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Early career teachers' role in school development and professional learning

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ABSTRACT

School improvement efforts rely on teachers' capacity for professional development and learning. We investigate the kind of roles taken by early career teachers (ECTs) with a master's degree from a research-based teacher education programme in relation to professional learning and school development in Norwegian schools after five years in the profession. The conceptual framework includes research of professional learning and trust. Semi-structured interviews of 26 ECTs were analysed using reflective thematic analysis. The findings illustrate four different roles that ECTs take: creators, translators, drivers and passengers. All the ECTs become creators, as they were enquiry-oriented and collaborated with colleagues to promote bottom-up professional learning, in order to improve teaching. Translators capture the ECTs' ability to translate a new curriculum into deep-learning and student-active teaching. Drivers obtain formal positions and promote professional learning in schools. Passengers take a passive role, and they are critical of the school system that introduces and performs a high number of top-down school-development projects. We discuss how ECTs want to develop relational trust, while the system may strengthen relational and structural trust.

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Introduction

School systems are influenced by governing control in the form of neo-liberal reforms that contribute to improving top-down quality assurance and accountability, and to promoting evidence-based teaching (Ball 2016). Peck and Theodore (2015) describe how such new educational policy ideas travel fast around the globe and into schools as they are packed in as decontextualised ready-made solutions, a phenomenon conceptualised as 'fast policy'. On this basis, school development and effectiveness continue to be addressed at all levels (Hargreaves 2019). Great expectations and responsibility in this matter are often placed on the teachers themselves (Buchanan 2015) for translating new ideas into practice (Røvik 2016). As such, educational reforms and school improvement efforts need adaption and contextualisation to function (Røvik 2016), that rely on teachers' professional development and learning (Adolfsson and Håkansson 2019). A risk of fast policy is, however, that it may result in schools and teachers jumping frequently between many top-down school development projects; a phenomenon known as kangaroo schools (Tiller 1990). Here, Tiller (1990) criticised fast top-down school development and argued for professional learning and long-term trust-based assessment in schools, led and driven by the teachers themselves.

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Fast forward thirty years and Tiller's ideas have been influential in a piloted five-year research- and master's-based teacher education programme for primary and lower-secondary school at UiT – The Arctic University of Norway between 2010 and 2016. The purpose of this pilot was to give early career teachers (ECTs) the knowledge to play an active role in their own and the schools' professional learning (Jakhelln *et al.* 2019). This is in line with international research, where there has been extensive focus on five-year research-based teacher education programmes with a master's thesis (Darling-Hammond *et al.* 2017). Such teacher education programmes feature ECTs learning about versatile teaching and learning research, and research methods, and conducting research themselves as part of their bachelor and master's theses (Toom *et al.* 2010). These ECTs should also have knowledge of active teaching methods and pedagogics that support students' learning (Cao *et al.* 2023). According to Toom *et al.* (2010, p. 339), the ambition of such five-year research-based teacher education programmes is to develop ECTs with an enquiry-oriented attitude and with the capacity to observe, analyse and develop their teaching.

From this background, we want to investigate how ECTs trained in research and development, as well as collaboration (Jakhelln *et al.* 2019), experience their professional learning in relation to school development projects in Norwegian primary and lower-secondary schools after five years in the profession. Our research question is: *What kind of roles are taken by ECTs with a master's degree in relation to their schools' work with school development and professional learning after five years in the profession?*

Next, we describe our conceptual framework of professional learning. To better understand the roles ECTs take in school development and professional learning, we will utilise the concept of trust.

Conceptual framework

Teachers' professional learning

The field of research on teachers' professional development is extensive, as is the flora of concepts, leading to conceptual ambiguity. A shift in the development of research from in-service training of individual teachers towards continuing professional development, with an emphasis on collaborative forms of learning in schools (Hargreaves 2019), can still be identified. The concept of professional learning is increasingly replacing the concept of professional development, which is often consistent with school development or educational reform, and according to Webster-Wright (2009), signals that teachers would need training or development through knowledge transfer, via courses. Instead, our study draws on Olin *et al.* (2020)'s understanding of professional learning as a dynamic, continuous and often collaborative process, which takes place at a specific educational site, where the teachers themselves become active agents in their own and their school's development processes. We also adhere to Aharonian (2021) that learning is a constant and organic aspect of the professional practice of all teachers navigating their professional lives and constructing their professional identities.

