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**TRANSITION TO ESTONIAN-LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN ESTONIA:  
INTERPRETATIONS AND ACTIONS OF THE TEACHERS OF RUSSIAN-  
MEDIUM SCHOOLS**

Master's dissertation

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This thesis conforms to the requirements for a Master's thesis

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## **ABSTRACT**

Educational reform in Estonia has proven to be a time-consuming and complicated process. In the school year 2007/2008, the step-by-step implementation of the transition to Estonian-language instruction was started. By 2011/2012 this transition resulted in 60% of the curriculum being taught in Estonian language in the upper secondary grades. On a classroom level this meant that both teachers and students in Russian-language schools had to adapt a different language of instruction, from Russian to Estonian. Central in this study are the roles, beliefs, and actions of teachers during the, still ongoing, implementation of this transition. In order to investigate this, the framework of street-level bureaucrats is applied as a potential explanation for the roles of teachers during the implementation. In this research twelve teachers from Russian-medium schools participated, teaching subjects, Estonian language, and English language. Firstly, this research focussed upon the teachers, their attitudes, the changes that occurred in their classrooms, and the impact of the language transition. Secondly, the framework of street-level bureaucrats was applied to investigate whether teachers defined themselves as street-level bureaucrats, used their discretionary space to change the policy, and were influenced by external relationships. Finally, some theoretical adjustments were suggested in order to make the theory of street-level bureaucracy fit better to the context. This study will conclude that teachers from Russian-medium school can be perceived as street-level bureaucrats to a certain extent depending on which aspects are taken into account.

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## INTRODUCTION

The educational landscape in Estonia developed quickly after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Although the common practices of segregated education was continued – ethnic Estonian children continued going to Estonian-language schools, and children from Russian-speaking families to Russian-language schools – policies were designed to overcome this practice (Golubeva, 2010: 316). Because of the segregated nature of the school system, and the society as a whole, changes in the education policy became sensitive. Reforms were often perceived by the Russian-speaking minority as a direct assault on their identity, culture, and language (Golubeva, 2010: 318). This research will focus on the latest educational transition in Estonia and specifically on the role of teachers in this process. The reform central to this study is the 2011/2012 transition to Estonian-language instruction, which resulted in an increased use of Estonian language in the classroom. Although initial steps were taken already in 1993, it took several adjustments, and until the school year 2007/2008 before the step-by-step implementation was started (Kello et al, 2011: 5). Key issue in this reform is the compulsory use of Estonian language in at least 60% of the upper secondary school curriculum. The transition had far-reaching consequences for the 47 upper secondary Russian-language schools in Estonia. Not only students had to adapt to a new language of instruction that often differed from their native language, teachers found themselves in a new situation (Kello et al, 2011: 2). This group did not only have to deal with the different language of instruction, but also with the attitudes of students and a lack of appropriate teaching materials.

In Latvia, a similar reform several years earlier, led to situations in which teachers and schools developed a curriculum on paper that was in line with the policy guidelines, but taught a different curriculum that consisted mostly of Russian language instruction. Thereby creating a situation in which the transition towards Latvian language instruction became a ‘stage classroom performance’ (Silova, 2002: 473-474).

In order to prevent this from happening, the Estonian government opted for a more sensitive approach to implementation. Nevertheless, in 2011 a research found that 66% of the respondents perceived the transition as too rapid (Kello et al, 2011: 17). Therefore, this study will be focussed upon the individual teachers, and how they dealt with the transition to Estonian language in their classrooms. In order to do so, this study will employ the theory of street-level bureaucracy as developed by Lipsky (2010 [1980]) and Moody-Maynard and Musheno (2003). In general, these theories assume that teachers could potentially influence the policy implementation process due to the nature of their job. Teachers perform their job in relative autonomy as it is impossible and also undesirable to check and control all the lessons and all the teachers. Furthermore, their direct contact with students, allows them to better evaluate the needs of the students, and gives them an advanced position. Potentially, this advanced position may give teachers discretion over the policy implementation, which can be used to improve the transition, but also to sabotage the transition.

This study will feature twelve teachers from Russian-language schools, and investigate their role, actions, beliefs, and rationale during the transition to Estonian language in their classroom and in their school. The teachers all participated in in-depth interviews, which were transcribed and analysed. Hereby some inductive methods of grounded theory were used. The participants were divided into three groups, subject teachers, Estonian language teachers, and English language teachers to analyse potential differences between these groups in their roles, attitudes and experiences during the transition. Furthermore, all teachers were analysed from a theoretical perspective on the themes self-definition, discretion, and external influences.

The aim of this research is to investigate the beliefs, actions and role of teachers from Russian-language schools from the perspective of street-level bureaucrats. In particular the above mentioned transition will be researched, as this provides the conditions to apply the theory to a real-life case. The official transition might be over, but the implementation process is still going on. Although this topic has been studied before (Soll, 2012; Masso and Kello, 2010; ) this research will have an original focus. Firstly, this study will analyse the role of teachers during the implementation and especially communicative process behind the transition. Earlier studies revealed the politicising, power relations and communicative processes behind the transition to

Estonian language instructions (Masso et al, 2013; Masso and Soll, 2014). This study will analyse the position of the teacher within these influences and the way how teacher use independent approaches during the implementation process. Secondly, this research will include teachers from three different fields (subject, Estonian language, and English language) which will be analysed and compared. Additionally, during the interviews it became apparent that theory and reality did not always align. This led to potential new insights regarding the theory of street-level bureaucracy. This research attempts to point out some potential adjustments for adopting the SLB theory more into the European context. However, due to the small sample only preliminary conclusions can be drawn and further research should be done to explore whether solid theoretical changes are needed in order to embrace the European context.

The research will be structured in the following manner; the next chapter will discuss the role of street-level bureaucrats during the policy implementation process, the role of teachers during educational change, and the context in which educational change takes place. Furthermore, it will provide an empirical overview of educational reform in Estonia in 1991, and the chapter will end with the main research questions for this research. In the second chapter, the used methodology will be outlined, including the conducted interviews, participants and method of analysis. The third chapter will present the main findings of the interviews, central to this chapter are the attitudes of the teachers and the actual changes they experienced. A comparison will be made between Estonian language teachers, English language teachers, and subject teachers, in order to create a comprehensive overview. In the following chapter the findings will be discussed along the theoretical assumptions made in the first chapter. In this chapter three main themes will be focussed upon, self-definition, the use of discretion, and external influences. Finally, this study will end with a conclusion in which the main findings will be presented and summarised.



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **1.1 Educational Change in Estonia**

Educational change in Estonia has proven to be a time-consuming and difficult process, the educational transition towards language instruction in Estonia already started in 1993 (Galbreath, 2005: 171; Kello et al, 2011: 5). However, the foundations for this policy can be traced back to the last years of the Soviet Union. In 1989, the Estonian Supreme Soviet adopted a law through which Estonian language became the sole language of the Estonian Socialist Soviet Republic. Under this law, public officials were required to be able to work in both Estonian and Russian languages (Galbreath, 2005: 166). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the language policy shifted towards only Estonian language, continually restricting the use of Russian language in the administration as well as in the society (Galbreath, 2005: 168-170). The original educational reform contained the over-ambitious goal of Estonian being the main language of instruction by the year 2000. Almost immediately it became clear that the timeframe was too narrow and that the complete transition would cause much resistance among the large Russian-speaking minority. Nevertheless, despite earlier attempts, especially by the Minister of Culture and Education Paul-Eerik Rummo, the reform-law was not amended until 1997 (Galbreath, 2005: 171). In this year the compulsory transition towards Estonian language was postponed until the academic year 2007-2008 (Kello et al, 2011: 5).

In general the transition was only mandatory for Estonian upper-secondary schools, whereas basic schools had no general requirements for teaching in Estonian language. Basic school, however, do have the obligation to prepare their students for secondary school (Estonian Ministry of Education, 2011: 2). The goal of the transition

to Estonian language is to ‘improve the knowledge of the official language among non-Estonians, to facilitate their integration into Estonian society and to increase their ability to compete in the educational and labour market’ (Kello et al, 2011: 6). Interestingly, the additional goal of the policy is to create greater coherence within the school system and reduce costs by sharing teaching materials and teacher training (Kello et al, 2011: 6). This is interesting because the policy is presented as an education policy, but only the additional goals have a direct impact on education. The first mentioned main goals have a clear overtone of integration policy, except for the better access to higher education institutions in Estonia which requires a sufficient level of Estonian language. This observation can also be supported by the fact that in society the transition created a divide among ethnic lines. The support for the transition is almost unanimous among ethnic Estonians, while the Russian-speaking minority have mixed-feelings and a more negative attitude towards the transition (Kello et al, 2011: 6).

The transition to more Estonian took place in several stages, in order to give Russian-medium schools time to adapt. The transition started in the school year 2007/2008 with the introduction of nine Estonian language lessons, and one Estonian literature lesson (taught in Estonian language), in the tenth grade. The final school year of the transition 2011/2012 would result in: ‘one Estonian Literature course, two Social Studies courses, three Music courses, two Estonian History courses, three Geography courses, and nine Estonian language courses as well as at least 37 additional courses chosen by the school will be provided in Estonian, constituting 60% of the minimum required study volume’ (Estonian Ministry of Education, 2007: 3-4). Furthermore, the development plan specifically states that the bilingual model will not be used as, in the classroom there is only place for Estonian language (Estonian Ministry of Education, 2007: 4). Nevertheless, Kello et al (2011: 6-7) find that ‘it is not forbidden to assist students, if necessary, in Russian and, if possible the use of teaching materials in both Estonian and Russian at home and in the school library’. The ministry of education identified, students and teachers as the main stakeholders in this transition. However, they also pointed to the importance of the broader community surrounding the school such as; parents, youth organisations, and educational officials of local and county governments (Estonian Ministry of Education, 2007: 6).

## **1.2 The Context of Educational Change**

After defining the context of the transition this research will now explore the peculiarities of educational reform. As Fink and Stoll argue, educational reform is often a rather difficult, frustrating, and time-consuming process (2005: 17-18). This is partly caused by the fact that stability and continuity are necessary conditions for the effective management of schools and classrooms. However, in many cases this ‘quest for stability has become an excuse for immobility’ (Fink and Stoll, 2005: 18). Another potential cause derives from a discrepancy between policymakers and policy implementers in the field of educational change, which is due to a fundamental misunderstanding between policymakers and implementing teachers (Marshall, 1988: 98). In the view of Marshall, ‘policymakers fail to understand the world of educators and vice versa’ (1988: 98). In the case of the Estonia, the reform in Russian-medium schools has been everything but a smooth and easy process (Galbreath, 2005: 171, Kello et al, 2011: 5).

Educational reforms take place in a complex and diverse context. Although the outcomes of reforms are often aimed at students and their results, the policy changes also affect teachers, schools, and even communities. Therefore, the earlier mentioned immobility among schools is not an illogical reaction, as the reform has a greater impact than initially foreseen. Fink and Stoll distinguish three factors causing this immobility: teacher resistance, contextual constraints, and timing (2005: 21). The factor of timing is the most obvious, and is also applicable to other fields of policy implementation. In general it can be said that successful educational reforms are conducted through a balance of change and stability, and careful timing is crucial in this process (Fink and Stoll, 2005: 21). The other two factors are more specific for educational change, although resistance among teachers stems from the natural human habit to be afraid of innovations. This natural habit derives ‘partly because people prefer the familiar, and partly because the vested interests of most people are normally bound up with the existing set-up’ (Gustavson, 1955: 72). Furthermore, the high number of innovations and reforms in the educational sectors, especially since the turn of the century, has reduced enthusiasm and willingness among teachers to keep up with these reforms (Fink and Stoll, 2005: 19). Contextual constraints that might hamper educational reform,

are influences created by outside groups, organisations or institutions. Classrooms are part of a broader network – schools districts, nations, teachers unions, parents, etc. – and need to operate within this network in order to make change successful (Fink and Stoll, 2005: 19). According to Fink and Stoll, ‘a schools community can often serve as a powerful brake on authentic change in schools’ (2005: 20).

Another factor, discrepancy between policymakers and policy implementers, also contributes to the complex context of educational reform. The issue of misunderstanding between policymakers and policy implementers is potentially harmful for the reform (Marshall, 1988: 104). As Darling-Hammond points out, in case of misunderstanding, ‘teachers were expected to implement approaches they had, had no role in developing. Without deep understanding or commitment to the ideas, they were unable to bring them off successfully, and the reforms died out’ (2005: 369). In fact, in several cases the mutual understanding and relationship between policymakers and policy implementers has become troubled. As Maynard-Moody and Musheno argue, teachers – and other ground level policy implementers – often perceive ‘the abstract and seemingly foolish policies’ of lawmakers and top officials as an ‘annoyance imposed by an impractical and ineffectual elite’ (2003: 24). The result of the discrepancy between policymaking and policy implementation is that the reform process becomes more costly and time-consuming and that the intended policy outcome might never be reached.

The difference between the policy intended by policymakers and the policy outcome achieved by policy implementers is caused by several factors. Firstly, ambiguity in the policy documents, trigger different interpretations of the policy among implementers. Furthermore, policy often goes through at least four levels before it is implemented in the classroom with the high probability that at each level changes are made (Marshall, 1988: 100). In line with this, Darling-Hammond argues that ‘policy is not so much implemented as it is re-invented at each level of the system’ (2005: 368). Secondly, teachers are, and should be treated as, street-level bureaucrats. Therefore, they possess a significant amount of discretion when it comes down to policy implementation. Policymakers should not blindly assume that teachers will implement their intended policy, the policy should align with the dominant teaching culture, and the necessary resources and time should be available (Marshall, 1988: 101). Finally, the

policy should keep the local context in mind. The intended policy may be ignored at a district or local level when it does not fit within the societal beliefs and values. In order to overcome this last problem, mutual adaption has proven to be a powerful tool. Within the mutual adaption process, the policy and practice try to come to a working consensus (Marshall, 1988: 102). Nevertheless, Marshall does point out that even mutual adoption might not work when local authorities have no intention of implementing policies (1988: 102).

The level of support among policy implementers, in this case teachers, is often determined by the selected model of implementation. Within the field of educational reform a wide range of literature is created on potential models that influence the implementation process. Croll et al, theorise four potential models which each direct a different role to teachers and have therefore different outcomes to the intended reform (1994: 334). The first model, treats teachers as part of the policy-making process cooperating with central and local policy-makers. However, school directors or representatives of teacher unions generally took the place of teachers during the policymaking process. This inadequacy, led to a broadened gap between teachers and the policymaking process, and influenced the implementation in a negative way (Croll et al, 1994: 335). In the second model of implementation, teachers were treated obedient and impartial bureaucrats that followed the policy guidelines. Shortcoming, however, was that it led to different interpretations of the policy and therefore diverse individual policy outcomes (Croll et al, 1994: 336). Unsurprisingly, the third model, as a reaction to the second, assumed resistance among teachers. The gap between policymaking and policy implementing was recognised, but perceived as policy conflict (Croll et al, 1994: 339). This resulted in policymakers attempting to be as explicit as possible in their policy documents, while teachers tried to use any ambiguity in order to bend the rules and regulations in their favour (Croll et al, 1994: 341). The final model of implementation perceived teachers as policymakers in practice and is used in the most recent policy reforms. It revolved around the individual level and the creative solutions of teachers during policy implementation, in other words teachers as SLB. The model emphasised the discretion among teachers, which creates and shapes policy on the individual and group level (Croll et al, 1994: 341-342). The policy outcomes might

differ from school to school, but the individual policy is more likely to fulfil the needs and demands of students (Croll et al, 1994: 344).

