Journal of Teacher Education and Educators
Volume 9, Number 3, 2020, 329-347

Values and Beliefs Matter: Newly Qualified Teachers' Experiences of Relational Trust

(Received on April 30, 2020 – Accepted on November 7, 2020)

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Abstract
In Nordic and Finnish teacher education, emphasis has often been placed on the teaching process and content over the teachers' ability to handle and take responsibility for relationships within the profession. This study aims to explore teachers' experiences of their relationships with pupils and parents, as well as their relational competence concerning these after one year of teaching experience. The study uses the theoretical framing of relational trust. A total of 14 Finnish primary school teachers participated in the study. Data were collected from individual interviews and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Results revealed two main areas of knowledge—enhancements and challenges—relating to how newly qualified teachers experience their relationships with pupils and parents. Based on the results, the importance of enhancing the teachers' consciousness of their values and beliefs are stressed for the creation of fruitful relationships based on trust.

Key Words: Newly qualified teachers, relational competence, relational trust

Introduction

During the last decade, numerous recurring comparative surveys have increased the interest in teacher education from an international perspective. Parallel to these, discussions on teacher education and qualification of professional teachers have taken place in different national contexts. This is also the case in Finland, where the success of Finnish pupils on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test has led to praise of the Finnish teacher education, but also to a debate in which it is explored critically (Puustinen, Säntti, Koski, & Tammi, 2018). According to the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), Finnish teachers are satisfied with their career choice, and the society highly appreciates their profession. The teachers are well educated, innovative, and change career less often than professionals in other sectors (OECD, 2019). Despite these positive results, there are some challenges and dilemmas. In Finland, the teaching profession has been very popular with a large number of applicants to the field of education. However, recently, there has been a decline in interest, and the profession no longer seems to attract young people as it did before.

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This change has been explained in terms of extensive changes made to the application process and a rather negative public image of schools (Korpela, 2019). At the same time, the need for new teachers is going to further increase due to the retirement of current teaching professionals (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018).

For a long time, there has been much international research on newly qualified teachers (NQTs) (Veenman, 1984). The experiences of NQTs are crucial for their development and future engagement as teachers as well as for determining whether or not they want to continue working as teachers (Jensen, Sandoval-Hernández, Knoll, & Gonzales, 2012). Finnish NQTs perceive that they have a stable foundation to build upon but that the emphasis in their teacher education has been placed on the teaching process and content instead of on competences, such as their ability to handle and take responsibility for relationships in the profession (Mandarakas, 2014; Skibsted & Mathisen, 2016; Sjølie, 2014). In a study by Aspfors, Eklund, & Hansén (2019), relational competence is stressed by Finnish teachers while the importance of cultivating relationships with both pupils and parents is emphasized. Teachers report that they often feel insecure in coping with parents and that, while rewarding, the relationships with their pupils are also deeply exhausting. Similarly, other international studies point out the dichotomous tensions between the functional and dysfunctional relationships in the profession (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; O'Connor, 2008).

Relational competence in an educational context is gaining a more prominent role in teacher education programmes in the Nordic countries as well as Europe in general. In a research review by Nordenbo, Søgaard Larsen, Tiftikçi, Wendt, and Østergaard (2008), relational competence is identified as one of the three core teacher competences. However, in contrast to the American context—where relational competence relates to pupils' achievements—the relationship between the teacher and pupil is the focus of the Nordic perspective. Nordic countries are characterized by strong collective societies with a high level of social and relational trust (Elstad, 2020; Holmberg & Rothstein, 2016). These highly valued levels of social trust are very important and often noted to be the Nordic gold (Andreasson, 2017). Close interactions exist between the pupils' upbringing at home and their education in schools and society (Putnam, 2015). Furthermore, in line with international surveys (OECD, 2019), the school community and teachers have an essential impact on pupils' well-being. In 2020, the importance of well-being is even more emphasized due to the new ways of living, working and studying. Thus, the teacher-pupil relationship continues to be crucial (Laursen & Nielsen, 2016), not merely for the measured learning results, but in preparing the pupils for also future challenges. Based on this, it is interesting to take a closer look at teachers' experiences of relational trust in the Finnish context. Hence, the current study aims to investigate teachers' experiences of their relationships with pupils and parents, as well as their relational competence concerning these after one year of experience in the profession. The study poses the following research questions:

1. What enhancements do teachers experience in terms of their relationships with pupils and parents?
2. What challenges do teachers experience in terms of their relationships with pupils and parents?