Teacher collaboration is emphasised particularly in research as essential for teachers' professional learning (Darling-Hammond *et al.* 2017). Postholm's research overview (Postholm 2012) shows that teachers' collaboration and cooperation with external resource persons have a particular effect and that learning in school is the best arena for continued development. Here, Hargreaves (2019) argues that teachers need to set the agenda for curriculum development themselves and distinguishes between contrived collegiality and collaborative professionalism. Contrived collegiality involves administratively organised meetings with a formal and predetermined agenda related to implementing, for example, curricula or other instructional strategies. By comparison, collaborative professionalism, where professionals work together in the best interest of students' learning, implies that teachers engage reflectively in their practices and take action and responsibility in both formal and informal meetings (Hargreaves 2019). However, time is crucial and needs to be allocated for teachers to

engage in individual and collaborative professional learning activities (Villegas-Reimers 2003). At the same time, professionalism implies freedom for teachers to decide about time in a needs-based manner (Kyndt *et al.* 2016). As we understand Hargreaves (2019)'s description of collaborative professionalism as a wide approach, this may include both professional development and professional learning.

Trust

In addition, ECTs also need trust in different forms in order to contribute to professional learning and social change in schools. Here, we understand trust from a processual perspective, as it always evolves through a process (Möllering 2013). Previous research examining trust in schools claims that school-based improvement requires the development of trusting relationships among all stakeholders in the school community (Bryk and Schneider 2003, Weinstein *et al.* 2020). Here, Ellingsen (2015) contributes specifically to widening our understanding and differentiating between pre-contractual, relational and structural trust. These three trust bases, which can also be understood as analytical categories of social life, lay the foundation for developing mutual understanding, and influence our expectations for others to act predictably.

Pre-contractual trust encompasses assumptions built upon common knowledge, norms, roles and expected patterns of action (Ellingsen 2015). Pre-contractual trust describes our shared expectations about how we act and how we expect others to act. Pre-contractual trust is experience-based and describes how social interaction is based on and developed by sharing knowledge and basic social rules, such as in professional learning communities in schools. Teachers who lack pre-contractual trust can be regarded as unpredictable and difficult to collaborate with. Pre-contractual trust includes both relational and structural trust.

Relational trust is constructed and reconstructed through communication and interaction via face-to-face relationships and familiarity (Ellingsen 2015). Relational trust is connected to mutual respect and is the adhesive that binds a professional learning community together (Kemmis *et al.* 2014). It is thus of utmost importance for promoting teachers' professional learning. Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer (2021) have explored the concept of relational trust from the perspective of middle leaders in schools. They found a doubleness in relational trust as it forms conditions for middle-leaders to build communicative spaces for developing trust, while also reciprocally generating conditions for realising the goals of school-based professional learning. Although Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer (2021) focus on middle leaders, this concept of relational trust can also be transferred, enabling an understanding of the ECTs' experiences of professional learning in relation to school development.

Structural trust is found beyond the individual and is grounded in formal social structures such as laws, rules, contracts, and educational and qualification requirements (Ellingsen 2015). Structures create predictability by specifying rights and duties and indicate what must or must not be done in certain situations (Luhmann 1990). This means that structural trust contributes to generalisable trust between strangers, and over time and distance. Formal structure describes expectations of teaching in schools, for example, and contributes to users trusting the education system (Bachmann and Inkpen 2011). Structural trust can be found at the international level, for example the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), at the national level in the form of education authorities, or at the organisational level in the form of a school.

