choices or the optional courses are offered in the middle of the school year so it does not make sense to opt out. Some teachers said they did not know whether students had any choice in language courses – *'they take them ((English courses)) anyway'*. Yet others suggest not giving names to courses (as is compulsory within the framework of the new curriculum) but numbering them (Course I, II etc.) instead. These are contingent pragmatic choices (Moore et al 2002) – as teachers are forced to fit language instruction into the course system, they find pragmatic solutions to the situation. This shows that the reform is indeed created in local contexts and teachers actively participate in policy construction processes, as is suggested by previous research (see Adams 2011; Ball 1994; Luttenberg et al 2013). One of the official goals of the new curriculum (see Ministry of Education and Research 2012) was to provide students with more choice; this has not been achieved in reality according to the teachers interviewed since most courses that students take are either compulsory or compulsory within their elective branches.

Teachers adopt different positions towards curriculum design and teaching (conveying the curriculum to students). Four out of eight teachers interviewed indicated that the textbook defines the content of their courses: *'I teach the textbook'*; *'we divided the textbook into courses'*, *'these good textbooks themselves create the new curriculum'*, *'the textbook is the basis'*. They explicitly state that they 'teach the textbook' as the textbook was the basis of curriculum design and is the basis of their everyday work. This, again, seems to be a pragmatic choice. One teacher related how the textbook gives her a feeling of security *'that you teach this and then the student should reach that level'*. This would indicate that the teacher on her own would not be confident in designing a course and the textbook is a vital resource for the teacher to compile courses. Three teachers said they teach topic-based courses, and at least some courses have content compiled by the teachers

themselves (as opposed to ready-made materials from textbooks). Finally, one teacher explained she designs courses based on student needs and does not take the curriculum into account much. This seems to be a principled pragmatic choice (according to Moore et al 2002) as it contradicts requirements set out by the state.

Teachers also indicate that their positions regarding the curriculum design process have changed over time. Teachers position the initial phase of the reform process as 'frustrating'. Teachers used descriptions such as '*there were questions*', '*there's this resistance in the beginning*', '*resistant*', '*defiance*', '*annoying*' to convey their initial reaction to the new curriculum. In hindsight, some teachers position the curriculum design quite differently: '*much ado about nothing*'. Most teachers adopt a pragmatic stance towards the process, crystallised in one teacher's words *the more detail you add the more obligations you set for yourself the less detail the easier for the teacher [...] don't write it in if there's no obligation*'. However, it should be kept in mind that subject curricula were designed by teachers themselves and the amount of detail in the subject curricula therefore is directly under their control.

The curriculum design process is positioned as technical paperwork rather than meaningful and important for the teachers. Four teachers report 'writing in' aspects into the curriculum they position as 'difficult to implement' in reality (such as integration) while omitting aspects from the curriculum they still plan to teach in class (such as grammar structures). Curriculum design is here positioned as paperwork necessitated by law, not by need. Teachers view the curriculum as mandatory paperwork that influences the teaching/learning process very little: *why is it necessary to create more paperwork [...] it is made too complex we know what level they must finish at*. This positioning enables teachers to approach the design process as 'unnecessary' and therefore invest minimal effort and reflection in it (deemed 'the copy-paste method' by teachers). This is another

example of contingent pragmatism. Teachers express various concerns relating to the process: suggesting this kind of work should be left to professional methodologists rather than practising teachers is one example, expressing doubts about whether teachers have the time or the skills to design courses is another. The process is seen as time-consuming and resource-intensive by most teachers. All these positions enable teachers to position themselves as 'rightfully frustrated'. However, it became evident in the analysis that the design process can be positioned quite differently. Two teachers positioned the process as '*awfully useful*' and saw the benefits of having to let the changes '*filter through ((oneself))*', indicating accommodation/assimilation of the reform (after Ketelaar et al 2012) as new ideas are fitted into individual frameworks. Again, this demonstrates the active role of teachers in creating and assuming varying positions.