Similar to the work of Croll et al, Fink and Stoll also distinguished four approaches towards the implementation of educational reform. Their main focus, however, lies upon the intended outcome of the implementation and not so much upon the specific role of teachers within this process (Fink and Stoll, 2005: 21). The first implementation approach, *school effectiveness*, was focussed upon greater efficacy of schools in learning outcomes. (Fink and Stoll, 2005: 21-22; Brown, 1995; Hamilton, 1996). Besides the difficulty in defining what exactly entails effectiveness in the field of education, the approach also received fierce critique for neglecting the individual contexts of schools (Fink and Stoll, 2005: 25). The second approach, *school improvement*, became popular during the 1990s and deals with the educational processes within schools. Furthermore, this method emphasised bottom-up implementation in which ‘the larger system provided direction and support and the actual change process was left to schools’ (Fink and Stoll, 2005: 25). Although this method had good intentions, it also had two shortcomings. It ignored the local context, by copying successful practices from school to school (Reynolds, 1991). Secondly, the implementation approach was less two-way as it was portrayed by scholars. In fact, it was actually used to obtain more control over teachers by creating a (false) sense of participation (Smyth, 1991: 324). *Restructuring and reform*, form the third implementation approach, which was concentrated around standardising and accountability. Teachers were challenged with a centralised curriculum that was tested by uniform tests, in order to ‘prepare students for the changing economy’ (Fink and Stoll, 2005: 28). The approach is criticised because it reduced teachers from ‘professionals to skilled tradepersons’ and it emphasised market values over public services ideals in dealing with educational problems (Fink and Stoll, 2005: 29). The final and most recent approach, *reculturing*, has directed the attention away from structures and formal processes to more abstract aspects such as culture (Fink and Stoll, 2005: 32). Therefore, reculturing deals with the development of values, beliefs and norms, and it reemphasises the professional role of teachers (Fullan, 1996). These values, beliefs and norms that are linked to the educational policy change, intend to not only influence the teacher culture, but also the prevailing cultures among students and

communities (Fink and Stoll, 2005: 33). Fink and Stoll conclude that the approach of reculturing shows the most promise to make lasting changes in the current period, but also emphasise the practical needs of the other three models in earlier periods (2005: 33).

### **1.3 Educational Policy and Bureaucracy**

After establishing the context of educational change, this research will now focussed upon the role of individual teachers during the implementation of educational reforms. The role of policy implementers has been discussed extensively in academic literature (Guy Peters, et al, 2006: 5). In this light, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Economy and Society) written by Max Weber and published in 1922, forms a classic work on topics regarding institutional organisation, leadership, and implementation (Handel, 2003: 5). Although Weber based his theory on the ideal concept of ‘bureaucracy’ and ‘bureaucrats’, this theory can be extended to a wider view. Even in Weber’s opinion, the organisation type of bureaucracy did not only apply to the public sector but to all organisations needing administrative work performed by qualified professionals (Handel, 2003: 7). Hence, bureaucrats are a much broader concept than just the employees of ministries or governments. In this study all people working within the public sector and dealing with the ‘public good’ are perceived as bureaucrats, whether directly employed by a government or ministry as policymakers or welfare worker, or indirectly employed through schools or police departments. The concept of bureaucrat should therefore be seen in the light of the job performed by the employee. This much broader view of bureaucrats is not merely a concept within this study, but is also often used within the field of policy research (Wilson, 1989: 10-11).

According to Weber, a division of labour is inevitable in modern, capitalist economies due to the complexity and growing size of tasks (1947 [1922]: 225). This division of labour results in asymmetric power relationships in which ‘power’ (*Macht*) and ‘imperative control/co-ordination’ (*Herrschaft*) determine the outcome of these relationships (Weber, 1947 [1922]: 152-153). The subtle difference between these two concepts, however, derives from the fact that ‘power’ is applicable in a much broader

context, whereas ‘imperative control’ can ‘only mean the probability that a *command* will be obeyed’ (Weber, 1947 [1922]: 153). It does not, therefore, include every application of ‘power’ and the incentives to obey the given command may vary from ‘habituation’ to ‘rational calculation’ (Weber, 1947 [1922]: 324). The concept of ‘imperative control’ becomes important when the initial incentives of obedience become intertwined with ‘the belief in legitimacy’ (Weber, 1947 [1922]: 325). Legitimate authority can be based upon three foundations, ‘rational grounds’, ‘traditional grounds’, and ‘charismatic grounds’. According to Weber, the rational grounds for legitimate authority will provide the most efficient form of organisation, in what he defines as the ‘bureaucratic type of administrative organization’ (1947 [1922]: 337).

The ideal-type of bureaucratic administration is formed upon knowledge as the mean of control, and is therefore characterised as rational. The required knowledge consists of two parts, fundamental ‘technical knowledge’ and gained ‘knowledge from experience’ in the work field (Weber, 1947 [1922]: 339). The design of the ideal bureaucratic administration is based upon a specific set of guidelines, such as: rule bound conduct of business, specified task and division of labour, a clear hierarchy and control system, specialised training for the staff, separation between the private sphere and the business sphere, and recording and documenting (Weber, 1947 [1922]: 329-333). Weber continues by pointing out that at the top of a bureaucratic organisation, with a few exceptions, there is always an element which is not purely bureaucratic. For example, presidents and ministers do not need to meet any technical qualifications other than enough support through voting. This makes their positions ‘as definitely appropriated as is that of a monarch’ (Weber 1947 [1922]: 335). This observation can also be found in Estonian schools, where the school head is often selected due to years of teaching experience, and not necessarily upon management skills (Oder, 2008: 239).

The ideal-type bureaucracy results in three general consequences for the staff working in the organisation. The first consequence is the ‘tendency to levelling’, in which the staff is recruited upon meritocratic principles. A second outcome is the ongoing training of the staff in order to create a ‘plutocracy’. Finally, bureaucracy results in a ‘spirit of formalistic impersonality’, in which everyone, in a similar context, is subject to the same rules, standards, and treatment (Weber 1947 [1922]: 340). Weber argues that ‘bureaucracy develops the more perfectly, the more it is “dehumanized”, the



more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation' (Handel, 2003: 22). In another work *Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism), Weber describes an unavoidable fatalism, created by rationality as an '*Iron Cage*' (Weber, 1992 [1905], 123).

Weber's believe in 'bureaucracy' as the most efficient organisation and governing form, might seem strange in modern perception. However, it has to be noted that Weber's ideal-type is focussed upon obtaining the greatest level of efficiency, and that the perfect ideal-type has never occurred in real life (Handel, 2003: 6). Bauman argues that Nazi-Germany was most likely the closest to Weber's ideal-type, and thereby points out the potential dangers of blind obedience and pure impersonality. According to him the Nazi' excesses are not inconsistent with the values and norms outlined in Weber's ideal-type bureaucracy (Bauman, 1989). However, Weber himself already noted that the consequences of ongoing rationalisation, combined with bureaucracy, might reduce staff-members into small cogs in the bureaucratic machine that are slowly driven into despair (Handel, 2003: 10). Weber searched for 'solutions through politics and science', thereby focussing on individuals that might be able, or should be enabled, to break through the 'iron cage'. In the interpretation of Kim, several attempts were made by Weber to outline the 'person of vocation'. In general this resulted in a 'character who can wilfully combine unflinching conviction and methodical rationality even in a society besieged by bureaucratic petrification and value fragmentation' (Kim, 2012).

For this study, two characteristics from Weber's ideal-type bureaucracy are important. First, the bureaucratic staff-member, whether public or private, should respect the hierarchy and obey commands under the 'imperative control'. Second, bureaucratic staff members should treat similar situations equally and in accordance with the defined rules. Additionally, the staff should do so without involvement of emotions or personal attachment. It should be noted that these two characteristics potentially lead to an 'iron cage', in which all individual creativity and freedom has disappeared. In the case of educational change in Estonia, the two characteristics from Weber might have caused an 'iron cage' in which teachers were caught. In 2004, before the actual transition took place, TNS EMOR conducted a study titled *Teaching subjects*

*in Estonian in Russian Schools: current situation and needs*. In this report researchers found that in general both teachers and principals were in general not against teaching more subjects in Estonian language. The major concern of these groups, however, was the proposed transition to a partial curriculum (i.e. the 60% law). The researchers observed that resistance often coincides with the teachers having experience in teaching in Estonian language, the more experience the more optimistic the attitude. Nevertheless, schools felt left out during the policy making process (TNS EMOR, 2004: 12). Similar to the second model of Croll et al, teachers were perceived as the implementers of policy which followed the policy blindly. As mentioned earlier this could potentially result in dangerous outcomes.

Another issue regarding the transition that was brought forward was the readiness of schools and individual teachers, the vast majority of teachers estimated their school to be “partially prepared” and 31% of the teachers even considered their school “unprepared” (TNS EMOR, 2004: 12). This might also indicate that the approach chosen by the policymakers did not include the stakeholders, and teachers were perceived to follow the policies no matter whether they perceived themselves ready or not. However, in a repeated study in 2006 the researchers did find a more optimistic attitude towards the transition. As they observed, ‘the need to transfer to subject teaching in Estonian has been acknowledged, specific steps have been taken and the general attitude has improved’ (TNS EMOR, 2006: 5). The repeated study did point out several issues that deserved extra attention such as a lack of appropriate study materials, unpreparedness among teachers who did not teach in Estonian language when the survey was conducted, and a growing workload for teachers and students (TNS EMOR, 2006: 6). The study finds that ‘we may draw a conclusion that by now, schools have “accepted “ the idea of partial transfer to subject teaching in Estonian’ (TNS EMOR, 2006: 7).

During the final year of the transition, two other reports were published. One is the highly biased report from the Legal Information Centre for Human Rights in Estonia (hereafter: LICHR) which included teachers, students, and parents in Russian-medium schools. However, their sample only consisted of ‘the most active teachers, parents, members of the boards of guardians, and members of the student government’ (LICHR, 2010: 26). Unsurprisingly, this led to a rather negative view on the transition. The

LICHR results show that 93% of the respondents were unsatisfied with the 60/40 divide, 70% is negative towards the mandatory disciplines taught in Estonian, and 95% of the respondents are displeased regarding the timeframe of the reform (LICHR, 2010: 35). This might imply that the policymakers selected the wrong model for implementation, but it is hard to draw such a conclusion based upon this report. The LICHR report also found that around 85% of the respondents demanded more consideration for the regional differences (LICHR, 2010: 35). Again, a similar observation regarding a wrong model of implementation can be made, but one should be careful in drawing conclusions based upon this data. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Taylor, ‘a lack of coherence between a language policy and the implementation plan for that can potentially reduce both the policy and the implementation plan to symbolic acts of no tangible benefit to students, teachers, or communities’ (2002: 313).

A second study conducted during this period by Kello et al, found that 66% of their respondents perceived the transition as too rapid (2011: 17). Furthermore, this study found that only 23% of the teachers was in general ‘optimistically’ regarding the transition towards Estonian language as the language of instruction (2011: 18-19). Likewise the LICHR report, Kello et al also found evidence that teachers criticise the mandatory Estonian courses and the transition in general. When asked about their subject, ‘only one third of the teachers of social studies, mathematics and sciences’ shared the opinion that teaching their subject in Estonian was justifiable (Kello et al, 2011: 19). Furthermore, several sub-studies indicated that teachers supported the ‘teaching of *some* subjects in Estonian’ but not the proposed 60% of Estonian language instruction (Kello et al, 2011: 20). Kello et al, suggests that these findings derive either from a sceptical attitude towards the transition, or from a more pragmatic attitude towards change in general (2011: 22). Nevertheless, this study also hints at low involvement of teachers in the policymaking process. Furthermore, both studies found complaints regarding the time path and the readiness of teachers in terms of language skills (LICHR, 2010: 36-37; Kello et al, 2011: 11-12). These findings contradict with the 2006 study from TNS EMOR which mentioned the ‘step-by-step’ approach that was followed by the government. A similar view is shared by Skerrett, who argues that ‘while the Estonian strategy can thus be considered more sensitive than that of Latvia’ still ‘more is needed to engage local Russian-speakers in the process’ (2013: 2). The

somewhat negative attitude among teachers and the unpreparedness among schools and teachers could indicate a wrong implementation model and policymaking process. Potentially, this resulted in an 'iron cage' and resistance among teachers.

#### **1.4 Teachers Implementing Change**

Public policy and its implementation often provokes emotional reactions among those who are targeted by the policy and those who implement the policy. Hence it would be naive to think that policy would be implemented exactly as outlined and intended by policymakers (Stone, 1997). As a potential solution to escape the theoretical 'iron cage', this research offers the theoretical concept of street-level bureaucrats (hereafter SLB). On a theoretical level, street-level bureaucracy attempts to emphasise the behaviour and actions of the individual bureaucrat (Meyers and Vorsanger, 2003: 246). In this sense the SLB might very well be the twenty-first century answer to the threat of the 'iron cage'. The first authors who employed and developed the term 'street-level bureaucrat' were Richard Weatherley and Michael Lipsky in 1977. Their initial research was focussed upon the implementation of special education reforms in America, but the concept turned out to be more broadly applicable (Weatherley and Lipsky, 1977). Their initial steps gave ground to the development of an *implementation theory*, which developed into a wide variety of literature on the subject of street-level bureaucrats (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003: 11). The concept SLB should be perceived in the same way as Weber used the term bureaucrats. In this research this concept does not directly refer to bureaucrats, but it refers to those employees having direct contact with the citizens. More specifically, to teachers from Russian-language schools that deal on a daily basis with their students in their classrooms. It forms the right framework for this study because it takes into account the individual but also the peculiarities of teaching as a profession. This includes: the direct contact with the students, the context in which teachers operate as officials from the state on the one hand and educators of their students on the other, and the potential employment of individual creativity in the form of discretion.

Michael Lipsky argues that ‘public policy is not best understood as made in legislatures or top-floor suites of high-ranking administrators, because in important ways it is actually made in the crowded offices and daily encounters of street-level workers’ (2010 [1980]: preface page XII). In two ways SLB possess policy-making power, SLB exercise discretion in their decisions regarding citizens, and combined the actions of SLB shape the organisational culture (Lipsky, 2010 [1980]: 13). The position of SLB, between the public and the state, provides them with a significant amount of discretion in carrying out their tasks. This professional discretion creates a situation in which SLB not only implement the policy but also create policy by shaping its outcomes to suit the needs and desires of the citizens (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003: 20). Lipsky continues by pointing out that: ‘at best street-level bureaucrats invent benign modes of mass processing that more or less permit them to deal with the public fairly, appropriately, and successfully. At worst they give in to favoritism, stereotyping, and routinizing – all of which serve private or agency purposes’ (2010 [1980]: preface page XII). The nature of the job performed by SLB unavoidably provides a degree of discretion. This discretion is, therefore, hard to reduce, if not impossible at all. This is due to the fact that: ‘SLB often work in situations too complicated to reduce to programmatic formats’ and ‘SLB work in situations that often require responses to the human dimension of situations’ (Lipsky, 2010 [1980]: 15). In general SLB try to mediate between the state and the citizens, in order to provide the citizens with the needed and/or desired service.