In summary, the three trust bases are interwoven and will naturally influence ECTs' professional learning in relation to site-based school development. Structural trust bases can change over time as relational trust practices are incorporated into new formal structures (Ellingsen 2015). Structural trust in a school or nationally can be supplemented by informal relational trust practices, which gradually become part of the structural trust and are then included in the pre-contractual basis of trust.

Methods

The Norwegian context

In Norway, the government is responsible for school development, with most schools being publicly managed. School management and development is the responsibility of local municipalities in respect of primary and lower-secondary schools (Opplæringslova 1998). Norwegian schools have traditionally adopted an individualistic perspective on teaching, where teachers have considerable autonomy to individually decide on degrees of participation in learning and development activities in schools (Blossing and Ertesvåg 2011). Blossing and Ertesvåg (2011) also highlight that this individualistic perspective has limited the opportunities for learning and development work, with Norwegian schools needing more systematic leadership and more planned activities for the teachers in relation to professional learning. Similarly, Czerniawski (2013) has found that Norwegian teachers are critical of external school development projects. Recent results from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (OECD 2020) investigation reveal that while Norwegian secondary-school teachers are now more receptive to collaboration in their schools, other research reveals that one out of five Norwegian school principals require more knowledge about professional development (Carlsten *et al.* 2021).

A national programme, Decentralised Competence Development, was launched in 2017 to enhance school development through collaboration between teacher education institutions and municipalities and their schools, to include various practice-oriented research approaches to promote professional development (Ulvik *et al.* 2021). In 2020, a curriculum reform introduced new curricula with new competence goals to promote deep-learning and creativity for the students, while also intending to improve the connectedness between subjects and professional learning for teachers (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2017).

The study context

The first pilot of the five-year master's teacher education programme for primary and lower-secondary schools focused on research, academic skills and in-depth knowledge (Jakhelln *et al.* 2019). This pilot programme evolved with minor changes over the first three years, contributing to the main principles for the national teacher education programme reform implemented in 2017. The pilot was differentiated into two programmes adapted to the Norwegian educational system: 1st-7th grades and 5th-10th grades. The new teacher education programme puts more emphasis on subject-specific skills and knowledge, with ECTs now having a specialised knowledge base in two to four school-related subjects, for which they take 30 to 60 ECTs in each. As such, they are not educated for development work in all subjects, although students also take at least 60 ECTs in education studies, which include knowledge of collaboration for professional and school development. Additionally, using action-learning during students' bachelor theses has contributed to student teachers' learning and gaining a critical enquiry-oriented attitude towards their own teaching, and national and local curriculums, and for some students against their assigned practice teachers in their schools (Antonsen *et al.* 2022). A master's thesis in education studies was written by 1st-7th grades and in subject didactics by 5th-10th grades students.

In summary, both the teacher education programme and the curriculum renewal are examples of fast policy in practice, with the ambition of giving competent teachers greater autonomy and relational trust to perceive their teaching and professional learning for their pupils. However, the new national programmes may strengthen structural trust.

Data selection and participants

The present study is part of a longitudinal project that has interviewed ECTs from three cohorts after they finished their education and then followed them up after one, two, three and five years in

the profession. The data used in this article comprises interviews with 26 ECTs after five years in the profession, of whom 11 graduated in 2015, 6 in 2016 and 9 in 2017. The informants were selected because their qualifications were relevant to the research question (Silverman 2013). The informants initially volunteered to participate after a written invitation and a detailed description of the study was sent to all 115 student teachers at the university. The sample was self-selected, and the informants gave their written consent to participate. The gender distribution matched the differences amongst students in the programme. After five years in practice most of the ECTs were aged around 30 and worked in schools throughout Norway.

An open-ended, semi-structured interview guide (Kvale 2008) was developed with a wide approach, to capture how the ECTs experienced their education and work as teachers after five years in the profession. The questions were not influenced by theory. In the guide, the ECTs' experience of research and development (R&D) in their schools was captured in the following themes: 1) understanding of the concept of R&D, 2) the R&D activities at schools 3) their role in the R&D projects, and 4) the relevance of these R&D projects.