The study draws on the theory of relational trust and the results are discussed in light of Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, and Rönnerman's (2016) five dimensions of relational trust.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, we focus on relationships in the teaching profession before scrutinizing relational trust as part of teachers' relational competence.

Relationships and the teaching profession

Even though interactions between a teacher and a pupil affect both parties, the relationship is asymmetric because a teacher's actions are affected not only by a pupil's behaviour but also by professional demands (Skibsted & Christensen, 2016). Teachers are responsible for creating and sustaining good relationships with their pupils. Løw (2011) and Handal and Lauvås (2015) discuss the unequal relationship between the two in the context of supervision. The latter stress that teachers, despite the asymmetry, can still try to create an equal approach—a subject–subject relationship.

Bryk and Schneider (2003), on the other hand, discuss the different role relationships that are part of the school context and the accompanying obligations. The distinct role relationships that teachers have are in the context with pupils, colleagues, and parents as well as all these groups with the school management. A school community functions when all parties agree on the understanding of their roles in terms of the obligations and expectations that are connected to them. For example, a study by Atik, Demirtaş, and Aksoy (2019) highlights the importance of support and trust between the principal and teachers. This expands the concept of relational competence to include not only a teacher's relationship with pupils but all relationships that the teaching profession comprises.

Previous studies show that the quality of the teacher–pupil relationship is directly connected to the pupil's academic performance (Cadima, Leal, & Burchinal, 2010; Topor, Kean, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). Pupils who experience their teacher to be warm, accepting, and supportive have more positive attitudes towards school, are more motivated, and see themselves as academically capable (Hughes, 2011). The teacher–pupil relationship is also important for pupils who are at risk for academic problems (Burchinal, Peisne-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002). McGrath and Van Bergen (2015) identify significant student characteristics that influence the relationship negatively to be: student age and physicality, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic

status, behaviour and temperament, disabilities and learning difficulties, and academic ability. Furthermore, conflicts in the teacher–pupil relationship are related to the pupil's adjustment in school, and the relationship also has a direct impact on the pupil's relationships with his/her peers (Farmer, McAuliffe Lines, & Hamm, 2011; Košir, Sočan, & Pečjak, 2007). If pupils find that the teacher likes their peer, then they are more likely to like this peer, although the effect is found to be stronger when it comes to disliking (Hendrickx, Mainhard, Boor-Klip, & Brekelmans, 2017). Pupils who have supportive and non-conflicted relationships with teachers have higher levels of peer acceptance and lower rates of rejection (Hughes, Im, & Wehrly, 2014).

In addition, children with parents who are involved in their school careers perform better than children without committed parents (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Topor et al. (2010) define parent involvement to be how teachers perceive the parents' positive attitudes towards their children's education, teacher, and school. Epstein and Dauber (1991) find that teachers who encourage parental involvement in children's schoolwork have a higher level of involvement than schools that do not. Teachers' attitudes are also of importance because those teachers who express a positive attitude to parental involvement are more successful in involving the parents who are normally more difficult to reach—for example, young parents or parents with a low education level. A high level of parental involvement is also significantly related to increased quality of the teacher's relationship with the pupils (Topor et al., 2010). Thus, the teacher's need for creating good relationships with the parents is important because it is directly beneficial for the pupils.

Relational trust as part of relational competence

Relational competence can be described as a general ability to connect with other people. However, placing the concept in a professional context, relational competence is formed and developed for professional purposes and implies that one of the parties in the relationship has specific expectations and formal responsibilities (Aspelin, 2015). Relational competence in an educational context refers to the teacher's knowledge and skills for creating sustainable relationships with pupils, as well as the ability to show empathy, respect, and tolerance (Nordenbo et al., 2008). The concept also includes the teacher's willingness to show an interest and see the potential in their pupils. According to Skibsted and Mathisen (2016), it is difficult to pinpoint constructive ways of creating relationships in a classroom and then there is also the question whether relational competence can be taught or whether it depends on innate traits.