This analysis of teacher positioning in reform contexts suggests that teachers have actual opportunities for *teacher positioning* (Luttenberg et al 2013), which allows them to alter the reform. Compiling curricula that do not include much detail do not pose restrictions on teacher actions. This would indicate that teachers have the option of making pragmatic choices in the curriculum design process as well. Also, making choices about grammar instruction, course organisation, and curriculum content signals that teachers have ample opportunities for *sense-making* in reform context (Ketelaar et al 2012) as they are free to accommodate, assimilate, tolerate or reject the reform.

#### **2.4.2. Positioning the Curriculum**

The curriculum itself is positioned in various ways, main positions being: curriculum as 'in the background', 'nothing new', 'difficult to implement' and 'unattainable'. It became evident from teacher talk that teachers position themselves toward the curriculum in a way that attaches little importance to the curriculum: '*the curriculum is advisory*', '*it is in the background*', '*this ((the curriculum)) should be the big frame around*

*everything'*. This enables the teacher to shift the focus elsewhere in her work. Another way is positioning the curriculum as so general that it has no specific influence: *'it covers the whole of the human experience', 'this is the frame', 'it should be the general framework', 'these things are so general', 'it is so general there's nothing to adopt from there'*. These positions place the curriculum 'in the background', enabling teachers to explain why implementing the curriculum is not possible or important. It also functions as 'stake confession' – the 'fact' that the curriculum is so general creates a situation where teachers supposedly have nothing to adopt from the curriculum, and positioning the curriculum thus allows teachers to 'admit' not taking the curriculum into account in their everyday work. Also, positioning the curriculum in this way helps the teachers to maintain that following every detail in the curriculum is not necessary.

Also, the positioning of authorities as 'incompetent' and of teachers as 'experts' allows teachers to cast doubt on the necessity of the curriculum in general. This positioning enables the teachers to see the curriculum as less important: *'to be quite honest we don't take the curriculum that seriously because we think we are professionals and we know or think we know what our students should know'*. This is reflected in the positioning that a curriculum is not necessary in everyday work, *'it is in the background'* and therefore less relevant. This positioning combines with statements regarding how much the details of the curriculum matter in everyday work. According to five of the teachers, they do not pay much attention to the detail of the curriculum for different reasons. First of all, *'((the curriculum)) says that you have to use all of these things but I think noone's gonna line us up at gunpoint ((if you don't implement every detail))'*, the teachers do not see it as a major problem if some details are lost in everyday work. Secondly, the curriculum can be positioned as inflexible in taking account the specific needs of the students/class: *'I look at the class to be honest I look at the curriculum quite little ((laughs))'*. Here, the curriculum

is positioned in opposition to the needs of a specific class and the teacher positions herself as 'on the students' side' as opposed to simply following the curriculum. Finally, the goal of teaching is not to remember every detail of the curriculum: *'we forget the detail but I guess it's not the goal [...] the teacher ((sighs)) does not think about it all the time'*. Here, it is again evident that the teacher strengthens her position by suggesting this applies to *all* teachers (*we – the teacher*).

The positioning of teachers as 'experts' allows teachers to reject certain changes. All teachers interviewed defiantly state they still teach grammar: *'completely clearly I teach grammar as well' 'even though we're not supposed to'*. Positioning themselves as experts allows the teachers to assume a defiant position of doing something 'we're not supposed to' since they know what they are doing. Different reasons for grammar instruction were given: (1) *'students want to'*, *'Estonian teachers like grammar students like grammar'*, (2) grammar instruction as supporting the student as they do not need to deduce the rules from context but are given clear rules; (3) precision in grammar is necessary for a high score at the national examination; (4) high school is the time when rules can be learnt consciously whereas in basic school rules are learnt by drilling. These manifold reasons reflect different principles in making pragmatic decisions (in concurrence with Moore et al 2002) and position the teacher as making an 'expert' decision regarding grammar instruction that takes students' wishes and capabilities into account and supports the student.