Informants had opportunities to talk freely about problems and solutions in the around 60-minute interviews that were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Follow-up questions were asked to clarify ambiguities. The number of informants allowed us to capture variations in the school context. The study followed the ethical standards approved by The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH) (2019) and was approved by SIKT Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (project number 795217).

Thematic analysis

To analyse our data, we used Braun and Clarke's (2021) approach to reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), whereby the analysis is influenced by the researchers' reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation. RTA is theoretically flexible (Braun and Clarke 2021), and as such matches our research question about the ECTs' experiences, views and perceptions. Braun and Clarke (2006) described a six-phase process for analysis which we have used in our analysis process. Although the phases are sequential, with each phase based on the previous phase, the analysis was a recursive process, with movement back and forth amongst the phases. We do not interpret the phase approach as a rule that must be followed precisely, but rather as a tool that guides the analysis process as described by Braun and Clarke (2021).

Phase 1: data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes

First, the first author read the entire transcripts in NVivo and, in the process, selected all text sequences that were relevant to the purpose of the study and the research question. The process did not involve coding. The first author became familiar with the text and took notes during the reading. As a quality check, the third author read through a selection of texts and the authors discussed the content of the dataset analytically, to start to grasp what the data meant, according to Braun and Clarke (2006).

Phase 2: generating initial codes

The first and third author started generating data-driven (inductive) codes in NVivo about how the ECTs experienced R&D at their school. The selected text sequences were coded and resulted in 20 codes in total that captured the data content. The codes were both descriptive and interpretative.

Phase 3: generating initial themes from coded and collated data

In generating initial themes, according to (Braun and Clarke 2021) we were seeking to capture themes that embraced several codes and could contribute to telling a story. Recoding took place to remove duplicate codes and themes and to filter down and improve the codes. Here, the first and third author examined the codes and sorted data to identify significantly broader opinion patterns.

Phase 4: developing and reviewing themes

The goal of this process was to fit all the data into a theme and to improve the themes. First, we named a theme as develop-oriented ECTs, as all the ECTs wanted to improve themselves and their colleagues in informal collaboration. Next, a theme called curriculum renewal was developed, because all the ECTs were positive about this new reform and the learning process it promoted. Then two additional themes capturing differences between the ECTs' roles were developed: the drivers for school development and those for being passive participants.

Phase 5: refining, defining and naming themes

In this phase, the first author identified each theme, to assess whether the themes contained sub-themes. The codes and themes were re-read, and this process ended up as four themes describing the ECTs' roles as: a) Creators, b) Translators c) Drivers and d) Passengers. Here, all authors contributed to discussion of the themes.

Phase 6: writing the report

In the last phase, all authors collaborated on providing sufficient evidence for each theme in the results section including two or three examples of indicative quotes. In the result section, the ECTs are referred to by numbers, such as T1 (teacher number 1).

Results

The four themes from the analysis are presented below. In general, the results reveal that the ECTs may combine several of these roles at the same time in their school.

Creators

The 'creators' captured how all the ECTs expressed the wish to, and improved, their teaching practice in face-to-face collaboration with their closest colleagues, and that this collaboration took place continuously. These ECTs used their knowledge from their teacher education programme to seek to develop their work in informal bottom-up professional learning. In their everyday work they chose their collaborators or used their closest colleagues at their teaching level. The collaboration gave room to discuss class management and better teaching for their students and involved subject and didactical questions. Creators related this to their previous teacher education programme, of which enquiry-orientation and action learning were part, as quoted by T37:

T37: I think that we have an advantage as new graduates and have had a lot of research and development work. You feel that it is there, it is in a way something in us, and that we constantly want to improve practice and know that practice is not perfect, and in a way, you have a willingness to change, so. And it is, at the same time, I think in a way that it reflects a little that we have in the development group and in the development work at the school, that ok. 'What, how do you do that?' 'How can one do this?'

As exemplified, the ECTs said that they had a knowledge base from their education programme that they could use for reflection, development and improvement of their teaching practice. The ECTs expressed how self-initiated professional learning in collaboration with colleagues created time for professional learning in a hectic work environment with limited time for bigger projects.