Internationally, terms such as "interpersonal knowledge and skills" or "social skills" have been used to describe teachers' relational knowledge. In a Scandinavian context, the term relational competence has become more prominent in the last 20 years (Klinge, 2016). In this article, instead, we focus on the concept of relational trust. Relational trust and relational competence, to some extent, are frequently used

in economic sciences to describe relationships in business contexts (Hatak & Roessl, 2011; Robbins, 2016). In an educational context, relational trust is a necessity for the creation of developmental changes in the school community (Leis, Rimm-Kaufman, Paxton, & Sandilos, 2017). Relational trust is, like relational competence, something that is built among all stakeholders in the school community, requiring the ability to meet the expectations of all parties (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Weinstein, Raczynski, & Peña, 2020).

Analyzing how teachers experience different aspects of relational trust, Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, and Rönnerman (2016) specifically focus on how teachers account for the middle leaders' development of a culture of relational trust in their practices, as well as how teachers themselves characterize relational trust and ways in which to achieve it. Here, relational trust appears to be multi-layered and multi-dimensional, consisting of five dimensions: 1) *interpersonal trust* relates to the way a leader shows empathy and respect, motivates, and supports confidence in teaching peers; 2) *interactional trust* concerns how a leader creates safe spaces for collaboration and democratic dialogues; 3) *intersubjective trust* refers to how a leader shows eyewitness and cooperation through participating in shared language, activities, and community; 4) *intellectual trust* concerns how a leader conveys self-confidence, professional knowledge, and competence concerning developmental work; and 5) *pragmatic trust* refers to the way a leader leads change that is practical, important, realistic, and achievable. These different dimensions of relational trust focus on middle leaders; however, they can also be transferred to the NQT context, enabling an understanding of the Finnish teachers' experiences of their relationships and their relational competence after one year of experience in the profession. In the following section, we provide a brief description of Finnish primary teacher education and its characteristics.

Finnish teacher education—A case description

Teacher education for primary school teachers (i.e. teachers of 6–12-year-old children) in Finland is well-known for its research-based approach. It aims to educate teachers who develop critical thinking and are able to reflect on their profession. Teacher educators are research qualified, and their teaching is based on research (Afdal, 2012; Kansanen, 2014). Student teachers become familiar with research methodology and carry out research for their own bachelor and master's theses. Education is the main subject, which—in relation to the European context—is quite unique (Jakku-Sihvonen, Tissar, Ots, & Uusiautti, 2012). Student teachers obtain knowledge of and insights into different educational sciences—for example, general didactics, educational psychology, and educational sociology. Topics related to teachers' relational competence are, to varying degrees, brought up during these courses. Students write both their bachelor and master's theses in education. Furthermore, they acquire basic competence in all subjects taught in primary schools with the opportunity to spe-

cialize in one or two subjects. Practice periods and different practice-oriented activities are mainly organized within a university practice school and, to a certain degree, in regular field schools. In the university practice school, supervision is characterized by a close collaboration among teachers, lecturers in the faculty of education, and student teachers. This system allows for a stable collaboration between theory and practice, endorsing student teachers' development as professional teachers (Hansén & Eklund, 2014).

Methodology

Informants, data collection, and data analysis

The present study is part of a larger comparative, longitudinal project that aims at exploring NQTs' experiences of research-based teacher education in relation to the school reality they encounter. Data were collected from a teacher education department at a university in Finland. Approximately 50 teachers who graduated in 2015–2016 were invited to participate in the study directly after they finished their master's degrees and before most began working as teachers. They were all educated as primary school teachers. All data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018) and 18 informants (16 females and two males) participated in the first interview. The second interview, which is the data source for this article, was carried out after the graduates had been working as teachers for about one year. A total of 16 informants (from the initial 18) agreed to also participate in the second part of the study and, of these, 14 (12 females and two males) interviewees were appropriate for the aim of this article because they were all working as primary school teachers.