Street-level bureaucrats are those workers within the public sector who operate in the frontline (i.e. have direct contact with the citizens), control access to public programmes, and enforce public laws and regulations (Meyers and Vorsanger, 2003: 245). The direct contact allows SLB to mediate between the two different worlds. On an individual level SLB make policies while they are mediating: on the one hand SLB are confronted with the rules and regulations from the state, and on the other hand SLB try to fulfil the needs and desires of individual citizens. Through the personal actions of the SLB, for example by bending or stretching the existing rules to help citizens, new policy is created or at least existing policy is changed (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003: 13). According to Vinzant and Crothers, the influence of SLB is even greater as they argue that the choices concerning outcomes and how to achieve these outcomes

effectively shape the concept of being a citizen. Hence they transform the concept of street-level bureaucrats into ‘street-level leaders’ (Vinzant and Crothers, 1998: 19). Maynard-Moody and Musheno find that SLB define themselves often as ‘citizens-agents’ who ‘create and maintain the normative order of society’ (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003: 23). Although there are different definitions with regard to the power of discretion, the role of SLB in the implementation process is undeniable (Meyers and Vorsanger, 2003: 245). To see whether teachers in Russian-medium schools acted as SLB, three main characteristics of SLB will be researched. The characteristics of self-definition, discretion, and external influences will be outlined below.

#### *1.4.1 Self-definition*

According to several authors, teachers are front-line bureaucrats who possess a level of professional discretion due the nature of their job (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003; Lipsky, 2010 [1980]; Hill, 2003; Marshall, 1988). Teachers, like other SLBs, find themselves caught between two narratives. On the one hand, the teacher is there as a state-agent, and as such they need to follow rules, procedures and laws. On the other hand, the teacher is a citizen-agent, in which they try to help students to the greatest possible extent. It is exactly this dilemma that makes the jobs of teachers complex and difficult (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003: 12-15). Another dimension in this research, the emotional dimension, increases the complexity. As Kiilo and Kutsar find; ‘Russian-speaking teachers are put in a double-bind situation’ (2012: 590). On the one hand, teachers, as educational professionals, are bound by the rules of the transition and the mean of legitimising the use of Estonian language in the classroom. On the other hand, teachers want to teach their students in the best way possible, even if this is in Russian. Furthermore, they often belong to the Russian-speaking community, creating a situation in which not only the students might need Russian-medium instruction, but also an emotional connection to the language among teachers (Kiilo and Kutsar, 2012: 590). The moment these two narratives do not align, SLB see themselves forced to use their discretion, often in favour of the citizen. Maynard-Moody and Musheno, argue that SLB try to do what *they* think is best for the citizen, even if this sometimes goes against the ‘system’.

This feeling is even further enhanced when policy attempts are made that directly change the processes in the classroom. Suggested policy changes in pedagogy and teaching methods, or in curriculum planning, provoke a strong emotional reaction among teachers. If not recognised by policymakers, these reactions might result into fierce resistance towards the policy changes (Hargreaves, 2005: 293). Besides resistance, policymakers might also harm the profession of being a teacher. As Hargreaves argues that ‘without attention to the emotions, educational reform effects may ignore and even damage some of the most fundamental aspects of what teachers do’ (2005: 294). Similar to the argument of Hargreaves, Maynard-Moody and Musheno also focus upon the emotional dimension of the work of teachers. They see that ‘rules and bureaucratic processes are ever present, decisional space opens for teachers as they close their [classroom]doors and interact with their respective constituencies’ (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003: 39). To sum up, three things are important when defining SLB; passion for the work they perform, close relationship with the citizens, and awareness of discretion.

#### *1.4.2 Discretion*

The role of SLB, as holders of discretionary power, during the implementation process is significant. In the case of teachers, Marshall argues that ‘without educator’s cooperation, policy will not be implemented’ (1988: 102). Fullan goes even further by stating that ‘change in education depends upon what teachers do and think – it’s as simple and complex as that’ (1991: 117). In the context of street-level bureaucrats, Tyack and Cuban found that ‘teachers typically have sufficient discretion, once the classroom doors close, to make decisions about pupils that add up over time to de facto policies about instruction whatever the official regulation (1995: 135). As mentioned earlier, a similar policy reform took place in Russian-medium schools in Latvia. Silova finds that in this case, teachers used several survival techniques in order to save their school and in many cases also the Russian language as medium of instruction (2002: 471). These techniques ranged from silent obedience, to careful manipulation of the reform, to hidden resistance (Silova, 2002: 472). Obviously, these different forms of discretion did not contribute to the intended policy outcomes.

In more general terms teachers use their discretion by evaluating the appropriateness of the policy (Brown, 2010: 300). They can use this in a way of hidden resistance, as illustrated by the case of reform in Latvia, but also in a more constructive way, i.e. by adopting the policy to the local context (Meyer and Vorsanger, 2003: 249; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003: 111). Therefore, based upon the earlier discussed literature, the discretion can be used in four different ways along two dimensions, positive or negative, and active or non-active. The policy outcomes of these four dimensions differ from each other, as outlined in figure I. From a policymaker perspective, the ‘positive non-active’ type of discretion leads to the most desired outcome. Although the ‘positive active’ and the ‘negative non-active’ both lead to the implementation of the policy, both have the side effect of local differences. However, in the former case this is most likely improving the policy and most certainly the implementation process, whereas in the latter this will harm the policy and will most likely lead to poor implementation of the policy. The ‘negative active’ type of discretion is most harmful to the policy, and when employed this type will try to do whatever it can to prevent the policy from being implemented.

*Figure I: Types of discretion (Compiled by the author based upon literature)*

	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>
<b>Active</b>	Implemented – with local difference but most likely better connection with student needs.	Not implemented – most likely sabotage and shirking to avoid the policy from being implemented
<b>Non-active</b>	Implemented – according to the policy with less regards to the local needs	Implemented – but only those policy goals that are easily achievable for the teacher.

The actual use of discretion depends upon the teachers’ attitude towards to policy and the teachers’ personality to act upon this attitude (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003). From the literature six characteristics can be identified, which determine what type of discretion a teacher will use during the implementation, and hence what the outcome for the policy will be. The first four characteristics, *identity*,



*ideology, politics* and *past experience* can be summarised as the internal characteristics and revolve around the personality and beliefs of a teacher. (Stritikus, 2003: 33-34). The last two characteristics deal with the external causes: *timing*, and *relations*. These factors focus upon the external influences on the teacher, which influence the use of discretion (Stritikus, 2003: 35-36). Together, these characteristics shape the discretion a teacher can potentially use, and thereby determine the policy implementation and outcome.

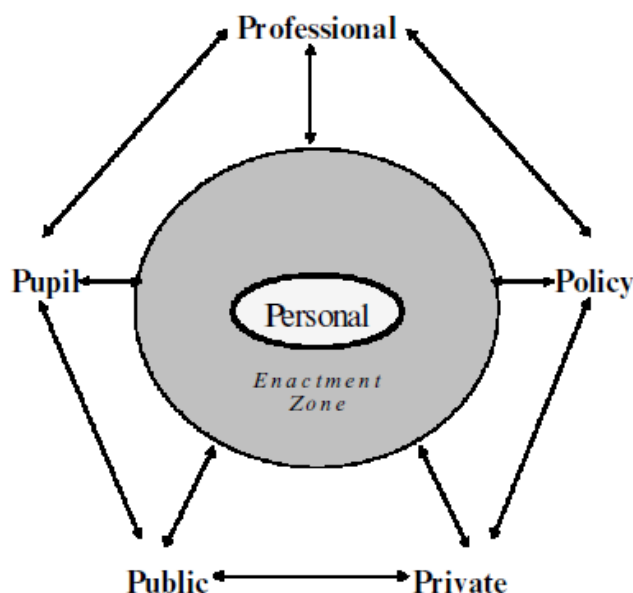
#### *1.4.3 External influences.*

Hargreaves argues that ‘educational change initiatives do not just affect teacher’s knowledge, skill and problem-solving capacity. They affect a whole web of significant and meaningful relationships that surround the work of schools. Educational change efforts affect teacher’s relationships with their students, the parents of those students and each other’ (2005: 280). These ‘networks of influence’ are theorised by several authors, and have different implications. However, a common agreement is established that the networks operate in two directions. As well as policy influences the network, the network also influences implementation and even policymaking (Spillane, 1999: 168-169; Darling-Hammond, 2005: 373). Spillane theorises that the personal capacity of a teacher forms the middle, which is influenced by the outside influences professional, policy, private, public, and pupils (see figure II). This hypothesis assumes a large role for the teachers within the implementation process as mentioned earlier. At the same time it demonstrates that teachers do not operate in a vacuum, and that external influences might limit their discretionary decision making.

Important for this study are three external relationships; the teacher-parent relationship, the relationship between colleagues, and the relationship teacher-supervisor/school head. Whereas the first relationship is often ignored in literature concerning SLB, the latter two relationships have been discussed extensively. In short, SLB literature suggests that teachers have close relationships with their colleagues, from whom they receive support in using their discretion and exchange ideas and experiences (Moody-Maynard and Musheno, 2003: 22; Lipsky, 2010 [1980]: 190). The opposite can be found in the relationship with the supervisor, in the case of schools the school director. According to the SLB literature supervisors are often perceived

negatively, because they try to limit the discretion and do not necessarily approve of the individual actions of SLB (Moody-Maynard and Musheno, 2003: 75; Lipsky, 2010 [1980]: 18-19). The final relationship between teachers and parents forms a new dimension. The SLB literature often overlooked this relationship, however other fields of study have found that the teacher-parent relationship is important (Spillane, 1999: 168-169; Darling-Hammond, 2005: 373). Therefore, parents potentially have the opportunity to influence teachers and the use of discretion. This research will include this relationship in order to distinguish whether parents are able to influence the discretion of the teachers and thereby also the implementation process.

*Figure II: The network of influence – (Spillane, 1999: 168)*



#### *1.4.4 Potential issues surrounding SLB*

The control of discretion among SLB is an often debated topic in the academic fields of public administration and political science. Although no real consensus has been agreed upon, as to the most effective method to control discretion, research has found that control of SLB discretion is a complex combination of political, organisational and professional factors (Meyers and Vorsanger, 2003: 246). The issue of control is not only relevant to the discussion of SLB but also to Weber's ideal-type

bureaucracy. Within his ideal-type, the bureaucrat follows the political decisions, SLB, however, follow the political decisions only to a certain extent. Often, their main concern lies within helping the citizen and, therefore, the rules and regulations laid down by politicians need to be bent, eluded, or even be broken. It is exactly this which Weber tries to rule out, because it potentially leads to unequal treatment and unintended policy diversity within a state, region, or community. On the other hand, discretion among SLB leads to creativity and personal action, which Weber was looking for in attempting to break out of the 'iron cage'.

Literature on SLB suggest three ways of controlling discretion: political, organisational, and professional. Political control assumes that SLB use their discretion to adjust national policy programmes to the local situation. Hereby, they ignore the national political control, but are more likely to show 'responsiveness to local electoral politics', thereby creating local democratic control (Scholz et al, 1991: 84). Other authors pointed out that the asymmetric access to information leads to an unequal relationship. In which the actions of SLB are in line with the easily observable policy targets, but less with the more underlying policy goals (Winter, 2000; Meyers et al, 1998). The second mean of control, organisational, focuses on rules, resources, and organisational culture. Paradoxically, research has found that an increase in rules results in an increase in discretion, due to growing complexity of the work. This also makes it more difficult to monitor and oversee the actions of SLB (Meyers and Dillon, 1999; Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003). The last mean of control, professional factors, deals with SLB on a personal and group level. Several studies show that policy change is more successful when it aligns with the values, beliefs and practices of SLB and the broader SLB community (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003; Sandfort, 2000). Therefore, personal and organisational culture can create both positive and negative discretion among SLB (Lin, 2000). This type of control is most-likely the most effective in managing discretion, however, it is the least manageable by outside influences (Meyers and Vorsanger, 2003: 248).

The difficulty in controlling discretion can lead to several potential issues. Again the familiar contrast arises, when discretion is limited, the surrounding issues will also be limited, but at the cost of personal creativity and freedom. However, this will be at the expense of personal freedom and creativity, and ultimately restrict the actions of

bureaucrats in general and SLB in particular. The first potential issue surrounding discretion is the creation of a democratic hole. This derives from the fact that a policy is made by elected officials, but implemented by unelected bureaucrats. When SLB use their discretion to change policy, they do not hold responsibility to the citizens (Meyers and Vorsanger, 2003: 249). Another issue revolves around unequal treatment of citizens. Research has shown that SLB base their help on how much they can identify with the citizen. The better they can identify with the citizen the more help they are willing to provide, and vice versa. It is exactly this type of unequal treatment which challenges the government as an institution (Meyers and Vorsanger, 2003: 249-250). Finally, the use of discretion by SLB can hamper the intended policy outcomes. When the visions of policymakers and the policy-implementer (SLB) do not align, it is more likely that the intended policy outcomes will not be achieved because of a shift in focus by SLB (Meyers and Vorsanger, 2003: 250). Despite these potential dangers, scholars tend to agree that the hierarchical model of control based upon obedience and impersonality, is no longer adequate in the modern world. Meyers and Vorsanger argue that, ‘the exercise of discretion by front-line workers is not only inevitable but desirable – for promoting democratic control over policy processes, tailoring policies to individual needs, and increasing the effectiveness of policy efforts’ (2003: 249).

#### *1.4.5 Teachers in Estonia*

As the main focus of this research is the individual teacher, it is beneficial to look into the changes that occurred for them. Three groups are distinguished, subject teachers, English language teachers, and Estonian language teachers. The most influenced by this transition were the subject teachers, subjects like history, biology, chemistry, and geology, shifted from Russian-language instruction into Estonian-language instruction. This had a large impact on their classroom, and in particular on the teaching methods and materials. Related to this the subject teachers found that preparing their lessons in Estonian language took much more time and effort, when compared to teaching in Russian language (Kello, et al, 2011: 34). The transition, however, did not only affect subject teachers, language teachers also became involved in this transition. Both foreign language teachers and Estonian language teachers experienced changes in their classrooms and schools. Although in the case of foreign

language teachers, the transition was more oriented to English-medium instruction (or any other foreign language) than to Estonian-medium instruction. According to a private communication by a former official of Ministry of Education and Research (22.04.2014), there was a silent agreement that English could be counted in the subjects transferred to Estonian-medium instruction, even in case the actual transition was to English-medium instruction. Estonian language teachers in Russian-medium school did not necessarily experience a language change in their classroom, although now they were supposed to teach Estonian language in Estonian and also Estonian literature in Estonia. Furthermore, they did experience a shift in their school. Their subject became potentially more important, and this group was perceived as the facilitators of the transition within the school. Most likely the least directly influenced by the transition were the Russian-language teachers. As they did not have to change their language of instruction, however, their subject got a different position within the school. Finally, all the language teachers have also experienced the broader educational transitions that have concerned all teachers in Estonia, and particularly Russian-speaking teachers since late 1980s.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

Deriving from both the theoretical and empirical results are several questions that this research will attempt to answer. The central question in this study is: *to what extent and in which aspects is the conception of teachers as street-level bureaucrats applicable to teachers from Russian-medium schools during the transition to more Estonian-language instruction?* In order to answer the main question several sub-questions will be explored:

1. In which aspects was the transition experienced differently by teachers positioned differently towards it? (i.e. subject teachers, Estonian language teachers, and English language teachers) In other words, what was the attitude of the teachers towards the transition and which kind of changes did they experience in their classroom and in their school?