Different rhetorical devices are employed to defend the need of separate grammar instruction, for example irony and stake confession. Use of irony is exemplified by one teacher's comments that according to the new curriculum, grammar knowledge will be instilled in the students *'God willing with perfect ease'*. The teacher paints a vivid picture of grammar instruction as supposedly seen by the 'incompetent' authorities and then distances herself from it through the use of irony. Another strategy often used is 'stake

confession' (Potter 1996): teachers defy criticism by 'admitting' or 'owning up'. Through this device, teachers make themselves immune to criticism: '*completely clearly I teach grammar as well*'. This helps the teacher to do something that is 'forbidden' and maintain a position that is difficult to undermine because the teacher implies she is aware of her 'wrong-doing' but positions it as a defiant choice rather than foolishness. In other words, teachers use this rhetoric to empower themselves. The positioning process of teachers is here shown to contribute to the construction of positive teacher identities, also demonstrated by Luttenberg et al (2013), as teachers select to implement some aspects of the reform but reject others.

The position assumed by one teacher paints a slightly different picture of grammar instruction: '*now language structures are not taught (.) separately are not they are taught in context I have a question how is it possible to teach language structures out of context they've always been in context*'. This demonstrates the teacher positions (1) herself as an expert on language instruction; (2) positions the authorities as 'incompetent' and (3) positions the curriculum as 'nothing new'. Here, the rhetorical question aimed at the education authorities undermines the position of the authorities as competent while maintaining the positioning of the teacher as 'expert'. It also allows the teacher not to make changes in her teaching as she positions the changes as 'nothing new'.

This positioning of the curriculum as 'nothing new' is pervasive. Teachers relay that '*changes were cosmetic*', '*there are not that many changes*', '*we didn't find anything really new*'. Fanghanel (2007) also highlights that underscoring the cosmetic function of reform signals disjunction. One teacher strengthens her claim by positioning the authorities (despite their 'incompetence' suggested earlier on in the interview) as saying the same: '((representatives of InnoVe)) *have pointed out several times that not much has changed*

*there're a few things that have changed but not like a revolution*'. A curriculum positioned as 'not new' does not necessitate changes in teacher action.

The general positioning of the curriculum as 'nothing new' takes specific forms in relation to specific aspects of the curriculum. Curriculum content, integration and formative assessment are all positioned in two ways: either as 'nothing new' or 'difficult to implement' in teacher talk. When positioned as 'nothing new', the aspect is also positioned as 'easy to implement'. It can be said that teacher positionings in relation to the three abovementioned aspects seem to be eclectic (Moore et al 2002) as no clear pattern of positions emerged from the analysis. It could be argued, therefore, that teachers are making pragmatic choices in positioning various aspects of the curriculum. Also, teachers can be seen to actively make sense of the reform (see Ketelaar et al 2012) and, through this process, alter the reform and make it their own.

The fluctuation of positioning is best exemplified by presenting positions from one interview. Three positions ('nothing new', 'difficult to implement', 'easy to implement') are manifest, for example, in how one teacher positions integration. Firstly, integration 'nothing new', it is something that has always been done in language classes since '*all knowledge is from elsewhere they convey it in language*'. Also, the teacher positions integration as 'an old thing given a new name': '*this term is scary in the beginning but then you admit you actually do it*'. Here, the teacher positions integration as something she is forced to admit to doing. Secondly, integration is positioned as 'difficult to implement' in the interview:

Teacher: *we have tried but it doesn't work in a large school*

Interviewer: *do you have an [example]*

Teacher: *[of course] at the same time it works they do all these projects*

Finally, the teacher positions integration as 'easy to implement' because it '*works*'. Later, the teacher comments that: '*it is very easy to do*'; '*all these topics support it is not at all*

*difficult to do*'. Other teachers interviewed assumed similar positions in relation to integration. It is often seen as something that 'we have always done'. On the other hand, it is positioned as something that is 'difficult to implement' because it requires a lot of coordination between teachers and subjects, and this takes time, a resource that is scanty. The fluctuation in positions demonstrates that teachers are actively constructing, assessing, assuming and rejecting positions in her talk, a find in concurrence with previous research (Søreide 2006; Fanghanel 2007, Ketelaar et al 2012; Moore et al 2002).