The interviews covered five themes, of which three had a relational focus: *NQTs' perceptions of their relationships with 1) their pupils, 2) their pupils' parents and 3) school management and headmaster. The other two themes covered questions about: NQTs' perceptions of 4) their teacher competence and 5) professional identity and development.* In this study, we focus on NQTs' relationships with pupils and their parents because the teachers themselves emphasized these the most. The informants were interviewed online through video calls or face-to-face at the university. The interviews took place in the spring and autumn of 2017 and were conducted by two research assistants and a research manager. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each and all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The study followed the general ethical standards approved by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2012).

Interview data were analyzed inductively using qualitative content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the researcher (first author) read all transcripts in full and highlighted the parts that concerned NQTs' relationships with pupils and parents as well as their competence concerning these. Open coding was carried out, and different themes

were divided into two main groups—one describing what the NQTs feel enhances the relationships and one describing what they experience to be challenging. Second, the researcher focused on one group at a time to identify different aspects, which were then compared for similarities and differences and categorized into specific categories. Four categories were identified in each group. At the end of the coding, two category systems or main areas of knowledge were finally developed. All three researchers discussed the category systems to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. The categories are exemplified with quotes from the interviews, which were translated from Swedish to English by the researchers. The informants are identified with codes in this paper (numbers 1–14, with the capital letter R = Respondent). The codes are used to maintain confidentiality and when describing the results.

Findings

NQTs' experiences of their relationships with pupils and parents

The results reveal two category systems—*enhancements* and *challenges*—in relation to how NQTs experience their relationships with pupils and parents. These two categories include descriptions of the teachers' relationships with both pupils and parents as well as the number of teachers mentioning these.

Enhancements

Four different categories of enhancements are identified in connection to NQTs' experiences of their relationships with pupils and parents: 1) *other parties' engagement,* 2) *own personal values,* 3) *support from management and colleagues*, and 4) *supportive contextual factors.*

The vast majority of the NQTs (10/14) mention that *other parties'* engagement plays a substantial role in creating and maintaining good relationships with pupils. Several teachers find the relationship with pupils to be a motivation for them to work as teachers. Teachers value the pupils' own quests to maintain a good relationship with them and appreciate the things they can learn themselves from the relationships with their pupils. Pupils' progress and own engagement in the learning progress also appears to be an important motivational aspect for a couple of teachers: "If a pupil makes progress and you've struggled for so long...then it's like, yes, this is what I'm supposed to be doing" (R-4). One teacher further mentions that pupils' excitement about schoolwork and a show of trust make her feel secure and more competent.

In comparison to the relationship with pupils, teachers (5/14) less frequently mention parental engagement as a relational enhancement. However, some nevertheless stress that well-functioning cooperation with parents is also important for forming good relationships. According to several teachers, parents show a great involvement in schoolwork and activities. One teacher also highlights cooperation regarding specific

pupils: "My pupils' parents are nice....The parents are aware of the child's difficulties and are easy to work with" (R-12). Two teachers also note that the feeling of trust is an important aspect—parental show of belief and support in a teacher's work can enhance the relationship between the parties. However, in their relationships with the parents, some teachers stress that they feel somewhat insecure regardless of parental involvement, and wish that they had learned more about how to interact with parents during their studies.

In the second category, *own personal values*, teachers (9/14) describe how their own beliefs and values contribute to building good relationships with pupils, which can also be described as their attitude towards their professional development. Teachers state that they actively think about what kind of teacher they want to be and what kind of message they want to send out. One of the teachers notes: "Creating good relationships with the pupils has been really important for me from the beginning.… We have a mutual respect for one another and a good relationship in general" (R-12). Teachers mention that it is important to work with the core values of their school in mind and to show respect. They also emphasize the importance of seeing the pupils' differences, showing interest in their hobbies and personal life, and most importantly, of finding something good in every child. Some of the NQTs further describe themselves as being good with children, having patience and a sense of humour when interacting with pupils.