2. To what extent do teachers identify themselves as SLB during the transition? In other words, did teachers show passion in performing their job, did they describe close relationships to their students, and were they aware of their potential discretion?
3. What types of discretion were used by the teachers during the transition? In other words, did teachers use positive or negative discretion and in an active or non-active manner?
4. Which external influences influenced the teachers' discretion? In other words, how could the relationship be characterised between colleagues, and teachers and the school director, and what was the influence of parents on teachers and their discretion?

Additionally, during the interviews and after the first analysis another question rose:

5. Which potential adjustments could be made to the SLB theory in order to fit better in the Estonian and European context? In other words, how might the discrepancy between theoretical assumptions and empirical observation be explained?

These questions derive both from the theoretical assumptions that teachers can be perceived as street-level bureaucrats, as well as the empirical observations that the transition provided ground for teachers to actually use their discretion. Furthermore, the potential 'iron cage' created by the policymakers, might have caused resistance among teachers as seen in the case of Latvia. This study offers the framework of street-level bureaucracy to research the role of teachers during the transition.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1 Interviews**

The most appropriate type of interviews for this type of research are semi-structured in-depth interviews. As pointed out by Johnson and Rowlands: ‘a researcher who uses in-depth interviewing commonly seeks “deep” information and knowledge ... This information usually concerns personal matters, such as individual’s self, lived experience, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspective’ (2012: 100). Hence this type of interview was employed, as this research aims to emphasise the teachers personal interpretations, roles and creative solutions during the transition, as well as their feelings and emotions.

The location for conducting the interviews differed, in most cases the interviews were conducted in the (personal) classroom of the teacher. In three cases, the teacher preferred a neutral location outside the school. Before the interviews teachers were provided with given informed consent, explaining what the goal of the research was and how they contributed to it. Furthermore, the interviewees were promised and ensured that their answers would only be used in an anonymous way, and that the transcribed interviews would be accessible to a limited number of people. After this the teachers were given the choice between recording or handwritten notes - ten teachers agreed with recording and two preferred only handwritten notes. Finally, before answering the questions, the teachers were asked to avoid personal names, place names, or organisational names, in order to ensure their anonymity. Most participants followed these guidelines, and used the relationship (i.e. a student, a parent, a colleague), the regional name (i.e. Ida-Virumaa), or the organisation in general (i.e. the school, the university).

The starting point for each interview were the questions formulated in the interview schedule (see Appendix 1). However, since semi-structured interviews offer a lot of flexibility, the answers often determined the further direction of the interview. This resulted in interviews which were specific to the individual teacher, as the follow up questions often differed. When a teacher lacked the personal experience regarding a question, they were asked to talk about their experience in the school in general. Overall most teachers were cooperative during the interviews, and they seemed to be open and honest. Only a few questions were not answered, mostly because the teacher did not have an answer, or in some cases because of sensitivity. These were either questions regarding personal issues in the classroom, or problems in the school in general. Only in one case did the teacher seem unwilling, and answered with short and general answers. This might be explained by the fact that this participant was the result of the snowball sampling strategy and the interview came somewhat unexpected to her – she was introduced to the author by her colleague and did not have much time to prepare herself.

After the interviews, the teachers were explained that the recorded interviews would be transcribed and that they could get a duplicate of this if they desired so. Only two teachers wished to receive their transcription but neither of them added any comments. For the transcription the literal answers of the teachers were used, including possible language mistakes. All transcribed interviews and the notes of the other interviews are accessible through the author.

## **2.2 Participants**

In selecting the interviewees the intention was to find who fulfilled the following criteria: teaching at the *upper-secondary* school level, having some experience with the educational transition, and being able to express themselves in English. In order to create diversity in the sample, the intention was to find, if possible, people from socio-linguistically different regions (Tartu, Tallinn and Narva), teaching different subjects, and from different age groups. In order to find participants, several strategies were applied. Firstly, emails were sent to eight different schools directed to the school director and head teachers, with the question whether they would be able to suggest



colleagues for an interview. After this method turned out to be unsuccessful, as only one school director was able to refer to a potential interviewee, individual teachers were emailed. Over 500 emails were sent out to 12 different schools, two in Tartu, six in Tallinn, and four in Narva. This resulted in six teachers who were willing to participate in the research. After these initial contact attempts, interviewees were asked regarding other potential participants, and personal contacts were also used. Via personal contacts four more interviewees were found. The aim of the new sampling strategy was to find teachers with different perspectives on the transition to Estonian-medium instruction: subject teachers who have started teaching in Estonian and are thus affected most directly; English teachers for whom 'transition to Estonian-medium instruction' actually means transition to English-based instruction of English, and teachers or Estonian who are more like facilitators of the transition involved as helpers of their Russian-speaking colleagues.

The final sample contains twelve interviews: four teachers from Tartu, seven teachers from Narva, and one teacher from Tallinn. The above mentioned categories were quite equally divided: five subject teachers, three English language teachers, three Estonian language teachers, and one teacher who taught both Estonian and English language. In this research five different schools participated, one in Tallinn and two in both Narva and Tartu. All schools were combined schools, containing primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels (grades one to twelve). Eleven out of twelve teachers were female and their age differed between 24 and 52 years old, with teaching experience of between three years and 30 years. Of the English language teachers, three taught in all grades, and one teacher only in the primary and lower secondary levels. The Estonian language teacher in Tartu taught in grades nine to twelve, her colleagues in Narva taught in all grades. The five subject teachers were more diverse; two teachers taught history, civics and philosophy in grades nine to twelve, another teacher taught chemistry and natural sciences in all grades, one teacher taught arts in all grades, and the last participant taught biology and natural science in grades six to twelve. All teachers possessed at least a bachelor's degree or equivalent, and eight teachers possessed, or were obtaining, a master's degree. Two teachers even indicated that they were currently working on their doctoral dissertations. Furthermore, seven teachers had the necessary C1 level of Estonian, four teachers were native speakers, and only one

teacher indicated not having the necessary language certificate although her Estonian was on a high level. Although the number of participants is small, it is nevertheless feasible for the study conducted. As debated and described by many authors, the sample size for these kind of research can differ between six to 12 participants (Thomas and Pollio, 2002), five to 25 participants (Creswell, 1998), or two to 10 participants (Boyd, 2001).

### **2.3 Method of Analysis**

After the interviews were transcribed, they were analysed. An inductive way of analysis was used based upon a grounded theory approach. In this approach empirical observations are used to investigate whether theoretical assumptions can be used to explain the empirical phenomenon, and when necessary adjust theoretical assumptions (Charmaz, 2006: 9). Due to the limited sample of this study it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions. Hence, this research will indicate potential theoretical adjustments, but further research needs to be conducted in order to support these conclusions. Following the grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006 :11), the first selection contained the establishment of main themes. These themes came from the questions that were answered by all teachers, which enabled an analysis of comparing and contrasting. However, because of the open nature of the interviews, not a lot of themes were answered by all teachers and sometimes teachers had different interpretations of the questions. Therefore, the second round of analysis focussed upon the three subgroups, subject teachers, Estonian language teachers, and English language teachers. This analysis focussed specifically on two themes, the attitude of these teachers and the changes that had occurred due to the transition. In more detail, the attitude was divided in a school attitude and an individual attitude, and a similar approach was used for the changes which were divided in school-wide changes and changes in the classroom. Furthermore, the three subgroups were compared and contrasted with each other in order to see similarities and differences between the groups. This was needed in order to get a comprehensive overview of the attitude and experience of the teachers regarding the transition, which potentially provided the

grounds for using their discretion in a positive or negative way. The following analysis was focused upon the answers that could be connected to the theory. In this case both similarities and differences for each theoretical assumption were assessed. In this case the three main themes were researched, self-identification, discretion, and external influences. In the final round of analysis, the individual characteristics of the teachers, interesting comments, or personal statements were analysed. In this case, the teacher as an individual was the main point of focus. Overall, the interviews were examined extensively and a comprehensive overview of the interviews was made and presented. In the presentation of findings, a combination of direct quotes and paraphrasing is used.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **3.1 Subject Teachers: Main Implementers of the Reform**

The teachers most directly influenced by the transition to Estonian language were the subject teachers. This group was emotionally more involved in the transition and therefore offered interesting views when compared to the groups of Estonian and English language teachers. The group of subject teachers consisted of one male chemistry teacher, and a female biology teacher both from Tartu, two history teachers from Tallinn and Narva, and an art teacher from Narva. The language of instruction was an important topic for these teachers, as they experienced the transition on a daily basis in their classroom. The chemistry teacher from Tartu summarised his feelings as:

“I think I enjoyed it [teaching] more when I could teach in students’ mother tongue. Because then it made more sense. I mean then it was teaching of science.” (Chemistry teacher – Tartu)

The colleague from Tallinn did not express the same view, she acknowledged that there were difficulties with Estonian language in Russian medium schools, but she never encountered insurmountable problems. For her personally, as a native Estonian raised in a Russian environment, the language transition was not a problem. As she had been teaching history in both Russian-medium and Estonian-medium schools, she was able to compare both types. In her personal experience she enjoyed working in the Russian-medium schools more. She described the situation in her current school as more independent when compared to her previous position in an Estonian-medium school. This independence was important to her, because she was able to develop her own lessons and enjoyed doing so, rather than blindly following old curricula. The biology teacher had an entirely different experience, as she did not speak Russian she could only

teach in Estonian. It should be noted that her school was one of the leading schools in the transition process, and that hence her students were more prepared to receive education in Estonian language.

Both the history teacher and the chemistry teacher came in contact with the language transition for the first time when they started working at their current school, although they had heard of it before. The chemistry teacher talked about his teacher training period. At that point he worked in the lower grades and taught one class in the upper secondary grades. His school had developed a programme that allowed students in the lower grades to choose between Estonian or Russian instruction for chemistry. However, the next year this option was no longer given to the students:

“I could teach chemistry to them but I understood that now there were no voluntary basis. It was just decided, not just by school, there were some meetings with the parents and stuff, so they opted for chemistry taught in Estonian. But now there were no this kind of voluntary basis, but everything was taught in Estonian. And that is why it was quite challenging, because from my first point of view children themselves they did not choose it.” (Chemistry teacher – Tartu)

The history teacher from Tallinn had a similar story, after her previous Estonian school closed she got a position at her current Russian school. This was for her the first time she experienced the transition, she found that in the upper secondary grades teaching in Estonian was not that much of a problem. Besides some minor struggles at the beginning she was able to perform her job well. According to her the main problem was in the ninth grade and the transition to the tenth grade, as this was a major change for her students. Although the biology teacher had six years of teaching experience, she had only minor experience with the transition. As mentioned before, her school was a “model” school where the transition had started earlier. She noted that when she arrived the transition processes, or at least the difficulties with the transition, were already over. As she explained during the interview:

“Most of the students in our school have already been in this language transition from the kindergarten, and so it is hardly a problem there”. (Biology teacher – Tartu)

This was also the reason why she, with limited knowledge of the Russian language, could teach in this school.

### *3.1.1 Attitudes towards the transition*

When asked about their personal attitudes the subject teachers expressed themselves positively. The biology teacher expressed only a positive attitude towards the transition, in her eyes this would benefit her students in the long term. When she was asked whether the increase of use of Estonian language was a success in her school she immediately expressed that it was “a huge success”. In fact, as she explained later on:

“I think us being so successful in this area, has made our school really well known around Estonia. And especially in the eastern part of Estonia, where there are many Russian schools, which are now struggling in this transformation into Estonian. And so there are many teachers from eastern part of Estonia coming to see how we are doing, what we are doing.” (Biology teacher – Tartu)

The history teacher, being from Estonian descent, explained that she tried to be supportive to her students. In her view univocal the attitude of the school helped her, as she made clear:

“No real problems [with the transition] happened. In the other school [Estonian medium school] there was a lot of democracy, but not in Russian schools. The students were just told they had to study in Estonian [in the upper secondary level].” (History teacher – Tallinn)

Her personal approach to her students was less commanding, she had explained to her students that it was useful for their future to study in Estonian language. She tried to help students who struggled and encouraged the students to use Estonian language as much as possible. In her view this attitude had proven to be very helpful and resulted in only few small conflicts. Although she also acknowledged that this was not always successful and that sometimes just referring to the “school policy” was necessary. The chemistry teacher also had a supportive attitude towards his students, he tried to help them as much as possible and told that he sometimes felt like “a language teacher instead of a science teacher”. He supported his attitude with an example:

“If children do not understand I am able to support them. And also they use some structures quite weirdly, I could also support them with that, how they could transform that. And to somehow connect it into a coherent understanding with their mother tongue, because my mother tongue is also Russian”.  
(Chemistry teacher – Tartu)

Regarding the general attitude in his school the chemistry teacher was uncertain, his answer can be best summarised as “some teachers supported the transition, and others not”. He did observe that in his school a lot of projects were started to increase the amount of Estonian medium subjects, also in the lower grades, but these projects had varying degrees of success and were received differently amongst colleagues and students. The biology teacher pointed to another aspect of the transition, besides more use of Estonian in the classroom, the government also attempted to create larger upper-secondary schools. In the case of Tartu this led to the creation of only one Russian-medium upper-secondary school instead of two. As the teacher described this led to problems for her school in general:

“The number of students in our school is going to raise really rapidly. And I do not know what is going to happen. I have heard that they are actually planning to open the school next year in two, how do you say, two different groups. So one that comes in the morning, and those who come in the afternoon. But I do not know if it will work or if it will go even in work ... I think the problem is not only because of the number of students. But because of the number of classrooms we have, and we are really completely full now. So they need to find a place or a solution for that.” (Biology teacher – Tartu)

The history teacher from Narva explained that in her eyes, the attitude of the school was not too different from the attitude of the individual teachers. She did, however, also note that a lot of new teachers were hired and that the Estonian language department had a strong influence on the school in general.