Similar fluctuation in positioning is apparent regarding formative assessment and the content topic 'Estonia and the World'. Formative assessment was defined in various ways by teachers: as feedback, as encouragement given to students (*'oh well done'*), or as giving process grades in every lesson. One teacher said that possibly the European language levels system could be used in giving feedback but in general *'of course we give grades'* and the main motivation for learning is still the grade. One teacher said she had started using much more of formative assessment and she is seeing a positive washback effect in students' learning and behaviour. Teachers, then, position formative assessment as something that has always been done and *'it was a positive reminder'* in the curriculum; or claim that this cannot be done or is 'difficult to implement', especially in high school. The new focus on local contexts (in the topic 'Estonia and the World') is also positioned as 'nothing new' and therefore 'easy to implement' (*'all these topics [...] can be integrated ((with the topic of Estonia))'*) or, in opposition, 'difficult to implement' because it creates extra work for the teacher (*'((teacher reads her notes)) not in the textbooks so this is something we have to reinvent'*).

These various and contradicting positions seem to indicate that teachers are making eclectic pragmatic decisions regarding the reform (Moore et al 2002). What is important here is not which positioning teachers adopt but rather, how these positionings influence

the implementation of the reform. Both positionings ('nothing new' and 'difficult to implement') enable the teacher *not* to implement changes. That is not to say that teachers do not implement changes in their teaching (actual changes in their teaching practice would require a longitudinal observational study of their lessons as well) but both positions make it easier for the teachers to explain their actions *if* they do not implement changes.

Finally, the new curriculum is explicitly and implicitly positioned as 'unattainable'. One teacher says *'I don't have the motivation to take this (.) curriculum that seriously because we see we cannot implement it we cannot implement it at that level'*. What is noteworthy here is the fact that the teacher rhetorically supports her positioning by claiming other teachers see the curriculum in the same way through pronoun use. This concern was also voiced by another teacher: *'the question is can all of the students in Estonia do it'*. Similar positioning of the reform as 'an impossible agenda' was revealed by Fanghanel (2007: 197). Another teacher states *'((logical progression)) is taken from me I don't even see it I can't implement what I've seen creates this logical progression it'd like to see this logical progression I'd like to see it'*. The teacher here positions herself as robbed of a chance to see the fruits of what she as an 'expert' has planned for her students. Taken a step further, some teachers cast doubt on the *necessity* of the new curriculum *'why is it necessary to create more paperwork'*. This position is summed up in the image conjured by one of the teachers when describing education reforms: *'let the dogs bark the caravan moves on'*, suggesting not worrying too much about the reform since reforms come and go. This attitude is relevant when we take into consideration that on positioning discourse level (after Luttenberg et al 2013), change is expected to happen, but on teacher positioning level, the opposite is taking place, namely, some teachers position themselves towards the reform in a way that requires minimal change.

According to the teachers, 'up there' 'incompetent' authorities design changes which create *'extra work for the teacher'*. The teachers feel treated as ignorant, and as *'cheap labour'*. In this light, teachers' reactions to such top-down reforms are understandable. It makes sense why teachers would choose to position the curriculum as 'nothing new' and the changes as something they have always done anyway, without specific instruction from 'incompetent' authorities; or to position it as 'difficult to implement' which functions as stake confession in case they choose not to implement changes. It derives from this that teachers find possibilities to position themselves towards the curriculum in a way that does not limit them in their everyday work.

## **2.5. Positioning the Teacher as a 'Non-Expert'**

While positioning themselves as 'experts' in relation to the authorities as well as students, teachers position themselves as 'non-experts' on one topic – the student research paper. The student research paper seems to be the most problematic change for the teachers. Even though many schools had research projects before the new curriculum was introduced, now it is compulsory for all upper secondary school students.