When it comes to personal values enhancing the relationships with the parents, only a couple (2/14) of teachers mention this. They both try to have a humble attitude in their interaction with the parents and in the way they bring up matters to discuss. One teacher also expresses that it is important to show that you mean well: "We have the same interest, the pupils.…I want to show that we are on the same team" (R-7). In the contact with the parents, the teachers feel that they understand and are confident in themselves, which makes them more secure in their profession. They do not see all problems in the relationships as lack of competence but as something that needs time to develop.

Several teachers (6/14) note that *support from management and colleagues* is important for maintaining good relationships with pupils. While different ways of supporting teachers might not be directly affecting their relationships with pupils, they do have a broader impact. Three teachers say that the management and the headmaster, in particular, trust them to try new methods that they believe are beneficial for pupils without pressuring them to succeed immediately: "I feel free to try methods and ways of working. They are on my side; you are allowed to try but also to fail" (R-9). Three NQTs describe that they appreciate the sharing of ideas and materials with the more experienced teachers at the school and say that this helps them improve their teaching. Another NQT feels grateful for the support in disciplinary issues with pupils.

Support from management and colleagues is also essential for several (5/14)

teachers in their interaction with parents. Similar to the relationship with the pupils, this could also be seen as a factor enhancing teacher–parent relationships more indirectly. A few teachers mention that they felt insecure in the beginning, not knowing how to communicate with the parents, and that help from colleagues has been valuable. They have, for instance, received advice on what topics to discuss in parental meetings or how to answer upsetting e-mails. The support is also crucial in cases of opinions that diverge from those of the parents: "I never work alone, I've gotten support from the others. If you had to do that job alone, I don't know if you would be as strong" (R-11). Teachers emphasize that support from management and colleagues is essential in enhancing their professional competence. One teacher adds that, with the help from the team, it is easier to see where one's job starts and ends and to realize that some cases are not a single teacher's responsibility.

The fourth category is *supportive contextual factors.* Several teachers (3/14) mention that these factors are enhancements for the relationships with pupils, and one teacher sees them as an enhancement for the relationships with parents. Another notes that the relationships with pupils are affected by whether they like a certain subject that is taught and by how motivated and open-minded they are for learning a specific subject. The teacher adds that this can be problematic for teachers who teach less popular subjects, such as Religion (according to this teacher). One other supportive contextual factor is school size. One teacher highlights the effect that size has on the teacher–pupil relationship: "I think it works well because it's a small school and you know the pupils, it's a different atmosphere" (R-3). Another feels that a smaller-sized school improves cooperation with parents.

Challenges

Four different categories of challenges are identified in connection to NQTs' experience of their relationships with pupils and parents: 1) *expectations*, 2) *disciplinary problems*, 3) *differentiation*, and 4) *aggravating contextual factors.*

Some NQTs (4/14) express that pupils' expectations can be a challenge for creating good relationships. Three NQTs mention that pupils were quite sceptical towards them in the beginning because of their young age and because they were newly qualified. One teacher finds that it is difficult to live up to the expectations of pupils if they had a good relationship with their previous teacher: "It is really hard to come to a class which has loved the previous teacher.…my pupils were quite direct and said 'but this is not the way our previous teacher did it'" (R-1). Two teachers feel that there is pressure from the teacher role in their free time as well. They often have to think about acting like role models outside school because they feel it is expected of them since they live in the same city or neighbourhood as their pupils.

Parents' challenging expectations are something that half of the NQTs (7/14) experienced. The pressure of acting like role models outside school is one challenge

they mention, similar to the challenge a few of the teachers feel concerning pupils. Scepticism from the parents regarding the NQTs' young age or lack of experience is something three teachers bring up, which can compare to the feelings related to pupils' expectations. One teacher expresses that parents, in some cases, believe that a teacher can decide and affect everything in the classroom—for example, parents wanting the teacher to decide which children play together. Parents sometimes also compare a teacher with other teachers and work methods, expecting that teacher to work in the same way: "Nine hours of work a day is not enough, I would have to work twelve if I carried out all of their wishes" (R-1). A couple of teachers mention that not knowing parental expectations can also be a challenge. They highlight that receiving some kind of feedback from parents is crucial.