T49: That you have trust in what you're doing is good, so you also dare to try new things and try and fail a little bit in the classroom even without getting sort of called into the principal's office and asked, 'what are you doing?', but rather like 'so exciting that you tried it, but ok it didn't work'. And then you can talk about those things.

Here, T49, even if not asked about it, described the importance of trust from superiors while trying out new teaching methods for their students on their own or in collaboration with colleagues. The quote from T49 also reveals the importance of working with teachers

who share their different teaching arrangements with each other, even though T49 also expressed that he did not have any close colleagues to collaborate with regarding his level of teaching, and this was something he missed. The ECTs claimed that they collaborated with new or older colleagues if they were enquiry-oriented and wanted to improve themselves and continue their professional learning. In these cases, both new and experienced teachers were open towards learning from each other. Here, other ECTs brought similarity from a common educational background for improvement, while older colleagues contributed experience related to class management and teaching approaches. Examples of collaborative work were, for example, related to creative teaching, the learning environment or inclusive education.

Four of the ECTs expressed (without being asked about it) how they wanted to further develop their subject specialisation from their education programme and wanted to spend time on further improving their knowledge of their subjects and didactics.

T28: Yes, yes, so there is an hour set aside for a professional meeting in each subject during the week ... The fact that we can talk to our colleagues 'how should we organise the teaching for the students?' ... and discuss a lot like general subject didactics then. 'What exactly is the purpose of the subject and how do you teach in the best possible way?' ... have really appreciated this cooperation.

Here, T28 described how subject didactics were discussed and developed in the group of subject teachers. The quote also reveals how T28 prioritised subject refreshment for his professional learning.

Translators

The 'translator' refers to the ECTs' task of translating the new curriculum renewal reform from the government's presentation in policy documents, written guides and short online lectures, into plans and solutions for their own and schools' work. All the ECTs were positive towards working with the implementation of the top-down reform because it matched their education training, where they had worked with deep-learning and creativity for the students. The recent reform mirrored their piloted teacher education programme and how the ECTs had been taught to think about bottom-up professional learning and teaching in their subjects. Here, T48 refers to the action learning assignment from the third year in their teacher education programme.

T48: We had to think a little differently when we had to create a curriculum in relation to the new one, the new competence goals I was about to say, the new ones, yes. Curriculum 2020 ... We tried to sit down and make some themed plans like that and tried to have some projects, I almost felt like we got some use for this action learning mindset.

The ECTs were open and positive towards the new curriculum as it gave scope for their own interpretation while using teaching programmes or other ideas to create potential learning opportunities for their students. The new teachers also acknowledged that the new curriculum needed a lot of work in the school to be fully implemented, for example more interdisciplinary projects involving more colleagues in professional learning, as quoted by T47:

T47: But of course you always wish you had more time, at least to do bigger projects or things like that, I think in terms of the interdisciplinary topics and stuff, that if you're really going to go in to work that way, you have to have time to be able to plan to be able to carry it out as well as you want.

Here, T47 describes how she must spend time, in collaboration with other teachers, on creating space for interdisciplinary matters, and such collaboration could be adjustment to the timetable and the teaching of different subjects. T47 also describes how she must act in relation to planning and implementing new practices according to the new reform. The new reform required time, according to the ECTs, and some of the schools limited the time allocated for other projects and used all their assigned time for common development work for the curriculum renewal.

Drivers

Thirteen ECTs gained a formal role in the schools' work with professional development and became what we characterise as drivers. Here, the schools' management acknowledged the drivers' competence from their formal education. Examples of drivers were ECTs who gained a position in the development group that decided on the schools' strategy for professional development. Some gained these positions as a matter of routine for new teachers, while others were asked to join due to their competence or interest. Other drivers worked as a middle manager or as resource persons, for example in ICT projects or with assessment tools. In a few exceptional cases, they participated in national curriculum work groups or gained employment in a competence centre, where they worked as advisers for other schools. Their formal position as drivers gained them positions to influence how they and their colleagues might work with the projects that were adopted by the school, or further up in the hierarchy, or promote more experienced learning, as claimed by T16.