### *3.1.2 Changes brought about by the transition*

The personal changes were in the case of these subject teachers a result of the changes that the transition had brought about to their school. The history teacher explained that she got her current position because she “spoke both languages”,

Estonian and Russian. She had replaced the previous history teacher because this teacher did not have the necessary C1 certificate. In her case the transition had a positive impact on her personal situation. However, she could imagine that it could result in “unpleasant” situations within a school. The teacher illustrated this by telling about a colleague who her school after only two weeks as she not able to work in a double language environment. The biology teacher explained that she got her job due to the fact that positions opened up at her school. As the head master of this school was also a lecturer at university, university students were approached to start teaching in this school. Although she did not directly link her job to the language transition, it is likely to assume that for her job position an Estonian speaker was needed. The chemistry teacher from Tartu got his position mainly because he had done his teaching practice at the school. However, because of his C1 certificate he got to teach classes in the upper secondary level, even when it was not his subject of study:

“It is like this that now from this natural sciences cycle, I also teach geography in one class. Because our geography teacher is not competent in Estonian. So if the person does not have this higher level of Estonian, it is called C1, then they are not competent to teach in Estonian. And then these subjects are given to someone else, who is competent language wise, and also because it is in the natural science cycle. So this kind of processes are going on.” (Chemistry teacher – Tartu)

Likewise to the history teacher, he admitted that the transition had had a positive influence on his career. The fact that he had the C1 certificate and lots of practice in Estonian were, according to him, great advantages for getting a position as a teacher.

The impact of the transition on the classroom relations, revealed different perceptions among the teachers. The chemistry teacher described the situation in his classroom after the transition towards Estonian language as:

“Now the communication is a bit like a broken telephone. You say something and then you need to make sure that they got it. And then you need to scratch your head thinking like: ‘ok half got it and half did not’ what should I do now? ... I feel that this link [between science and everyday life] is now absent. So probably, their understanding of chemistry is less coherent then it was before when it was taught in Russian language. And at first for me it was about



teaching science, but now I see that sometimes teaching of language.”  
(Chemistry teacher – Tartu)

The biology teacher from Tartu, explained that she did not have such initial problems as her students were more used to speaking Estonian. Furthermore, she had developed several tricks how to help the students that were struggling with Estonian:

“What I do is, I try to really explain with really simple words and explain over and over again. So that if I see that somebody does not understand, then I sometimes ask another student to translate into Russian. And we use dictionaries and so on, and Google translate of course.” (Biology teacher – Tartu)

Their colleague from Tallinn had not experienced such difficulties in communicating with her students. She described a situation that recently occurred, when a female student from Russia without any Estonian language proficiency was placed in her classroom. To her own surprise a couple of active students helped the student from Russia with translations, or with extra explanation in her mother tongue. It made her happy that at least some students took up an “active role” in her classroom. She pointed to this “active role” as one of the side effects of the transition, and said it positively influenced her classroom dynamics. The art teacher from Narva pointed out that if the younger students had already experienced teachers using Estonian it became much easier for them to continue with this:

“I can see that it is more easy to speak with the small children who is in the third form. They are very close to Estonian now, they easily can hear and answer a question in Estonian. And more difficult with the grown-up children. It shows that it is already better with Estonian now, it is already that small children can easily understand and speak.” (Art teacher – Narva)

Another interesting impact of the transition was brought forward by the chemistry teacher from Tartu. He related his own experience as a student in high school and later as a student at Tartu university to the situation of his current students. In his view his classrooms were now divided into three groups, the “straight A students” who spoke fluent Estonian, those with less language skills but with an interest in the natural sciences, and those with no or little interest in the natural sciences. He was particularly worried about losing this second group, and outlined that this could have a negative effect on his students, but also on the broader Estonian education system:

“And also now I see the university and I see a lack of people who have good understanding of chemistry or other subjects of science. So this [the language transition] spills over into this field of higher education, university education. And so I understand for professors it is more important to find a student who knows brilliantly chemistry and is problematic with Estonian than a student who knows a lot of Estonian terms but lacks coherent understanding.” (Chemistry teacher – Tartu)

In the eyes of this teacher, the lack of coherent understanding was caused by insufficient language skills. As he illustrated with an example quite nicely:

“We have these subjects for Russian kids, but in reality they are using like Estonian textbooks which are designed for Estonian children. And with the text they use quite scientific language actually. That is another hindrance for students, so that sometimes there are quite several new words.” (Chemistry teacher – Tartu)

The same teacher brought up an interesting anecdote from a history colleague in the same school. In the case of this subject, students were sent home to read a specific section of their history book. One student returned to class and had found 68 new words in one paragraph, even with the help of the parents this student was not able to understand the text. The history teacher from Tallinn admitted that the history books were indeed “a little difficult” for non-native Estonian speakers. Her personal solution was to create materials herself, based upon the existing books, that were better suitable for her students. The biology teacher pointed out that in her eyes the textbooks used “too scientific language”, and that she even expected that native Estonian students would have difficulties understanding everything.

### *3.1.3 Suggestions to improve the policy*

Finally, this group of teachers also proposed several changes towards the current policy changes. The history teacher was in general rather positive towards the transition, and would not make changes to the policy or its implementation. She did point out, however, that if the policy was also to have an effect on integration it should give teachers more freedom. As an example she described that she took her students often on voluntary excursions to “Estonian organisations” such as the parliament or the national

history museum. She advocated more time and money for this, as it would help her students to get a different perception. In her experience history could be a sensitive topic, and she found that this kind of excursions could help overcome the sensitivity. The biology teacher brought up the similar point of excursions, and the added value of these class trips:

“Maybe there should be something really thorough done in our curriculum. Because even though there was this new curriculum, which was launched a couple of years ago, I still think that there is too much the students need to learn. And there is so little time for me to actually do something with them. And I have seen, that when I go outside. When I go outside the school boundaries, for example when we go to some kind of camp. They see me as a real person and when they can study in a different environment. And they can actually do something with their own hands it gives them some kind of different view of their knowledge. And they actually understand that they can use it, and that is something you cannot give them in a classroom.” (Biology teacher – Tartu)

Perhaps connected to the situation in her school, she voiced a critical opinion towards the ongoing trend of uniting upper-secondary schools. As this “ended the work of really normal schools”, that were only closed because they did not have enough students, not because the level of education was poor. She perceived the creation of large upper-secondary schools not necessarily as an advantage in all cases. The chemistry teacher from Tartu was a bit more critical, he pointed out that if the gymnasium level was going to be in Estonian, or at least 60%, the children should be “submerged” earlier into the Estonian language. Another critical point from his side was the potential decline of student’ performance in relation to language learning:

“I heard this opinion of parents, and parents said that ‘let’s study language in the language class’. So and I understood like ‘yeah really why not’, to have more language classes. And at the same time the government says that ‘oh you know if the students study only in the language class then their language skills are not sufficient’. Then it means that to make more language classes, but they do not have to be classes. There can be some kind of integration projects.” (Chemistry teacher – Tartu)

This opinion was connected to earlier mentioned fears he expressed for the future. In his eyes it was better to develop the talents of students, than to develop the Estonian language. He pointed out that English language became increasingly important as well in the Estonian society, and he was wondering whether the government could protect the Estonian language from this development and at the same time advocate a “knowledge based economy”. With this example, he tried to justify the teaching of subjects in Russian language if it would help students to develop their talents.

### **3.2 Estonian Language Teachers: Facilitating the Transition**

At first glance it looks like Estonian language teachers had the easiest role during the transition, after all it was their subject that was now being used on a wider basis in the school. A closer look however, revealed that the three Estonian language teachers and the one Estonian and English language teacher in this research had a significant role in the transition. The Estonian language teachers interviewed had the most years of teaching experience when compared to the English and subject teachers, three came from Narva and one teacher came from Tartu. Obviously, these teachers used only Estonian language before the transition and continued to do so after the implementation of the 60% law. Three teachers claimed never to use any Russian language, not even when explaining difficult grammar constructions. One teacher admitted to using Russian only on a few occasions, but this was in her opinion necessary to make instructions or explanations clearer. All teachers noticed that the subject of Estonian language and the language itself fulfilled different roles after the transition. As one teacher explained:

“It [the transition] helps students to improve their language skills, because they do not listen to one teacher. Not just this teacher of Estonian with all this grammar structures, they see and listen that this language may be used in biology, chemistry, or whatever, not just in the Estonian classroom.” (Estonian language and literature teacher – Narva)

Nonetheless, this did not always make the work of the Estonian teachers easier. Some explained that it was harder to motivate students because they already received so much Estonian language education from other teachers during the other subjects.

### *3.2.1 Attitudes towards the transition*

As these teachers had more teaching experience than in the other groups, it was asked whether they could compare the situation before, during, and after the transition. As two teachers from the same school in Narva noticed, the attitude had changed over time. The oldest described:

“In 2001-2002, I first heard about this [the transition], and I went to Latvia to a Russian school to observe how it works. And I noticed that this is quite real, if you have teachers that are prepared. So teachers here [in Estonia] used to say it is impossible, we should prolong this beginning. But I used to see from the very first moment it is real and it will work.” (Estonian language and literature teacher – Narva)

In her eyes the attitude towards transition of it “being impossible” changed once the actual transition started in 2007-2008. Confronted with this new situation teachers either “dealt with it or left”. In general the teachers interviewed witnessed that the colleagues who spoke sufficient Estonian changed their attitude from rather negative to more positive, while those without the sufficient language skills remained negative towards the transition. As the Estonian language teacher in Narva explained:

“In Estonian [language] teaching, teach mainly young teachers and they are positive in teaching in Estonian. So I think more negative are people who do not speak Estonian themselves, and they are negative in teaching in Estonian. But I think young teachers, who come to school and who speak English, Estonian and Russian they are positive in teaching.” (Estonian language teacher – Narva)

On an individual level the Estonian language teachers expressed rather positive attitudes towards the transition and increased use of Estonian in the classroom even if this resulted in a more difficult job for them. This might be logical as the teachers were teaching Estonian language, nevertheless they did not shy away from criticising the policy itself:

“This Estonian language learning process must be changed, smaller groups and added hours. Only in this case we can solve the problems [with the transition]. Because nothing changes, they just have this additional biology, chemistry and geography in Estonian, but they have this four or five lessons of Estonian as they used to have. Nothing changes with the Estonian subject, they need to add more, we need to teach Estonian more.” (Estonian and English language teacher – Narva)

### *3.2.2 Changes brought about by the transition*

On a school level, the teachers in Narva testified that the transition had created tension between the older and younger generations of teachers. These teachers saw that within the school, the older teachers retired or were able to teach significantly less hours because of insufficient level of Estonian language proficiency. The opened job positions were filled by younger teachers with the necessary language certificates, but this created tension between the two generations. One teacher described a personal experience that she encountered even though she taught Estonian and English language and not a subject:

“There is this conflict. They [older teachers] cannot leave the school because if they leave the school and try to find a new place they need the certificate B2 level of Estonian. They do not have that that is why they are here, hating us. Because of course their students are taken and given to younger teachers, who can teach in Estonian. Of course, and they blame not our government and the director, they blame us the younger teachers.” (Estonian and English language teacher – Narva)

This teacher even told that in her opinion, it felt as a disadvantage to have the language certificate instead of an advantage. The teacher from Tartu also described situations of tension among colleagues. These tensions, however, came in her view not only from differences between generations, but also from ethnic differences. In her experience did not all colleagues “speak well of Estonian and Estonians”. She recalled a situation that she had experienced as insulting and difficult:

“Once I went into my class and there had been a history class in Estonian. I think the topic was Estonian after 1991, after the independence period already. And

there were the head-minister, you know, powerpoint presentation pictures and facts. And the facts that were pointed out, I was shocked. There were many problems with monuments taken down, and these were in block [bolded letters], all the bad things done. And of course Edgar Savisaar [major of Tallinn] there were only the good things what were done.” (Estonian language teacher – Tartu)

Another change some of the Estonian language teachers encountered had to do with their role within the school. From the school in Narva, two teachers were actively involved in helping other teachers with language related problems, such as finding and developing appropriate materials. As one of them described:

“We had like a team, a working team developing this materials and the aim was to start this practice of teaching subjects in Estonian language. Every two weeks we meet and discussed what works and what does not, the problems and troubles, and so on. Some events were organised [through this work team], like the day of citizenship where the history teachers and Estonian teachers were involved.” (Estonian language and literature teacher – Narva)

The Estonian teacher from Tartu had a different experience, in her school such a project was not conducted. In fact when asked whether she was consulted on language issues by her colleagues, she indicated that this barely happened. She then continued by saying that most teachers teaching in Estonian were competent, whereas earlier in the interview she had mentioned concerns regarding colleagues not being able to speak sufficient Estonian. This teacher indicated that she would not mind being more closely involved in the transition process in her school as long as that meant she would get less other responsibilities.

### *3.2.3 Suggestions to improve the policy*

As the final question of the interview, teachers were asked what they would change if they were in charge of the education policy. This often resulted in interesting views on the current policy change, Estonian education in general, and also classroom improvements that teachers would like to make. The Estonian language teacher from Tartu pointed to the fact that in her view the government did not do enough to improve the situation in the Ida-Virumaa region, the region with the highest number of Russian speakers. As she saw it educational change was not the only solution to the problems in

Estonia. On a school level this teacher pointed out the lack of proper resources, especially to organise activities outside the school that would enhance the education policy:

“If we have more money, we have opportunities to make summer camps or send our students to Estonian families for a summer or even a few weeks. I am sure it would help ... My friend was, you know, the second after the minister. And she told me how much they worked with all the programmes, what kind of plans they had, but since the ministry itself was so small, it always got out of the way of the big policy. So never their plans went through.” (Estonian language teacher – Tartu)

The teachers from Narva looked mainly at their own classes of Estonian language for improvements. They also advocated that more money should be available for schools, but they had a different goal in mind. As these teachers taught language classes, they asked for more money so that they could make smaller groups and give the students more individual attention:

“I used to have while being a student, 13-14 people in a classroom while practicing our English. And now I have 18 and more, 20 for example. The difference is only you know five students, but it is enough to face difficulties. I simply do not have enough time to talk to all of them.” (Estonian and English language teacher – Narva)

Other changes these teachers would make were an increased number of actual language classes. In their mind it would be good for the students to have more practice with the language, as the opportunities to speak Estonian language were rather limited in Narva. One teacher suggested that these classes did not even have to take place in the school, but that it could also be projects or excursions. However, again the money available for this was limited.

### **3.3 English Language Teachers: a Different Transition**

As pointed out in the first chapter, English language teachers were also part of the language transition but in a different kind of way. For this research three English



language teachers and one Estonian and English language teacher were interviewed, all of them were women, three teachers came from Narva and one from Tartu. When asked about the transition, the English language teachers pointed towards the motto of the content and language integrated learning approach (CLIL) “one teacher, one language”. Although this approach was never officially part of the transition, for them it meant that they tried to speak as much in English as possible in their lessons. However, they found themselves in a difficult situation when students were unable to understand them. The English language teacher from Tartu used the most English in her classroom - she said that she only used Russian for “important messages”. The use of language in her classroom was:

“Only English! Only English! Maybe a couple of times there was a situation where I used Russian but it was for something really important, like the day of examination. So just in case, because sometimes I know that the foreign language information is not taken as seriously as the mother tongue information. But in general everything is in English, and I try to encourage them to ask in English as well. Sometimes it is messy, sometimes it is quite difficult to understand, but we work it out together.” (English language teacher – Tartu)

Her colleagues from Narva had the same intentions, but when questioned deeper their answers became more ambiguous. At first one teacher pointed out that she tried to use English as much as possible, however she ran into difficulties when she had to explain “tenses or articles”. She admitted that in that case she often switched to Russian even though this was not in accordance with the principle of “one teacher, one language”:

“Because it [the use of Russian language in the classroom] is easier, faster. I think it is no good to spend 15 minutes explaining them in English than spending 5 minutes explaining them in Russian. So it is more comfortable for me, and I prefer it ... But I know that maybe it [the use of Russian language in the classroom] is a mistake, because there is this rule like ‘one teacher, one language’. If I am a teacher of English, I must speak English. But I do not know, maybe I am making a mistake. I work like this, sometimes I speak Russian.” (English language teacher – Narva)

The other English language teacher from Narva told a rather similar story, she emphasised that the Russian language was only used when she gave instructions or explained difficult grammar.