In relation to the research paper, teachers position themselves as 'non-experts': *'I should be at least a semi-expert on this ((research topic)) I am not'*. In the given example, it is evident that the teacher positions herself very strongly not even as a semi-expert, let alone an expert capable of supervising student research papers. Research papers are seen as additional workload for the teacher and for the students. The problems that have arisen because of the research papers are seen as a consequence of 'incompetence' of authorities: *'they have only thought about the what they haven't thought about the how neither have they thought about the students'*. The positioning of authorities as 'incompetent' is here further strengthened by their perceived inability to account for students' needs, resources and capabilities. The metaphor of 'sword of Damocles hanging over your head' was used in

two interviews to describe the situation. This indicates the teachers are positioning the research paper very strongly as a threat.

The positioning of teachers as 'non-experts' is interesting in the context of how much effort is put into positioning teachers as 'experts' in relation to other topics. This could indicate that teachers position themselves as 'non-experts' for pragmatic reasons, such as deflecting responsibility for a task they do not feel competent or motivated to undertake.

## 2.7. Positioning the National Examination

In general, the teachers see foreign languages as under pressure and say '*we have to justify the number of courses we are offering*'. The low number of compulsory courses (five compulsory courses) raised questions for many of the teachers – if a foreign language is one of the three compulsory examinations as of 2013, then the number of compulsory courses is a contradiction for them. Teachers acknowledge that the majority of students will be taking their compulsory foreign language examination in English.

All but one teacher explicitly state that the examination is the goal of foreign language instruction: '*the exam at the end is what we have to take into account*'; '*they all have to take the exam*'. As the national examination is positioned as the goal of language instruction, it is understandable that much attention is given to drilling students for the examination: '*we have to drill them for the exam*' and '*the closer the national exam comes the more we concentrate on drilling them for the exam after all what they want to get is a high score at the exam*'. In the last example, in addition to positioning the examination as the goal of language learning, the students' wishes are positioned as the reason for drilling. Teachers claim students themselves want to study for the exam: '*students want to feel there's something separate ((for exam preparation))*'; '*the closer we get to the national exam ((students ask)) aren't we going to practice*'. In a system where examination results

are positioned as the main goal of the education system, it is understandable that students want to be prepared and that teachers strongly position the examination results as the students' responsibility. In this system, *'they ((the students)) are afraid even now ((1.5 years before the exam))'*. According to the teachers, the English language exam is a *'complete and pure language exam'* that does not test the content of the curriculum. This makes it understandable why teachers wish to continue focusing on teaching grammar. Some teachers do say that they would like to see topics from the curriculum incorporated into the examination: *'why not incorporate this ((content)) in the oral exam'*.

All teachers expressed that *'it's not sure what's gonna happen with the exam'*. One teacher also described and submitting an enquiry to Innove and receiving a helpful reply. This indicates that teachers might be criticising a situation without having made an attempt to *change the situation*, which chimes in with the description of Estonian teachers as passive by one of the interviewees. Teachers who know their students will not struggle with the examination are not concerned about the new examination. However, others expressed concern, fear and frustration about the uncertainty surrounding the new examination. Some teachers were ironic about the perceived attitude towards teachers: *'they said the exam corresponds to the curriculum we all know the exam to this day does not correspond to the curriculum'*. This indicates the teacher feels that she is being talked down to and she resists that positioning with being ironic.

Only one teacher says *'the exam is a sort of side effect it cannot become the goal'*. The examination is positioned as a positive challenge for students: *'you adapt to the situation you use this creativity or imagination'*. Here, language learning is positioned as the main goal and the result of language learning is that the students are able to adjust to challenges.

## Conclusion

The reform of the public education system of recent years in Estonia has been focused on reorganising the network of schools and the national curriculum. The new national curriculum was adopted January 2011 (State Gazette 2011a), making it obligatory for every secondary school to design three elective branches for students to choose from.