T16: I was allowed to lead the academic section in English, so that then we have always started each meeting with the fact that it has been our own turn to present a teaching lesson to the others. In addition, we can set aside time for things we want to work on. So, I think that's been interesting, things like that are very important to me for me to enjoy my work.

As the quote reveals, being a driver such as a leader gives opportunities to promote more professional learning in the school, also in relation to their subjects. Most of these ECTs described that they worked in schools where the management sought to have a strategy of undertaking relevant and long-standing development projects and involving the teachers in the decision-making processes. However, sometimes being a driver also involved seeking to limit the number of development projects that the school wanted to initiate, or to influence the implementation of projects through, for example, their work in the school development group, as mentioned by T44.

T44: We're kind of lost to the areas of development that are kind of chosen for us further up. But within that, we have the freedom of how, in a way, we want to attack it. So, I feel like we have a lot to say compared to our colleagues. At least make suggestions.

The quote implies that the drivers saw a purpose and opportunity to influence the translation, or even transformation, of new reforms or ideas into their school. Here, the drivers contribute to strategic thinking for professional development for their school.

Passengers

Eight ECTs described working in schools with a top-down school development strategy, where the leaders and school owners, the municipality, implemented a high number of development projects over a short time span. The ECTs took a passenger role, as they participated in the projects, but did not have enough time to create changes and implement new practice. The passengers claim that projects were not properly completed or evaluated, and they did not see that the processes brought improvement for the school and the students. The projects were important and featured such themes as digital competence, deep-learning, assessment, outdoor schooling, learning environment and science. In practice, the projects ended up being handled superficially, as the ECTs claimed that there was limited time for notable school development in their hectic work, as quoted:

T44: It's a school owner, it sets some guidelines . . . just this year we've had inclusive children's and school environments to be worked on. And then we've had science municipalities that need to be worked on, and then we've had assessment practices that need to be worked on, so there are so many things that need to be worked on in parallel. It's just sauce, plain and simple.

Here, T44 describes how the municipality initiates several school development projects that are intended to be relevant for all their primary and secondary schools, and that all the teachers should

collaborate across subjects and levels in their school. They further reveal that the school owner or management decides on targets for professional learning without involving the teachers. These ECTs were very critical about the strategy, with some describing the participation in common development work as meaningless and time consuming.

T4: We've been working on basic skills. And, then you can choose between digital, reading and writing, etc. And where the focus is writing, the examples and methods come from the language subjects and they become difficult to directly relate to, for example, mathematics. So, when we are put off in academic sections and must do a programme that is best suited to Norwegian and English, it becomes a bit pointless. Then it is better that one put with a slightly self-directed scheme for mathematics.

Here, T4 indicates that the ECTs have little time, often only a few hours every week, for their development work. The passengers expressed concern that these development projects were something that had to be done, and that they took up time that could be used better, for example the implementation of the new curriculum revival. The school leaders and owners may be too ambitious about the time available to use on development work, or that school development ends up as formal requirements, as quoted by T46.

T46: Such general development work, having time to work on something proper. But in the world, we live in, or more specifically for schools, I don't know, but it seems like it's sort of just more and more formal requirements and then there's no time to do them, but they just must be ticked off that it just must be done and then just spin on.

The quote illustrates that top-down-decided development work may result in teachers having limited possibilities for deciding who and what they should collaborate about within the projects, resulting in a lack of motivation. The passengers also do not prioritise the school's development work.

Discussion

The results reveal that ECTs take four different roles in professional learning and school development, ranging from the active, mutually trusting and reflective *drivers*, *creators* and *translators* to the passive, trust-lacking and reactive *passengers*.