The vast majority of teachers (9/14) experienced *disciplinary problems* with the pupils. One teacher feels that the teaching part of the job is going well but that the disciplinary aspects are both challenging and time-consuming: "In a day, if you have been able to concentrate on teaching all five–six hours, then it's been a good day. It's challenging, it takes a lot of energy to handle incidents and solve problems" (R-2). A couple NQTs discuss the challenge with boundaries and how strict one should be in the classroom. One teacher says that it is, overall, hard to know what kind of disciplinary actions to take in certain situations. On the other hand, four teachers mention that it is especially difficult to know how to solve conflicts between pupils. Two teachers point out that just one or two pupils with disruptive behaviour may have an impact on the entire class.

Some teachers (4/14) note that disciplinary problems they have with pupils in school lead to strained relationships with parents in some cases. Two teachers mention that this is particularly challenging when the teacher and the parents have different views about the child's behaviour. One also highlights that parents do not always know how their child acts in school: "It's challenging if a pupil acts like one person at home and another at school. When you meet those parents, they can have difficulties believing that their child acts this way when they've never seen it themselves" (R-14). Two teachers also say that facing parents with matters concerning pupils' bad behaviour sometimes feels uncomfortable and that it can be difficult to stay calm and diplomatic in situations where parents show anger. Several teachers consider themselves to have enough competence for handling discipline issues as part of their job. They point out that competence increases with experience and as they get to know pupils better. However, a couple of teachers feel that they needed more education about disciplinary aspects during their studies, such as bullying and anger management.

Half of the NQTs (7/14) consider *differentiation* to be a challenging part in their work with pupils. One teacher says that it is hard to find every pupil's strengths and difficulties. Two teachers also struggle to find content and work methods that motivate all pupils and are suitable for the entire class. Teachers also find differentiating for the

more gifted children to be most challenging because they primarily learnt how to support children with learning disabilities during teacher education. Two teachers point out that, as NQTs, it is even more difficult to differentiate: "It's hard when you don't have any experience, you have no material as a new teacher" (R-3).

All teachers (3/14) who bring differentiation up as a challenge in the relationship with parents have experienced the same type of problem—the parents do not agree with their views on the pupils' special needs. In these cases, teachers describe that parents cannot come to terms with the fact that their children are struggling. They state that these conflicts between the homes and the school have a negative effect on the pupils' schoolwork. One teacher expresses: "With some families we had to fight for what the child needed and that obstructed the child's progress. Some families didn't have the same opinions as we had" (R-11).

In the last category of challenges, *aggravating contextual factors*, the statements of teachers (7/14) can be divided into two sub-categories: 1) lack of time and money and 2) immigration. According to five NQTs, schools have limited money resources, leading to decreased personnel. There is a high number of pupils per class and there are not enough assistants. Regarding immigration, two teachers mention communication difficulties when pupils do not yet know the classroom language sufficiently. One teacher also mentions that the asylum process affects schoolwork: "The families lived with great anxiety and, of course, that affected the children. They didn't know if they would be allowed to stay" (R-10).

Only one teacher brings up aggravating contextual factors in the relationship with parents. This teacher discusses immigration and how it can make the relationship with parents difficult, similar to the relationship with immigrant pupils. The teacher mentions communication problems that lead to not knowing whether or not important information is fully understood. The teacher also experienced challenging situations between immigrant families from different countries: "There were different kinds of tensions one wasn't prepared for, for example, between ethnic groups and how one should respond to that. If it only regarded the pupils it would be easier, but you notice that there are whole families thinking alike" (R-10).

Discussion

The quality of the teacher–pupil relationship is related to pupils' academic performances and to their well-being (Burchinal et al., 2002; Cadima, Leal, & Burchinal, 2010; Hughes, 2011). Furthermore, teachers' relationships with parents are beneficial for pupils because high parental involvement is related to increased quality of the teacher's relationship with pupils (Topor et al., 2010). Consequently, relational competence is essential for the teaching profession and represents one of the core competences for teachers (Nordenbo et al., 2008). Therefore, this article aimed to investigate teachers' experiences of their relationships with pupils and parents as well as their

relational competence concerning these after one year of experience in the profession. Based on the research questions, results reveal two main areas of knowledge—enhancements and challenges. In this section, we discuss the crucial findings in relation to previous research and to the five above-mentioned dimensions of relational trust by Edwards-Groves et al. (2016): interpersonal trust, interactional trust, intersubjective trust, intellectual trust, and pragmatic trust.