This group of teachers was also asked whether their school had encouraged them to teach in Estonian if they were not teaching in English. On this point the English language teachers were more divided, both the teachers from Narva pointed out according to the official policy this was not a necessary requirement. As one teacher described:

“No I was not asked [to teach in Estonian], because they consider me speaking in English rather than in Estonian ... And I think after the increased Estonian language more people wanted to learn more English” (English language teacher – Narva)

Her colleague supported this view, she stated that the school did not demand from her that she teach in Estonian language. This teacher, unlike her colleague, had the necessary C1 language certificate and was according to her own assessment “fluent”. However, in her view the use of Estonian language in English class would only “distract the students from learning proper English”. She even told that she tried to “integrate” English into other subjects by teaching for example topics from biology or geology. The English language teacher from Tartu had a slightly different view on this matter, in her case the school had encouraged her to use Estonian instead of Russian. As she explained quickly, however, she hardly ever used Estonian because she spoke only English.

### *3.3.1 Attitudes towards the transition*

When asked about their attitude towards using more Estonian in the upper-secondary grades and the school, the English language teachers were rather positive. The teacher from Tartu described a classroom situation when she expressed her attitude:

“I had an argument with the older students. Which asked me whether it was fair to make this thing [the transition] with us and I had to say that probably it seemed to be unfair. But on the other side, it is better for the students. Because I come from the Russian-speaking part of Estonia, it is in Ida-Virumaa, and I had huge problems and a huge struggle with Estonian when I arrived here [in Tartu]

to study ... And I do realise that in order to live successfully here I need to know both languages, well three better.” (English language teacher – Tartu)

She continued by explaining that she convinced the students to change their attitudes by sharing her personal experience and struggles. When she came to Tartu University she struggled with the language and was “lucky” to be helped by friends. Her hope was that the students would see this as an inspiration to study in Estonian, because it would help them in their futures. Not only at the university but also in everyday life. She did acknowledge that some students were not susceptible to these kinds of personal arguments. In this case she had a clear message, “you have no choice”, this messages helped those students that remind sceptical seeing that their resistance would not lead to a different outcome. The English teachers from Narva came with less personal answers but focussed more upon the practicality of Estonian proficiency:

“I think it [the language transition] is okay, we live in Estonia and it is normal that we speak Estonian.” (English language teacher – Narva)

Later in the interview, one of them supported this attitude by describing her personal family situation:

For example, my son studies in Estonian not in Russian. He goes to an Estonian school and he speaks quite fluently Estonian. It is good!” (English language teacher – Narva)

Her only critical note on the transition was that the extensive use of Estonian might limit the access to the upper secondary level and therefore also higher education. This was so because in her view the “bright and smart” students could easily cope with the shift to Estonian language. However, she did not have an answer as to what to do with the students who lacked the capacities to comprehend both the Estonian language and a subject.

The teachers were also asked to compare their personal attitude with the general attitude in the school. In this case some differences became visible, the teachers from Narva were individually rather positive towards the transition. However, when asked about their school they formulated a more negative answer. One teacher described the situation in her school as “difficult”, in her view the school perceived the transition as “good for younger students but not so much for the current students”. Her colleagues shared this view that within the school the transition was approached more negatively.

In the eyes of one teacher, it was especially the current students in the upper-secondary grades who were perceived by the teachers in general as the victims of the policy. In Tartu the English teacher formulated a different view on the attitude of the school:

“And of course being a teacher, we cannot say you know ‘it is a bad thing’. So we have this, it was not spoken, but I think each of us felt that we needed to support the students. Not to say you know it is a bad thing and you are poor things that government is making this with you. We really tried to make it positive.” (Language teacher – Tartu)

The difference between personal and school attitude, especially in Narva, could possibly be explained by the fact that the English language teachers only faced minor changes during the transition. Their colleagues from other subjects, on the other hand, were often challenged with more far-reaching changes.

### *3.3.2 Changes brought about by the transition*

The English teachers explained that for them personally only limited changes occurred. The one older teacher was personally affected by the language transitions, as she did not possess the necessary C1 Estonian language certificate. When she was asked about personal changes she replied:

“For me not [no personal changes took place], because I no longer work in the gymnasium, the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> [grade]. And I am also not going to anymore. That’s why nothing changed for me, for me everything is great.” (English language teacher – Narva)

The other teachers noted that the transition brought them positive changes, as they both possess the C1 certificate. The English teacher from Tartu pointed out:

“So when I came here, it [the language transition] was one of the reasons why I came here. So this reform helped me, because they needed a teacher with certain Estonian skills, so in this sense I might say thank to the government.” (English language teacher – Tartu)

Her colleague from Narva was of a similar age, she endorsed this statement by pointing out that she got the job at her current school because the position opened after none of the old English teachers possessed a C1 certificate. She taught mainly in the upper-

secondary grades, even though her teaching experience was limited to three and a half years.

The teachers were also asked to describe possible changes that took place in their school. They agreed that the transition towards Estonian language did bring about changes in their school but came up with different examples. One teacher in Narva pointed out one of the disadvantages of the transition which were visible in the school:

“Some teachers who do not have the degree, like C1, they cannot work in gymnasium with the grown up students ... Young teachers, who have just graduated from the university or somewhere, go to teach in the gymnasium [replacing the teachers who have been teaching there for years but do not possess the necessary C1 degree].” (English language teacher – Narva)

The teacher recognised that this process of replacing teachers without the necessary C1 degree caused tension within her school. She described this as a “feeling of change and tension” within the school, which was shared by her colleague. The teacher from Tartu focussed not so much on the organisational changes that took place, but directed her attention to the lessons:

“For the majority of teachers it is to realise that your Estonian is not as good as your Russian, it is obvious in many ways. And that in some ways your lessons are going to be not that interesting as they used to be. Because when you use a certain word or expression in Russian, you may laugh together, or you may point out some more problematic places. So it makes it more sophisticated. When it comes to Estonian the language is much more simpler, so it was the struggle.” (English language teacher – Tartu)

When asked about the changes in the classroom and the relationship with students, the older teacher from Narva pointed out that nothing really changed for her. The younger teachers, who taught in the upper-secondary level, expressed a different opinion. They all described cases where students had a lot of difficulties with the use of more English in the classroom, especially in the beginning. The teacher from Narva, told that in the beginning she had a hard time working with her students. Only over time, did the students start to see the usefulness of English language during the lessons, and they became more active. She described a situation in her classroom where active student would “help” other students who did not understand English and also

“reprimand” other students when they spoke Russian. The English teacher from Tartu came with a similar story:

“The first term was a problem. They were looking like this ... [participant makes a scared face with wide-open eyes] ... and they have these questions “what the hell is she talking about?”. But then they cooped with it and they started understanding, and now even have the basic ability to ask something. So it should have been anyways with a gymnasium. So the dynamics [in the classroom], well they started working.” (English language teacher – Tartu)

When asked why they thought the students were not ready to speak only in English in the classroom, both teachers shied away from answering. The teacher from Tartu said she found similar situations in the lower grades where she was teaching, and she tried to change these kinds of practices but it was a long-term process.

Another difficulty connected to the transition that both of these younger teachers encountered dealt with instruction materials. Even though they were teaching English and could find additional materials online, they described difficulties with the books they were supposed to use. The school in Tartu used an English book that had Estonian instructions but was also available in Russian, the teacher described this situation as:

“The materials, probably, we had to buy new books so this was rather a problem. And at the same time students used the Russian version of the book. I do not know whether they were forbidden to do it, at school probably, but no one can forbid you from doing something at home.” (English language teacher – Tartu)

The English language teacher from Narva described another problem with the materials, by saying that there was only one textbook per two students available. Furthermore, the costs for printing additional materials were her own responsibility. This teacher, therefore attempted to use IT-related sources, such as video clips, music, and interactive exercises. In general they both pointed out that they heard a lot of complaints from colleagues regarding the availability of appropriate teaching materials in Estonian for Russian speaking students.

### *3.3.3 Suggestions to improve the policy*

Also these teachers were asked what they would change about the language transition if they could. This question resulted in a variety of answers. Two teachers

from Narva focussed mainly upon the educational side of the reform, they also felt that their students were overloaded with homework. Furthermore, they pointed out that in their view the English final exam was too difficult and did not test what the students had learned or needed in the future. On the policy-level one teacher expressed the opinion that the transition did not take into account the individual student needs. She advocated a “chance to choose” for the students, and more freedom for the teachers to participate on the student needs. This “chance to choose” formed the focus of the English language teacher from Tartu, but with a different goal in mind. She stated anew that she did support the transition and would not change much about it. However, the main shortcoming in her eyes was what she labelled as “a lack of democracy”. By this she meant that in her view parents should have the choice between a Russian language school and an Estonian language school, because this would “save the democracy”. She described the following situation:

“So basically what it [the government] did, they did not leave the choice. And in this sense, it was not very wise because we take part in the elections as well ... We have a Finnish school, English school for ambassadors, why do we have those schools then? So those people who don’t belong to Estonian society, they do have a choice. And though I am a 100% part, a person who really wants to stay here, and who does not want to go abroad, who want to dedicate myself on the development of future Estonians. So in this sense ... [it feels unfair]”.

(English language teacher – Tartu)

This teacher, however, recognised that it would have always been difficult to implement the language transition, and that perhaps the way it was done was the best way. She did point out that a more open debate should have been organised, and that more and better information should have been given to teachers, students, and parents.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ANALYSIS**

#### **4.1 Self-definition**

In order to see whether teachers in Estonia perceive themselves as street-level bureaucrats, the teachers were asked about their self-definition and their personal definition of their work. The teachers were not asked directly whether they perceived themselves as SLB but the questions were focused upon several characteristics of SLB. As Moody-Maynard and Musheno (2003: 20-21) define, an important part of being a SLB is the close relationship with citizens. In the case of teachers this translates into the contact and relationship with their student. When answering the question “how would you describe your relationship with your students?”, all teachers brought forward a warm and close relationship. As one Estonian language teacher noted:

“The twelfth graders I taught a year ago, right now maybe in the weekends they come over and we have a coffee and we just talk.” “... we sometimes even had classes where I laughed so hard my tears just dropped out. And the tenth graders always said if she cries [from laughing] than it is a good day.”(Estonian language teacher – Tartu)

Her colleague from the same school described her relationship and the importance of this relationship to as:

“When it comes to the seventh till twelfth [grade], you really can be a friend of them and it really works. Because it is very nice when you see they are running through the door ‘hi teacher!’, you cannot imagine what is going on then.”(English language teacher – Tartu)

Perhaps the only teacher not describing his relationship in these very close terms, was the only male teacher in the sample. As he quite rightly pointed out though:



“Some things which female teachers can do, I cannot do with children” (Science teacher – Tartu)

Yet even this teacher did define the relationship with the students as the most important part of his job, and even told of a camping trip he was going to make with his students. A slightly different view came from two younger teachers in Narva as one of them explained:

“Well I have a normal relationship with my students. And of course sometimes I have some troubles it is impossible to avoid them at all, I suppose. But, well I am trying not to become their friend because in this case they can take everything for granted and it may cause some troubles.” (English and Estonian language teacher – Narva)

Her colleague who taught history and civics in the same school, explained that she had to keep some distance between her and her students. Nevertheless, she did describe this as a “friendly distance”. Both these teacher did indicate that they really enjoyed their jobs, and mostly because of the contact with students. Most likely the best way to summarise the general feeling among the teachers came from the biology teacher from Tartu:

“I like my students. If it was not for them, I think I would not be working as a teacher anymore” (Biology teacher – Tartu).

All other teachers expressed them along similar lines, and pointed the teacher-student relationship out as the most significant reason why they enjoyed their job even during difficult times. The history teacher from Tallinn even recalled an anecdote in which one of her colleagues asked whether she was not too friendly and too close with her students. In this case the history teacher had told her colleague that this was her way of getting respect from the students and creating a nice work environment.

Besides the direct relationship with citizens, another important characteristic of SLB is their passion regarding their work (Moody-Maynard and Musheno: 2003: 18). In the case of this study, the teachers were asked why they wanted to become teachers and whether they enjoyed teaching. The reasons why the interviewees wanted to become teachers were rather diverse. Only three teachers indicated that becoming a teacher was their “childhood dream”, mostly because they recalled nice experiences from their own time at school. For one of them this was even further enhanced by her family situation:

“As my parents are teachers and all their friends also are teachers, so from the very childhood I have decided to become a teacher.” (English and Estonian language teacher – Narva)

Most teachers, however, indicated more diverse reasons for becoming a teacher. The English language teacher from Tartu only wanted to become a teacher after she worked as an au pair in England, and found that she enjoyed working with children. The art teacher from Narva indicated that for her teaching later became a goal:

“At first I just wanted to paint and after I wanted to teach the children how to paint.” (Art teacher – Narva)

Others pointed out that they never thought to become a teacher, and got their current position only by “accident”. These rather diverse answers did not always express a lot of passion for their work.

The passion for their work, however, became visible when the teachers were asked whether they enjoyed their job. In this case that did not only express enthusiasm for their profession but also for their school:

“I never wanted to work in an Estonian school because it is boring for me. And I enjoy ... there are many difficult points, but I enjoy the difference of cultures and the language teaching itself.” (Estonian language teacher – Tartu)

A similar view was expressed by the history teacher from Tallinn, who had worked in an Estonian-medium school before. In her view, it was not only the organisational culture in Russian-medium suited her better, but she also enjoyed the interaction with students from another cultural background. As mentioned earlier students were the main reason why teachers enjoyed their job:

“The students, they are very creative, they are very like positive. And they are challenging, it is every day is a new day. There is something interesting every day, it never gets boring.” (History and Civics teachers – Narva)

In general, all interviewees answered the question “do you enjoy teaching?” with a loud yes. This was supported by the fact that only a few were able to point out negative sides of their job, and these dealt with organisational issues, such as large groups in one class and low salaries, rather than with the profession of teaching. As an English language teacher summarised the general opinion quite strikingly:

“Of course there are not so bright days, but they are everywhere. And still the plusses, they are much more than the minuses.” (English language teacher – Tartu)

In general, the author got the feeling that the teachers expressed a honest and sincere opinion. They were often excited to talk about their experiences and their profession, and talked enthusiastically about their job and the other activities with students many of them conducted.