Studies of the implementation of curricular changes conducted this far seem to show that teachers are content with the reform, with two thirds of teachers identifying positive aspects in the reform (Henno and Grandström 2012, Kirss and Paks 2012). However, 71.6% of teachers (and 66% of English as a Foreign Language teachers specifically) also defined problems (Henno and Grandström 2012; Kirss and Paks 2012) and some aspects of the reform, such as formative assessment and integration, are seen both as positive and problematic. Teachers' interpretations, therefore, might be much more fragmentary and complex than is suggested by quantitative analyses. This in turn suggests a qualitative analysis could help us gain a deeper understanding of teacher interpretations in reform context. The present thesis was designed to provide such a close-up, in-depth analysis of English as a Foreign Language teachers' interpretations of the curriculum reform.

Positioning theory (Davies and Harré 1990) is the theoretical basis of the study as the theory lends itself particularly well to analysing the reform process from the point of view of teachers. Positioning theory states that in every conversation, participants create, assume and reject positions to construct their version of events, their 'reality'. Positions are interwoven and conversations are in a constant flux as positions are assumed or rejected by participants. Teachers are positioned by official policy (e.g. the reform) and, in turn, they position policy, as a result *creating* policy in local contexts rather than merely

implementing it. The active positioning process of teachers helps explain how official policies are altered as teachers actively create what is in essence *their own reform*.

Grounded theory is the method used in the study. The analysis of interviews with eight teachers revealed *not only that teachers create their own reform but also how they position themselves and others in the education system*. The analysis of teacher positioning signals a power hierarchy in the education system, as teachers position authorities as the negative outgroup 'them up there' and teachers themselves as the positive ingroup 'us down here' (see van Dijk 1989, 2002). Furthermore, students are positioned even lower in this hierarchy. Even though the authorities are positioned as 'up there', they are also positioned as 'incompetent' and 'out of touch with reality'. In contrast to this, teachers position themselves as 'experts' in relation to both the authorities and their students so that students are positioned even lower in the education system hierarchy. The position of 'experts' also allows teachers to challenge the curriculum reform, and therefore create their own reform.

Teachers' choices regarding implementation or rejection of elements from the new national curriculum seem to be eclectic and pragmatic. Teachers make eclectic pragmatic choices that allow them to adjust the reform to their own teaching practice. For example, grammar within the framework of the new subject curriculum for foreign languages is not a separate topic but is taught in the context of other topics. Teachers relate that they have not included grammar as a separate topic into new subject curricula but on principle continue separate grammar instruction. Teachers use their position as 'expert' to support this decision. This is a vivid example of how teacher adjust the reform to their teaching practice. Eclecticism in choices regarding formative assessment, integration and content topics is further signalled by positioning some aspects of the reform as 'positive' and 'easy to implement' while others are positioned as 'nothing new', 'difficult to implement' or 'unattainable'. Positioning aspects of the reform as 'nothing new', 'difficult to implement' or

'unattainable' permits teachers not to make changes to their teaching practice. This is not to say that teachers have not introduced changes to their teaching practice (and, indeed, many report that they have) but it is possible to position the new curriculum in a way that does not necessitate changes.

This pattern of positionings is worrying for the author, and begs the question *why do teachers position themselves and others the way they do?* The answer may lie in another positioning revealed by the analysis – the positioning of the national examination as the main goal of language instruction. In a system that centres around examination results it is understandable why teachers choose to drill students for the examination and position changes to the curriculum in a way that allows them not to implement these changes. The Estonian education system is shown by teachers to be one of power relations where everyone threatened – the authorities by critique from the teachers, the teachers by overwhelming workload, and the students by responsibility for high scores at the examination. The positioning of the examination by one teacher – as a 'side effect' and not the main goal – may provide a way out of this system. This position also signals that teachers can, in fact, position the examination differently. Repositioning the examination as a 'side effect' and participants in the education system as equal partners working together is a great challenge to the Estonian education system.