In *interpersonal trust,* features such as empathy, respect, and support of confidence are emphasized (Edwards-Groves et al., 2016). In our study, teachers' own beliefs and values were found to enhance good relationships with pupils. Teachers pointed out the importance of showing respect to and of supporting pupils according to their differences and in the way that engendered their confidence. In terms of the teachers' relationships with parents, the dimension of interpersonal trust is, however, not as apparent. A couple of teachers mention that they show respect by being humble and empathetic in sharing the interest in a child. In comparison to the other dimensions, interpersonal trust was the least occurring one in our results. For example, it only appeared as part of the enhancements and teachers did not mention their own values being a challenge in creating good relationships with pupils and parents. It seems that teachers are not as conscious of the importance of their own personal values, particularly their somewhat negative attitudes, in creating and maintaining good relationships. According to previous research (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015), student characteristics, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, behaviour, and temperament, as well as academic ability, influence the relationship in a negative way.

Interactional trust involves the teachers' creation of collaborative and democratic dialogues (Edwards-Groves et al., 2016). In this study, the vast majority of teachers indicate that other parties' engagement is a significant aspect for creating good relationships with pupils. For others to be engaged, it is crucial for teachers to create a space in which all parties can engage and feel included. Collaborative and democratic dialogues are formed in spaces with well-functioning relationships. It is, therefore, important for teachers to maintain supportive teacher–pupil relationships, as studies show that these relationships also benefit the relationships between pupils themselves (Farmer, McAuliffe Lines, & Hamm, 2011; Hughes, Im, & Wehrly, 2014; Košir, Sočan, & Pečjak, 2007). In teachers' work, interactional trust is more prominent in cooperation with pupils than with parents because there is a natural dialogue between teachers and pupils that occurs on a daily basis in the classroom. Our results also show that interactional trust is affected by supportive contextual factors. Pupils' motivation for learning different subjects has an impact on the teachers' ability to create fruitful discussions. Another factor mentioned by the teachers is the size of the school, which affects the possibility that teachers have to interact with parents. Different expectations affect the teachers' ability to create trustful relationships with both pupils and parents—for example, the young age of teachers and the fact that they are newly quali-

fied. Furthermore, occurrences of disciplinary problems in the classroom inflect and, sometimes, aggravate interactional trust with both pupils and parents. Dialogue is also influenced by aggravating contextual factors, such as lack of additional resources and immigration. Besides these expectations, professional demands and teachers' responsibility for creating and sustaining good relationships within the profession also affect interactional trust and teachers' creation of collaborative and democratic dialogues (Aspelin, 2015; Skibsted & Christensen, 2016).

According to Edwards-Groves et al. (2016), intersubjective trust relates to the necessity of creating a platform for joint communication and activities in the school community. In our study, several teachers note that support from management and colleagues is important for maintaining good relationships with pupils and parents. They highlight having support in trying different methods and in sharing materials and ideas with more experienced colleagues. Regarding the teacher–parent relationship, it is obvious that the platform is particularly important for NQTs in learning how to create and handle the communication with the parents. Intersubjective trust also extends outside school because many teachers mention experiencing pressure to act as role models when meeting pupils and parents during their spare time. Consequently, there might be different views concerning the extent of the platform. Similarly, Bryk and Schneider (2003) emphasize that the school community benefits from all parties agreeing on the obligations and expectations of their roles. Hence, the relationships in the school community are formed by creating a platform that provides consensus about how responsibility is divided and what is expected from each party. To create developmental changes in the school community, relational trust is seen as a requirement (Leis et al., 2017), similar to the description of intersubjective trust, which regards the need for creating a common ground for communication and activities in the school community.