The final characteristic of self-definition as an SLB is awareness and potential use of discretion (Moody-Maynard and Musheno: 2003: 23). On this point the teachers within the sample were more divided, and a range of opinions was expressed. Again the teachers were not asked directly whether they possessed discretion, but the questions were rather focussed upon the individual decisions from the teachers and whether these were in line with the transition guidelines. This often led to interesting internal evaluations, where teachers reflected upon their own actions. In the case of this characteristic, however, the answers were dependent upon the individual and also rather ambiguous. The teachers did not define themselves into two categories of either fully adhering to the policy or using their discretion to adjust the policy. How individual the perception was, became clear in Tartu and Narva where several teachers from the same school were interviewed. In both cases teachers expressed different views on their possession and use of discretion and acted accordingly. The ambiguity of the answers was often showed throughout the interview, at some point teachers showed pride of their discretionary space to make decision by themselves, and at other points teachers asked for clearer guidelines which would provide some clarity. This was illustrated by the English teacher from Tartu, she explained during the interview that her colleagues had selected new textbooks for the English class. These were not just the government recommended books but also books that were selected with students in mind. These books followed the necessary topics of the state curriculum, but in a different order which was “much easier for the students”. This could be perceived as an example of teachers using their professional discretion. However, the same teacher answered the question “how would you improve the education policy in Estonia” with the following answer:

“So we have more freedom now, which makes it more difficult. Because when you have this strict road to go, and you know what is going to be in the end, and there are authorities to decide whether this book is okay for you or not okay. You know okay since they have decided it is okay, and you are going to reach your goal.” (English language teacher – Tartu)

In several other interviews similar ambiguity was found, on the one hand teachers expressed a desire for discretionary space, on the other hand they also desired clearer guidance from the policy.

## **4.2 Discretion**

As outlined in figure I, the discretion of SLB can be divided in positive or negative and in active or non-active actions. Each type of discretion will result in a different outcome for the policy. At first it was important whether teacher used their discretion, as outlined in the previous section the awareness about discretion was rather ambiguous among the interviewed teachers. This ambiguity resulted in diverse types of discretion, and these were often less clear than the four outlined categories in the theoretical section. The teachers who took part in this study did, however, not express real examples active negative discretion. This is most likely explained by the fact that the attitude of most teachers towards the transition was rather positive. Hence, no examples of sabotage or shirking were found in this study. In the earlier cited study concerning Latvia, several cases of active negative discretion were found, but in this study they were absent. This result has two potential explanations: firstly, the teachers in the study had all a rather positive attitude and, therefore, no reason to resort to this type of discretion. Secondly, the sensitivity of expressing these kind of practices, potentially made none of the teachers mention these practices. Nevertheless the author did not get the impression that this was the case during the interviews. During the interview the term discretion was avoided, in order to stay away from confusion, and the questions were more focussed upon the individual and collective actions that teachers conducted.

The closest example of negative discretion came from the English language teacher in Narva, which currently taught in the upper-secondary grades. She had used her discretion to increase the amount of English language. She tried to integrate English into other subjects outside her classroom, by for example teaching biology or geology lessons in English. Although her intentions were not to actively sabotage the transition to more Estonian language, she did undermine this process by trying to integrate English language into more subjects. When this teacher was asked whether her actions contradicted with the ideas of the transition, she pointed out that her students had more desire and interest in learning English than Estonian. Hence, in her view it was justified to integrate English into other subjects as this was in the interest of her students. When compared to the theory, this argumentation is rather similar to the arguments that SLB formulate to help their citizens. However, she also pointed out that the integration of English into other subjects only happened occasionally, and that she was not allowed or able to teach English in every classroom.

Other forms of discretion became clear in Tartu, here the English language teacher and the chemistry teacher both developed an extra class in which they could speak Russian. The chemistry teacher explained that his was not to teach the same lecture again, but to help students who had difficulties. As he described it:

“Well actually there are these times like during the week, for example in my case it is Friday after the lesson. So that children who feel difficulties or who were absent during the test they could come and make up for it. So that is one opportunity to explain more ... So after class and in the extra lesson I use mainly Russian, because usually people come and they have difficulties, so I need to explain these main points so that they could understand.” (Chemistry teacher – Tartu)

In his experience this had been an useful method for helping those students who had an interest in science but struggled with the subject because of the language. The English language teacher from the same school, had a similar experience. Although for her subject this extra lesson was more temporary:

“It was quite difficult for the students, because not all of them were ready. And then I had an extra lesson, half an hour in the mornings, when I was available and each of them could come and ask all the questions they had and I explained

them in Russian. So this was this overcoming thing to help them and I think they did use it during the first half of the year and then they had no problems.”

(English language teacher – Tartu)

As she explained later in the interview, this kind of practice had become popular throughout the school but teachers had developed it on an individual basis. The intention was not to undermine the shift to Estonian language, but to help those students who struggled with the subjects because of Estonian language.

“I am quite sure that after the lesson if the student does not understand then it is possible to come to the teacher, and I cannot imagine a teacher who says ‘go away’. So in this sense I think it [Russian language] was used. But I think it was rather used after the lessons, or during the extra lessons. It was absolutely possible to give extra information ... I think it was a thing to happen and it was the same with English. Were I had this extra half an hour a week, where they could come and ask everything they wanted in Russian.” (English language teacher – Tartu)

In this example, the teachers used their discretion to adjust the transition to the local needs. They noticed that some students had difficulties with the use of Estonian, or English, in the classroom. Instead of blindly following the policy, by using only Estonian or English, they developed an informal way of helping their students in their native language. The chemistry teacher admitted that by doing so he broke the motto of ‘one teacher, one language’, but for him helping students was more important than sticking to this motto.

Besides individual discretion, the Estonian language teacher from Tartu described an innovative language programme for the tenth grade. In her school the discretion in the curriculum was used in order to prepare the students for their subjects in Estonian language. As she explained:

“The programme, we taught all the Estonian classes or courses, there were 12 of them or so, in the tenth grade. So they had 12 classes of Estonian in one week all year. And at first it was stressful for them and they even said they were thinking in Estonian already. We had different courses, we had speaking, we had grammar, reading, and writing, and the final course was a training how to do the

exam itself. You know, the functional reading and so on, and every teacher had specific courses to teach.” (Estonian language teacher – Tartu)

She continued by explaining that the students were divided into different levels for the classes. Based upon the results of the examinations in the ninth grade students of similar levels were placed into one group:

“The first group was 90-100 points, second one was 70-90, then was 50-70 and then below. And since we needed very many students to open the tenth grade, the principal even invited other students, who had graduated earlier, back to school. Of course they dropped out very quickly. But we opened the tenth grade, that was the main goal.” (Estonian language teacher – Tartu)

The goal of this programme was to prepare the student in the upper-secondary level for other subjects in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> which were taught in Estonian language. The success of the programme was visible at the end of the year, as over 70% of the students were able to successfully complete the language examination. In the view of this teacher, it “made the life of the students easier” in the next grades. The school had also proposed to implement this kind of programme in the seventh grade and teach all the Estonian language classes in this year in order to prepare students for the eighth and ninth grade. To her own disappointment this was not implemented, which the teacher blamed on unwillingness among parents and some colleagues. Nevertheless, she did emphasise the importance and success of the programme in preparing students for the next grades and their future lives.

Finally, several teachers brought up that they used their discretion to organise class excursions. When asked more in-depth about these excursions, it became clear that in the eyes of the teachers these trips were more than just a common practice. The Estonian language teacher from Tartu explained that she had been organising class trips with a colleague from an Estonian-medium school. In her eyes this was a way to make her students practice Estonian language outside the classroom, and it also served the goal of integration which is attached to the transition. A similar argument was made by the history teacher from Tallinn, she organised voluntary excursions to Estonian institutions but always had a high number of students participating. In her view this created a better understanding among her students, and could therefore also serve the integration goal. When she was asked whether she would organise those trips together

with an Estonian school, she explained she never thought of this idea but found it interesting. However, her main fear was that teachers in Estonian schools would be unwilling or afraid to participate in such a project. The biology teacher from Tartu, explained that the excursions were good for better learning but also to develop personal skills. As she pointed out she got to know students better during camping trips, she explained that this is one of the reasons why she had developed a completely new view on the Russian community:

“Because what I thought about Russians before I went to work there was completely different of what I think of them right now. And I am really, actually, a bit a ashamed of myself of think of them the way I thought.” (Biology teacher – Tartu)

The added value of excursions for language learning and integration purposes should therefore not be underestimated.

#### **4.3 External Influences**

As suggested by the theory, SLB often form a close relationship with their colleagues. These colleagues function as peers, and help SLB in making decisions regarding their discretion. This creates a key relationship in which ‘SLB identify strongly with fellow SLB workers within and across agencies’ (Moody-Maynard and Musheno, 2003: 22). The participating teachers, however, formulated answers both supporting and opposing answers during the interviews. All the teachers were asked to described their relationship with their colleagues, and in what kind of actions, activities, or outcomes this resulted. On the first part of the question, all teachers indicated to have one or two colleagues who were close to them and several colleagues with whom “they talked”. In two cases teachers indicated to have this key relationship with their colleagues. In Narva, where five teachers were interviewed within the same school, the Estonian language teachers indicated to have a “really good team”. Independently from each other, they all talked about sharing problems and experiences, but also about parties and gatherings they organised outside the school walls. Interesting about this group was the fact that it entailed both young and old teachers. As mentioned earlier the



language transition often resulted in tension between teachers from the old generation, without sufficient language skills, and the younger generation who replaced them. The togetherness of the Estonian language teachers in Narva, however, can potentially be explained by the fact that within the transition Estonian language did not go through a lot of changes and the team remained largely the same. Another teacher who indicated to have a lot of support from her colleagues was the English language teacher from Tartu.

Perhaps more interesting from a theoretical point of view were the eight teachers that indicated to not have these key relationships. One teacher indicated that due to organisational change a lot of gossip was created in her school:

“I do not like this kind of thing, and because of that I right now spend my time mostly in my class[room]. I do not want to be involved in all this dramatic, if you [the other teachers] do not like it then go away.” (Estonian language teacher – Tartu)

Interestingly enough, this teacher came from the same school as the earlier mentioned English language teacher indicating that within schools and within subject groups the views can be completely different. The third teacher from this school, the chemistry teacher, pointed out that most of his colleagues were female and older, he referred to them as “aunties”. In his perception the “aunties” were helpful when he had problems, but he did not mention a close relationship. The other teachers expressed themselves along similar lines, colleagues were helpful and with some they had a close relationship, but in general teachers were operating on an individual basis. As pointed out by an English language teacher from Narva:

“Everybody is very busy here. So we do not communicate much with each other, only when we have lunch or something, and that is why the relationships are brilliant with each other.” (English language teacher – Narva)

In general it can be said that the majority of teachers described their relationship with their colleagues as rather distant. The teachers also indicated that team meetings with colleagues from the same subject were often mandatory, and hence in their view these meetings sometimes lacked usefulness.

Another relationship which the interviewed teachers were asked to describe was the relationship with their supervisor in the case of schools, the school director. Moody-

Maynard and Musheno theorise that supervisors do not necessarily approve of the use of discretion and this can potentially lead to conflicts. Based upon this assumption it would be correct to imagine that the relationship between teachers and the school director is tense. However, when asked about this relationship most teachers indicated to have a good or at least normal relationship with their school director. As one teacher from Tartu noted:

“The principal and the other head of school, vice principal, we have two of them, I am appreciated. Because whatever I need, they always find a way to support me. I never had a problem with that.” (Estonian language teacher – Tartu)

It should be noted that this teacher was in general rather critical towards her school, hence it is unlikely that this answer was just given because it was socially desirable. The interviewed teachers were not able to recall actual conflicts with their school director. In fact most teachers praised their supervisor for also being involved and interested in their personal lives.

“So she [the school director] asks ‘how is your daughter?’ or ‘how is your granny with whom you went to the hospital last year?’. So she knows everything, she is a person we can talk to and we know that she understands.” (English and Estonian language teacher – Narva)

Other teachers came with similar descriptions regarding the relationship with their supervisor. On the whole, teachers mentioned, “a supportive attitude”, “there to solve problems”, and “always aware of things going on in the school”.

A slightly more critical view came from an older teacher in Narva and the Biology teacher from Tartu. The experienced Estonian language and literature teacher explained her relationship as follows:

“We just discuss some points of work, but I do not have a closer contact with the school director” (Estonian language and literature teacher – Narva)

This can potentially be explained by the fact that this teacher was the oldest in the sample and had much more experience working in schools in Estonia. She did not, however, mention a bad or tense relationship with the school director and most certainly not that any conflicts had arisen because of the use of discretion. The other teacher had encountered a lot of change in her relationship with the school director:

“When she became head master, I actually went to work at the same year, and she was really supportive on the first year. And she actually has changed quite a lot and she is not the same person she used to be. She has gone more strict, and more how to say ... she is different now.” (Biology teacher – Tartu)

Again no real evidence can be found to support the theoretical assumption of a tense relationship between supervisor and SLB. Nevertheless, this teacher was the only one to mention a less positive relationship with her school director.

Finally, the teachers were asked about influences that might come from outside the school. This question led to a rather unified answer, the parents. This relationship with parents of their students resulted in both positive and negative experiences. The negative experiences were encountered with parents that did not have a positive attitude towards the increased use of Estonian language in the school. One teacher described a situation that happened several times to her and she even tried to avoid communicating with this kind of parents:

“Some [parents] even say: ‘he does not need Estonian, and so on, he will go to Russia or become a plumber, why should he struggle?’. But as a teacher I always say this is my job.” (Estonian and English language teacher – Narva)

The negative experience also happened on a school level, the Estonian language teacher from Tartu recalled a meeting with parents from her school as she described:

“They [the parents] have chance to choose either they want Russian speaking class, Estonian speaking class, or English speaking class for their children. And at the end of the meeting the principal asked what is your decision right now? And 95% of the parents choose Russian speaking class, so I was really shocked.” (Estonian language teacher – Tartu)

In general the teachers had a rather pragmatic attitude towards these parents. They defended the policy by explaining that this was the job they were hired for, but they also cautiously avoided the actual discussion.

The negative experiences did not only happen with the teachers who started using only Estonian language in their classroom. The English teacher from Tartu also remembered an interesting anecdote:

“I personally had a problem with one of the parents, who were really against me speaking English in the classroom. I said, okay I will use Estonian and it was

like: ‘why should you?’. I said, this is the reason why I am here!” (English language teacher – Tartu)

The negative attitude from these parents often derived from their own experiences while living in Estonia. As the older teacher from Narva explained, often these parents also had another view for their son’s or daughter’s future:

“Their parents see them only in the Narva vocational training centre where everything is taught in Russian. They cannot see them in the future, somewhere else than this vocational training, and not in schools anywhere in Estonia. So if their goal is Narva, they also do not see this need to study in Estonian. These are not even [real] conflicts, the students do not have any motivation and their parents as well.” (Estonian language and literature teacher – Narva)

The interviewed teachers, however, also told that the negative experiences were not as often as the positive experiences they had encountered. In general, the teachers encountered only a few negative parents in each classroom. However, these experiences made the most significant impact on the teachers as they all were able to recall at least one anecdote. Nevertheless, none of the teachers indicated that they altered their teaching significantly after these kind of experiences, they just “learned how to deal with it”.