It is hoped by the author that this analysis of teacher positioning furthers our understanding of the process of Estonian education reform. Even though an analysis of interviews with eight English teachers does offer insight into the positionings teachers adopt, the author is aware of the limitations set by the small sample as well as the exclusion of other groups in the education system such as the authorities, other subject teachers, and students. An analysis of positionings adopted by these groups would complement this analysis. Furthermore, an analysis of actual post-reform teaching practice

would be a worthy addition to our understanding of the reform process. Finally, as the major changes introduced in 2011 were withdrawn in June 2013, a follow-up analysis of teacher positioning regarding the reform would be welcome to establish if teacher positioning has altered in relation to these recent changes.

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## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

INGLISE FILOLOOGIA OSAKOND

**Kärt Villemson**

**Teacher Positioning in the Context of Education Reform. Õpetajate positsioneerimine haridusreformi kontekstis.**

Magistritöö

2014

Lehekülgede arv: 74

### Annotatsioon

Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärk on uurida, kuidas õpetajad positsioneerivad ennast ja teisi Eesti haridusreformi kontekstis. Sissejuhatus annab ülevaate Eesti haridusreformist ja varasematest uuringutest selle kohta. Töö esimene peatükk tutvustab teoreetilist raamistikku, positsioneerimisteooriat (vt Davies ja Harré, 1990), mis väidab, et igas vestluses luuakse, võetakse ja tõrjutakse positsioone. Esimene peatükk annab ka ülevaate seni õpetajate positioneerimise vallas tehtud uuringutest ja uuringus kasutatavast metoodikast.

Käesolev uurimus kasutab põhistatud meetodit, milles analüüs on tihedalt seotud andmestikuga ja kogutavate andmete pidev analüüs suunab edasist andmekogumisprotsessi. See meetod võimaldab sügavuti uurida, kuidas õpetajad reformi tõlgendavad ja milliseid positsioone kasutavad. Valimi moodustasid kaheksa gümnaasiumiastme inglise keele õpetajat, kellega viidi läbi poolstruktureeritud intervjuud.

Õpetajate positsioonide analüüs näitab, et õpetajad näevad haridussüsteemi kui võimuhierarhiat, milles võimukandjaid nähakse kui negatiivset gruppi 'nemad seal üleval', kellega võrreldes õpetajad on madalamal positsioonil ('meie siin all'). Samas positsioneeritakse võimukandjaid kui 'ebakompetentseid' ja 'reaalsusest kaugelolevaid', mis seostub õpetajate enesepositsioneerimisega 'ekspertidena'. 'Eksperti' positsioon võimaldab õpetajatel end positsioneerida ka õpilaste suhtes. Samuti kasutavad õpetajad 'eksperti' ja 'tegevõpetaja' positsiooni, et haridusreformi tõlgendada. Need tõlgendused mõjutavad omakorda õpetajate tegevust. Õpetajad positsioneerivad muudatusi (nt kujundav hindamine, integratsioon, õppesisu) kui 'mitte midagi uut', või midagi, mida on 'keeruline rakendada' või 'võimatu saavutada'. Need positsioonid võimaldavad oma õpetamispraktikat mitte muuta.

Märksõnad: positsioneerimine, põhistatud teooria, haridusreform, õpetajad

## **Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja lõputöö üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks**

Mina, \_\_\_\_\_ Kärt Villemson \_\_\_\_\_  
(*autori nimi*)  
(sünnikuupäev: \_\_\_\_\_ 16.09.1985 \_\_\_\_\_)

1. annan Tartu Ülikoolile tasuta loa (lihtlitsentsi) enda loodud teose  
\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher Positioning in the Context of Education Reform \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_,  
(*lõputöö pealkiri*)

mille juhendaja on \_\_Raili Marling \_\_\_\_\_,  
(*juhendaja nimi*)

- 1.1.reprodutseerimiseks säilitamise ja üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemise eesmärgil, sealhulgas digitaalarhiivi DSpace-is lisamise eesmärgil kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse tähtaja lõppemiseni;
  - 1.2.üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks Tartu Ülikooli veebikeskkonna kaudu, sealhulgas digitaalarhiivi DSpace'i kaudu kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse tähtaja lõppemiseni.
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Tartus, **15.01.2014**