The findings revealed that ECTs that were assigned formal tasks from their principal became what we named *Drivers* of school development and professional learning into the schools' practice. These ECTs' competence is acknowledged, and they get central roles in school development groups. The drivers are positive towards external projects or new knowledge that could contribute to better teaching for the students and believe that their school has a strategy to limit the number of school development projects. Drivers reveal an interest in the development part of the work (Olin *et al.* 2020), as they take ownership and promote collaborative professionalism, and advocate implementing system changes (Hargreaves 2019). The drivers contribute to strengthening structural trust by taking central roles in transforming new top-down demands into new collegial practices and consoling relational trust in the professional learning in the schools that later could also contribute to changes in pre-contractual trust bases about how teachers work in their schools (Ellingsen 2015).

The results reveal that all the ECTs gained a *Creator* role, as they were enquiry-oriented and interested in improving their practice in collaboration with their colleagues, in the best interest of their students. Creators follow bottom-up or self-initiated professional learning approaches and contribute to increased collaborative professionalism in subject specialisation groups or their schools (Hargreaves 2019). By using their own knowledge, experiences and ideas, they contribute to increased relational trust between colleagues, that in time could be incorporated into pre-contractual trust (Ellingsen 2015). Participating in subject specialisation groups also creates potential for promoting collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves 2019), where, for example, they could discuss how to improve their didactics for better teaching, a critical feature in professional development (Adolfsson and Håkansson 2019).

Translators describes the ECTs' positivity towards and role in translating the new curriculum policy reform into their own and schools' work. The translators find the competence from TE relevant, and the reform is experienced as meaningful. Translators promote both structural and relational trust (Ellingsen 2015), as the work requires working in accordance with top-down signals in bottom-up professional learning. These approaches may also contribute to developing pre-contractual trust about how we work in schools, since the role of translator entails contributing to interdisciplinary project work to promote deep and creative learning for the students (Cao *et al.* 2023). The translator role similarly correlates with ideas of collaborative professionalism, as the teachers work in accordance with system changes in the education system (Hargreaves 2019).

Passengers work in schools that introduce and perform a large number of top-down school development projects from the municipality. As a response, these ECTs argue in favour of working on fewer development projects in depth over time since, there is little time for such work, and because they have ambitions about participating in or being drivers of professional learning activities in their collegium. These passengers end up being critical of the top-down school development strategies in Norway that lack duration in the form of time hours and span (Villegas-Reimers 2003, Adolfsson and Håkansson 2019), as found by previous research (Tiller 1990, Czerniawski 2013). The ECTs are negative towards top-down, school-led development projects that end up with contrived collegiality, as described by Hargreaves (2019). For the passengers, the top-down projects signalled strengthening structural trust and weakening relational trust, and they responded by protecting themselves by being passive and prioritising their own work. In a hectic work environment, the passengers claim that too many external development projects within a short time are meaningless and take time away from professional learning and work. This finding indicates that Tiller's kangaroo-school critique of 30 years ago (Tiller 1990) is still valid.

The results reveal that the ECTs, especially the translators and drivers, seem to take a role described by (Levinsson 2011) as development leaders, using their research and development competence from their education to translate new knowledge (Røvik 2016) into new school practices that also involve teaching. This also indicates that the ECTs want to change and improve their own teaching, based on curricular and subject knowledge, and aim to create a shared vision among their colleagues that is essential in school development (Adolfsson and Håkansson 2019, Hargreaves 2019). These results are in line with the intentions of their education programme to pursue enquiry-oriented ECTs, as claimed by (Toom *et al.* 2010). These ECTs have learned an action-learning bottom-up approach for school development in their five-year teacher education programme that they further utilise in their work. Due to their education, these ECTs have the ambition to improve their subject didactics for their teaching and they express being able to read up on and try out new things. These findings indicate that the ECTs are more positive towards professional learning in Norwegian schools, in line with recent OECD results (OECD 2020) that differ from previous studies (Czerniawski 2013, Caspersen and Raaen 2014). These ECTs have also been viewed by management as competent and are given relational trust (Ellingsen 2015) to improve the schools.