Intellectual trust relates to how teachers show self-confidence and professional knowledge in their profession (Edwards-Groves et al., 2016). Some interviewed teachers point out challenges connected to the expectations of both pupils and parents. They think it is difficult to meet these expectations while being relatively young and newly qualified. Furthermore, the vast majority of the NQTs point out that disciplinary issues and differentiation pose a challenge. Consequently, teachers lack trust in their own competence and feel an uncertainty about the parents' confidence in their teaching skills, which especially manifests in discussions with parents about pupils' special needs and arrangements related to these. This corresponds with previous findings that show that student teachers do not feel adequately prepared for the relational challenges they later face in the profession (Mandarakas, 2014; Skibsted & Matthiesen, 2016), as well as with teachers stressing the importance of relational competence and the feeling of insecurity in coping with parents (Aspfors, Eklund, & Hansén, 2019).

Pragmatic trust describes teachers' ways of leading in a practical and achievable way (Edwards-Groves et al., 2016). Previous studies show that NQTs find the

profession more complex and demanding than they expected (Aspfors, Eklund & Hansén, 2019). In our study, teachers spoke of creating strategies for this by seeking support from management and colleagues to create beneficial arrangements and use relevant methods. Teachers also emphasized that practical solutions for their work with pupils and parents were easier to achieve in smaller schools and in classrooms with fewer pupils. Practicalities could be even more difficult to handle when cooperating with pupils and parents with an immigrant background due to difficulties in understanding the school language. Furthermore, since children with parents who are involved in their schoolwork perform better than children with uninvolved parents (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Topor et al., 2010), it is important to offer opportunities for parents to engage. Hence, this should be taken into account, especially in interaction with immigrant families.

Strengths and weaknesses

Because the sample was small and selected from one teacher education department, the conclusions drawn may be limited. Based on NQTs' interest for the study, 14 informants were interviewed. Although these NQTs represented different schools, it is difficult to know whether they are representative of the entire NQT group. However, the fact that they were all primary school teachers who expressed their experiences after one year of experience in the profession suggests that their views could be seen as highly relevant for the aim of the study. The interview guide was comprehensive and covered five themes, three of which are used in this study. The interviews were carried out by two research assistants and a research manager, without any real power relations existing during the interviews because all NQTs worked outside the teacher education department. The interviews were conducted online through video calls or face-to-face at the university. NQTs were encouraged to be honest about their views of their relationships with pupils and parents and their relational competence. Despite some limitations, the study meets the validity criteria because it did not aim to offer generalizable answers, but provide deeper insights into NQTs' experiences of their relationships and their relational competence (Stake & Trumbull, 1982). Consequently, research results could function as a mindset or tool for the future development of teacher education, especially in terms of the issue concerning teachers' relational competence and trust.

Implications and further research

The results showed that teachers find support from management and colleagues to be crucial for maintaining good relationships with pupils and parents. In order to support the teachers' relationships in the school community, it would be important to investigate how management experiences the different aspects of relational trust and in what manner it enhances the culture of relational trust in the school. In order to

attract young people to the teaching profession and decrease the dropout rate among teachers, especially NQTs, in the future, enabling teachers to create good relationships with pupils and parents is essential. This could be achieved by developing a culture of relational trust in the school community. The question is, however, how to create and maintain such a culture and how to establish responsibility for doing so. Within teacher education, an alternative could be to shift focus from the teaching processes and content to the teachers' ability to handle relationships within the profession, for example by implementing relational-focused assignments during student teachers' practicum. NQTs would then, to a greater extent, be aware of the importance of contributing to the development of the culture of relational trust in the school community.

Conclusions

The relationships between teachers and other parties in the school community can enhance the work of the NQTs but can also be challenging. Our findings show that teachers' interpersonal trust, as well as their values and beliefs, are of great importance when creating these relationships, especially concerning attitudes that can affect them negatively. It seems to be easier to overcome the obstacles faced in the profession with a higher level of trust between parties. For trustful relationships to be established, teachers need to create platforms to enable other parties to engage. Therefore, we stress the importance of enhancing the teachers' consciousness of their personal values and beliefs to create fruitful relationships based on trust.

Disclosure Statement

JH analyzed the data and drafted the manuscript with contributions from and supervision by the other authors. All three authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Acknowledgement

This study was supported by grants from Högskolestiftelsen and the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland.

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