#### **4.4 Discussion**

Deriving from the analysis are several interesting insights regarding the theory. As mentioned in the introduction, these insights only became apparent during the interviews and are not the main aim of this research. However, suggestions will be made to adjust the theory which should be supported by further research. The first interesting insight deriving from the interviews, was the diffused awareness regarding the actual possession of discretion among the interviewed teachers. Although the majority of teachers used their discretion mostly in a positive way, as became apparent in section 4.2, they did not necessarily realise the potential power of their discretion. In the case of Estonia this might be explained by a still present Soviet legacy. Galbreath and Galvin found, in the case of Latvia, three potential influences on the current

educational reform deriving from the Soviet history (2005: 455). The first influence deriving from the Soviet history is labelled 'duplicity'. This practice led to the expectation that the reform would be merely a change on paper and not be actually implemented, as was common in the Soviet era (Galbreath and Galvin, 2005: 455). If teachers believed nothing would really happen with the policy change, they were less likely to use discretion or even be aware of their discretion. The second historical inheritance deals with the remnants of the 'Soviet Ethos' (Galbreath and Galvin, 2005: 457). The Soviet bureaucracy was characterised by its inert way of operating and a mentality of following instructions. In fact, the Latvian government assumed that because of the Soviet legacy, 'administrators would implement all regulations regardless of any discourse or controversy surrounding these regulations and reforms' (Galbreath and Galvin, 2005: 457). It is unlikely to assume that awareness of discretion among teachers was high if this Soviet ethos was somehow apparent. Although most of the teachers interviewed were rather young, it can still be a potential explanation. The final influence pointed out by Galbreath and Galvin is 'professionalization', which is defined as 'a tradition of basing policies solely on scientific ideas generated by experts' (2005: 458). Policymakers often ignore other policy factors such as relevant stakeholders, costs of implementation, and support among the public and/or target group (Galbreath and Galvin, 2005: 459). Although not one-on-one comparable to Latvia, Estonia as a post-Soviet country might suffer also from this legacy to a certain extent. Therefore, teachers in Estonia could not always be aware of their discretion and their potential new role as a SLB.

Another interesting discrepancy between the theoretical assumption of the SLB framework and the empirical observations made in Russian-language schools in Estonia, was the personal relations of the teachers. The theory suggested that teachers would have strong and close relationships with their colleagues, and a distant and sometimes tense relationship with their supervisor. The practice, however, provided a rather different view. In the case of personal relations, a potential explanation might be found in a difference of context. The theory of SLB was mainly developed based upon cases studies from the United States of America. This research, however, was based upon Estonia, or perhaps European participants. The difference in context became especially clear when looked into the teacher-supervisor relationship. A report from the

European Commission on teacher autonomy in Europe concluded that ‘the responsibilities and autonomy of teachers are very extensive’ (EC, 2008: 71). This might form an explanation why the interviewed teachers did not have a tensed relationship with their school director, as they already possessed a greater amount of autonomy than teachers in the USA. Hence, when teachers within Estonia (or Europe) act as SLB this might cause less friction with the school director. Another possible explanation for the differences in relationship comes from Hargreaves, he describes teaching as a lonely profession (Hargreaves, 2001: 507). In relation to this research this might explain why teachers had not such close relationship with their colleagues, according to Hargreaves, this is due to the nature of their job.

Finally, this research found that the role of parents should not be overlooked when it comes down to teachers and their discretion. As several other authors already established, the relationship teacher and parent has an important meaning (Spillane, 1999: 168-169; Darling-Hammond, 2005: 373). In this case, all teachers were able to mention several occurrences with parents that often had a negative attitude towards the transition in general and in specific towards the teacher teaching their subject in Estonian in. Although, none of the teachers indicated to have been influenced directly or changed their teaching because of this, more research should be done to actually establish the role of the parents. This is especially important, since parents are becoming increasingly involved in the decision making process of schools. Also it is questionable whether a teacher is able to resist influences that come from a much broader group than just individual parents. Hence, it would be fruitful to research in more detail the role of the individual parent and also of groups of parents in relation to teachers and the use of discretion.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research aimed to investigate the role of individual teachers from Russian-language schools during the transition to more Estonian language in the classroom. Thereby, it particularly focussed upon the teacher's self-definition as an SLB, their use of discretion, and external influences. From the findings it became clear that the three different groups of teachers participating in this research had sometimes different experience regarding the transition. With regards to the main question it can be concluded that teachers from Russian-medium schools can be defined as SLB when looked in terms of relationship with students, passion for their work, and the use of discretion. However, some aspects made it complicated to define these teachers as SLB, for example the relationship with colleagues and the school director, and the awareness of discretion. Below this general conclusion will be discussed in more detail.

*In which aspects was the transition experienced differently by teachers positioned differently towards it?*

The change of language of instruction in the classroom had the least impact on the Estonian language teachers. English language teachers experienced a different transition, as the usage of English in the classroom increased after the transition. This was partly caused by the motto 'one teacher, one language', but also by the personal efforts of teachers who changed the teaching practices. The largest impact was witnessed among the subject teachers, especially the teachers who had experience teaching both in Russian and in Estonian language. This group described several communication problems with their students. As one teacher put it, the communication is sometimes like a "broken telephone", illustrating that students had difficulties understanding teachers and vice versa.

The personal attitudes of the participating teachers towards the transition was rather positive, in general teachers supported the increased use of Estonian language.

The most positive group were the Estonian language teachers but even this group was still critical towards the policy. The English teachers were differently involved in the transition, they were positive regarding the increased use of English language. Some teachers also had personal experiences with the increased Estonian language, as one was teaching Estonian language and one had a child in an Estonian-language secondary school. These English teachers were more positive about the transition than their two colleagues. Probably the most critical in their attitude were the subject teachers, although they did all support the transition. It was this group that worked with the new policy on a daily basis in their classroom and hence they re-evaluated their attitude based upon their experiences. Besides the attitude teachers also described the changes they experienced, on a school level most teachers witnessed tension between the older and younger generations. As the majority of the interviewed teachers came from the younger generations only their views were presented in this research. Several teachers expressed concerns regarding those students who used to get good results in certain subjects, but after the switch to Estonian language seem to drop significantly. On the other hand, several other teachers expressed that did not have such experiences, and according to them the results remained more or less similar.

*To what extent did teachers identify themselves as SLB during the transition?*

The interviewed teachers in Russian-language schools in Estonia identified themselves to a large extent as SLB. This became especially visible when the teachers described their close relationship with the students. Furthermore, the teachers often showed passion for their work and were enthusiastic regarding their teaching. In this sense it can be concluded that the participating teachers at least identified themselves as SLB. However, this identification became more complicated when the teachers were asked about their awareness regarding discretion. Although most teachers were aware of having discretionary space in which they had the opportunity to influence and shape the policy, they did not necessarily use it. Furthermore, most participants made contradictory statements regarding the discretion. At one time, arguing that teachers should be given more discretionary space because teachers knew the needs of the students and could therefore improve the education. Yet, at another time, the same interviewed teachers asked for more state interference because the boundaries were



vague and a creating a clear policy would be easier for them to perform their job. This ambiguity became also visible when looked at the actual use of discretion.

*What types of discretion were used by the teachers during the transition?*

The participating teachers in Russian-medium schools used their discretion mostly in a positive way. This might be a result from their rather positive attitude towards the transition as outlined above. Especially, the creation of extra lessons to help students with problems caused by the language transition, can be perceived as an example of 'positive active' discretion. In this case the teachers decided to use their discretion in order to help their students and also adjust the policy to the local context. On a school level, two schools implemented special programmes in order to prepare their students better for the language transition. In Tartu, one school decided to put all Estonian language classes in the first year of upper secondary education in order to give students a better level of Estonian language. In Narva, one school provided the students with one extra lesson of Estonian language every week, to improve the language skills of the students. Both schools used their discretionary space to adjust their curriculum to the needs of their students, and thereby attempted to improve the policy outcome. The last form of positive discretion revolved around class excursion, as many teachers pointed out these activities showed a lot of promise in the fields of language skills and integration. However, as many teachers also pointed out, the schools often lacked proper resources, such as time and money, to conduct these kind of activities. Finally, the only negative form of discretion was found in Narva. Here one teacher tried to implement the use of English language in a wider range of subjects. This contradicted the wider use of Estonian language as was prescribed in the policy. Although, this teacher did this with the intention of assisting her students, her actions did not align with the intentions of the policy and were potentially harmful for the policy outcome.

*Which external influences influenced the teachers' discretion?*

In the last section of the analysis, external influences, some interesting results were presented. During the interviews it became clear that teachers did not define their

relationship with their colleagues as close and intimate as the theory suggested. Only four teachers described a relationship with colleagues where ideas were exchanged and support for discretion was found. The other teachers had personal friends among their colleagues, but did not define the relationship as close and supportive. A similar observation can be made when the relationship with the school director was discussed. The theoretical assumption was that teachers would have a distant and sometimes tense relation with these supervisors. However, most of the interviewed teachers defined this relationship as a supportive and good relationship. Only one teacher hinted at the fact that this relationship might have been tense, but she did not actually say this. Also connected to the external influences was the role of parents, many teachers recalled encounters with parents that resulted into debates about the necessity of the language transition. Although in most cases the interviewed teachers defended the policy change, these encounters did leave an impression on most teachers, as all of them were able to recall at least one occurrence. The role of parents should, therefore, be further investigated when it comes to teachers and their role as SLB.

*Which potential adjustments could be made to the SLB theory in order to fit better in the Estonian and European context?*

From the interviews it became apparent that sometimes the theoretical assumptions did not align with the empirical findings. An attempt was made to look for potential explanations for this discrepancies. In the case of awareness regarding discretion among the teachers it was suggested that the Soviet past might still influence the current mindset of teachers. Hence, teachers in Estonia might not always be aware of their discretion or not always inclined to use their discretion in an active way. The dissimilarities regarding personal relationships, colleagues and teacher-supervisor relations, potentially derives from a difference in context. The interviewed teachers came from and operated within a European context whereas the SLB theory was mainly developed within the American context. Research has found that within the European context teachers already possessed more autonomy, and that the profession of teaching is a rather lonely job. This might explain why the interviewed teachers had closer and supportive relationships with their supervisors, but more distant relations with their colleagues. Finally, the role of parents should be researched further in order to establish

the influence parents might have on teachers and their discretion. As pointed out by the majority of the teachers, negative experiences with parents happened rather often. The influence of this should be researched in more detail. The above mentioned theoretical adjustments are merely suggestions as the sample is too small to draw any final conclusions on this. Further research should be done in order to investigate this more thoroughly.

### *Limitations*

Finally, some limitations to this research should be mentioned. First and foremost limitation of this study concerns the used language. As the author did not speak sufficient Estonian or Russian, all the interviews were conducted in English language. The use of English language had several important implications for this research. To start, the potential number of teachers able to participate in the research was significantly lowered by the requirement of English language. This resulted in a sample that was overrepresented by teachers from younger generations as they possessed sufficient English language skills. Furthermore, because neither the author nor the interviewed teachers were native English-speakers potential misunderstandings were likely to occur. Although, attempts were made to simplify the questions and provide clarifying statements and questions, it cannot be ruled out that the participants sometimes had a different understanding. Related to this, was the ability of the interviewed teachers to express themselves in English. Although participants had proficient English language skills, many were looking for words or expressions during the interview. Another limitation potentially hampering the outcome of this research is the sensitivity regarding the topic. Although, the participants were guaranteed anonymity, the questions asked were personal and could potentially cause trouble for the participants. Nevertheless, it should be noted that to the knowledge of the author, this did not happen and that most interviewed teachers had experienced their participation as pleasant. The final limitation to this study is the small number of teachers participating in this study. As mentioned before, this resulted in the fact that only preliminary conclusions can be drawn based upon this sample. Further research needs to be done in order to see whether the proposed theoretical adjustments can be supported with a larger sample.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

#### **Introduction**

- Myself
- Topic
- Research focus

#### **Teacher details**

- Subject
- Age
- Citizenship
- Gender
- Years of experience
- Education

#### **Introduction questions (Self definition)**

- Can you describe what made you decide to become a teacher?
  - o When did you decide this?
  - o Which factors helped you making the decision?
  - o Did you always expect to become a teacher?
  - o Do you enjoy working as a teacher?
- Can you tell me how long you hold your position at the current school?
  - o Is there a specific reason why you picked this school?
  - o If you could go back in time would you pick this school again? Why/why not?
  - o What do you particularly like about working in this school?
  - o What do you particularly dislike about working in this school?
- Can you tell me about your work and daily tasks?
  - o What entails a normal work day?
  - o Which subject/subjects do you teach?
  - o Besides teaching, do you have other tasks?
  - o Do you also work at home or mainly at the school?
- Can you tell me about the working-environment in the school and in your classroom?
  - o Do you feel appreciated and able to express yourself?
  - o How would you describe your relations with students?

- For example formal vs. informal or open vs. closed
- How would you describe your relations with co-workers?
- How would you describe your relations with supervisors?

### **Transition questions (Role and action)**

- Can you tell me about the transition towards the use of Estonian language in your school?
  - When did you first hear about with the transition?
  - What was the attitude of your school towards the transition at that time?
  - What was the role of teachers during the transition?
  - Did it change the working-environment in the school?
- Can you tell me about transition and the changes it caused for you as a teacher?
  - Did you have the language skills to teach in the Estonian language?
  - Did you feel ready to teach in the Estonian language?
  - Can you describe the difference between a normal lesson before the transition and a normal lesson after the transition?
    - Could you explain the similarities and dissimilarities?
  - In your opinion, which things have changed the most during the transition?
- Can you tell me more about your personal experience with the transition?
  - What was your personal attitude towards the transition at the time and right now?
  - How would you describe the actions you undertook during the transition?
  - In your opinion, if anything, what should have been done different during the transition?
  - Have you dealt with transitions in your field or school before?
    - What are the similarities and dissimilarities with earlier transitions?
  - What are your personal views/opinions towards the transition that took place?

### **Policy and implementation**

- Can you tell me about the changes you made in the classroom?
  - Are you aware of the policy guidelines?
  - Did you change or have to change the way you teach?
    - If yes, what kind of changes were necessary and why?
  - What kind of teaching materials did you use for your subject before the transition and which once do you use now?
    - What are the differences?
  - While changing your teaching, did you follow the policy guidelines?
- Can you tell me about the relationship between you and your students in the in your classroom right now?

- When compared to the situation before the transition, has this relationship changed?
- In your opinion did the transition improve, worsen, or maintain the level of learning of your students?
- Would you describe the interests of students and the proposed outcomes of the transition as similar or dissimilar? And why?
- When you think about the transition, could you describe me a situation in which your changed teaching conflicted with the desires and needs of the students?
- In such a situation, do you intend to follow the policy guidelines or the needs of the students? And why?

### **Network of influence**

- When you think about the transition period, could you tell me about how you made the decisions to change certain things?
  - Which factors influenced your decision to change?
  - Which factors influenced your decision not to change?
- During the transition, were there people or groups of people that helped/advised you?
  - What kind of help/advice did you get from within your school? (e.g. school head/colleagues/students)
    - How would you describe their influence on you?
  - What kind of help/advice did you get from outside your school (e.g. parents, community, teachers' union, language inspectorate)
    - How would you describe their influence on you?
  - Which of these were the most influential for you as a teacher during the transition?

### **Improvements**

- If you could change anything about the current education policy, what would you change?
  - Would you change anything about the transition?