The ECTs in general, independent of their role, argue for working in depth over time, with fewer development projects promoting what Hargreaves (2019) describes as collaborative professionalism in the entire educational system. As such, the ECTs in this study are positive towards fast policy in education, such as the curriculum renewal, and, in the right conditions, if given formal roles as drivers or translators, may contribute to translate such new ideas (Røvik 2016) in schools. In those conditions, ECTs may step up beyond their expectations and be assigned new roles, as also claimed by Buchanan (2015). This process includes their ability and willingness to work with informal relational trust practices and includes structural trust that, in time, may be integrated into a pre-contractual basis of trust in schools. Our study indicates that ECTs find relational trust as the grounding for school development and professional learning, as Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer (2021) found by investigating middle leaders. However, if ECTs experience too many challenges, and feel they have been left alone for too long, this will lead them to take more passive roles; a team

around the ECT can help alleviate these issues. Similarly, if ECTs experience too many development projects at the same time, this can seem overwhelming, and they maintain a passive role. These results indicate how contextual factors in the form of time and management influence the role ECTs take in relation to professional learning in different ways. In cases where the local authorities and school principals serve as gatekeepers and limit the influence of external development projects in the form of structural trust, this gives an opportunity for ECTs to contribute to professional learning.

Practical implications

The results reveal that ECTs with a more specialised master-based teacher education can contribute unique competences and knowledge to the schools in regard of school development and professional learning. The results show variance in different school development strategies from bottom-up to top-down, which is also found in earlier research in Norway (Blossing and Ertesvåg 2011). Here, we see that the school owner's role matters for school development and professional learning, as it is also connected to the newly implemented national decentralised competence programme (Ulvik *et al.* 2021). Regarding school development, time and the school owner's ability to be a gatekeeper are highlighted as important factors, together with how well the school's management engages with relevant themes for the school, as also claimed by Hargreaves (2019). The results imply that governments should consider initiating fewer national school development projects and resist calls for fast policy. If the ECTs are too busy with many tasks and projects, they argue that they are not able to engage with in-depth development work as previous documented (Kyndt *et al.* 2016). As such the ECTs need to be aware of the need for gatekeeping and time management, both for themselves and in terms of how the school leadership oversees things.

Limitations

Describing practice from interview studies has limitations (Desimone 2009), particularly regarding generalisation. However, a detailed description of the different roles may make it possible for others to relate to similar contexts, which Stake and Trumbull (1982) describe as naturalistic generalisation. Another limitation is sample bias, since as the 26 ECTs participated voluntarily in the course of a busy schedule, our informants may be the most positive or skilled ECTs. As we interviewed the cohorts during or just after the COVID-19 pandemic, at least the first two cohorts had less time for school development projects, as well as professional learning. It is also interesting that it was the third cohort, interviewed in a more normal situation in 2022, that was the most negatively against the municipality's school-development strategies. This indicates that the pressure for school development may be increasing in Norwegian schools. In the analysis, two researchers participated in the first three phases and all researchers questioned each other in phases five and six. This process contributed to researcher triangulation, as described by Creswell and Miller (2000), and strengthened the inter-rater reliability of the analytical work.

Conclusions

Our research question concerned what kind of roles are taken by ECTs with a master's degree in relation to school development and professional learning after five years in the profession. The results revealed four different roles in school development and professional learning, namely ECTs as creators, translators, drivers and passengers. The findings indicate that ECTs want to promote professional learning that is based on relational trust. For this to be successful, there needs to be trust from above, to fulfil their arguments. The results reveal a paradox, as competent and trained ECTs with the intention to be change agents for their own practice often meet a school owner system that continuously pushes a high number of top-down school development projects. The

teachers are burdened with increasing work tasks and quality assurance and there is limited time for professional learning in schools. If ECTs experience several school development projects within a short time they take a passive role, and as such this strategy is counterproductive. Therefore, in line with Kutsyruba *et al.* (2019), it may be reasonable to investigate further how neo-liberalism trends and intensification of work may contribute to further challenges for ECTs in their handling of work tasks and professional learning. Such research should clearly investigate the school owner perspective.

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