OULUN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY of OULU

KAARTINEN LEENA

FEMALE TEACHERS WHO DO NOT HAVE CHILDREN – CONSTRUCTION OF PROFESSIONALISM AND EXPERIENCES IN THE WORK

Kasvatustieteen pro gradu -tutkielma
KASVATUSTIETEIDEN TIEDEKUNTA
Intercultural Teacher Education
2014

OULUN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY of OULU

Kasvatustieteiden tiedekunta
Faculty of Education

Tiivistelmä opinnäytetyöstä
Thesis abstract

Intercultural Teacher Education	Tekijä/Author Kaartinen Leena

Työn nimi/Title of thesis
Female teachers who do not have children – Construction of professionalism and experiences in the work

Pääaine/Major subject	Työn laji/Type of thesis	Aika/Year	Sivumäärä/No. of pages
Education	Master's thesis	May 2014	81+3

Tiivistelmä/Abstract

Women and men still face different societal expectations when it comes to issues such as care and having children. These expectations are also visible in the teaching profession. This thesis examines the construction of professionalism and the work-related experiences of female teachers who do not have children. To understand these experiences, the thesis examines how not having children is perceived in society, and links this to the teaching profession. The thesis is constructed within a feminist framework, and the methodological basis lies in hermeneutic phenomenology. The data consists of 12 written responses which were collected through a writing instruction in a teachers' magazine. The data was analysed using qualitative content analysis.

Generally, teachers' professional development is considered a multifaceted phenomenon, which is influenced greatly by the life context of the teacher, but also subject knowledge, the work environment, as well as the larger societal context. This means that the professionalism of each individual teacher is unique. However, assumptions about differences in the professionalism of female and male teachers still exist, and these assumptions are often shaped by traditional stereotypes of 'male' and 'female' characteristics. These assumptions relate to the wider context of how women and men are perceived in society, and having children is a very value-laden aspect of this. Women are still expected to want to have children, and especially voluntary childlessness is often perceived negatively.

The general discussions on both teacher professionalism and not having children were visible in the data. In this data the influential factors for the construction of the teachers' professionalism were divided into four categories: i) 'Formal' professionalism; ii) Experiences that shape; iii) Values; and iv) Personal involvement. The teachers' experiences with regard to not having children were more complicated. In this data some of the most common topics were insecurities in the relations with parents, having more time and resources to dedicate to their work, and having to face general attitudes about not having children. The experiences related to not having children were divided into three categories: i) Influence on the work; ii) Feelings of insecurity or difference; and iii) General attitudes towards not having children. Even though most of the teachers in this study did not feel that their not having children would have been influential in the construction of their professionalism, all still provided examples of how not having children had been visible in their work.

The findings of the study cannot be generalised as such; they do, however, provide some important insights into the situation of teachers who do not have children, and the kinds of experiences they have had in their work with regard to this question.

Asiasanat/Keywords Childlessness, Gender differences, Phenomenology, Teaching profession

OULUN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY of OULU

Kasvatustieteiden tiedekunta
Faculty of Education

Tiivistelmä opinnäytetyöstä
Thesis abstract

Luokanopettajankoulutus	Tekijä/Author Kaartinen Leena

Työn nimi/Title of thesis
Female teachers who do not have children – Construction of professionalism and experiences in the work

Pääaine/Major subject	Työn laji/Type of thesis	Aika/Year	Sivumäärä/No. of pages
Kasvatustiede	Pro gradu -tutkielma	Toukokuu 2014	81+3

Tiivistelmä/Abstract

Naisiin ja miehiin kohdistuvat edelleen erilaiset sosiaaliset odotukset esimerkiksi hoivan ja lasten hankkimisen suhteen. Nämä odotukset ovat nähtävissä myös opettajan ammatissa. Tämä tutkimus käsittelee ammatillisuuden rakentumista ja työhön liittyviä kokemuksia naisopettajilla, joilla ei ole lapsia. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan sitä, kuinka lapsettomuuteen suhtaudutaan yhteiskunnassa, ja sitä kuinka nämä asenteet linkittyvät opettajan ammattiin. Tutkimus nojaa feministiseen tutkimusperinteeseen, ja metodologiset lähtökohdat ovat hermeneuttisessa fenomenologiassa. Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu 12 kirjallisesta vastauksesta kirjoituskutsuun, joka julkaistiin Opettaja-lehdessä. Aineisto analysoitiin laadullisella sisällönanalyysilla.

Opettajien ammatillisuuden kehittyminen nähdään yleisesti monitahoisena ilmiönä, johon vaikuttavat suuresti opettajan oma konteksti ja elämäntilanne, mutta myös aineosaaminen, työympäristö sekä laajempi yhteiskunnallinen konteksti. Näin jokaisen opettajan ammatillisuuden voidaan nähdä olevan ainutkertainen. Tästä huolimatta edelleenkin on olemassa oletuksia nais- ja miesopettajien ammatillisuuden eroista, ja nämä oletukset pohjautuvat usein perinteisiin stereotyyppisiin näkemyksiin miesten ja naisten erilaisista ominaisuuksista. Nämä oletukset kytkeytyvät laajempaan yhteiskunnalliseen näkemykseen naisten ja miesten rooleista. Tähän kytkeytyy myös lasten hankkiminen, joka herkkä aihealue. Naisten odotetaan edelleen haluavan lapsia, ja erityisesti vapaaehtoinen lapsettomuus nähdään monesti negatiivisessa valossa.

Yleiset näkemykset sekä ammatillisuuden rakentumisesta että lapsettomuudesta olivat näkyvissä tämän tutkimuksen aineistossa. Aineistossa esiintyneet ammatillisuuden rakentumisen kannalta merkitykselliset asiat jaettiin neljään kategoriaan: i) Muodollinen ammatillisuus; ii) Muokkaavat kokemukset; iii) Arvot; sekä iv) Henkilökohtainen osallistuminen. Opettajien kokemukset liittyen siihen, että heillä ei ole lapsia, olivat moninaisia. Tässä aineistossa yleisimpiä aiheita olivat epävarmuuden tunteet suhteissa oppilaiden vanhempiin, työhön käytettävän ajan ja resurssien suurempi määrä, sekä yleiset asenteet liittyen siihen, että heillä ei ole lapsia. Kokemukset liittyen lapsettomuuden vaikutukseen työssä jaettiin kolmeen kategoriaan: i) Vaikutus työhön; ii) Epävarmuuden ja erilaisuuden tunteet; sekä iii) Yleiset asenteet liittyen lapsettomuuteen. Vaikka suurin osa tähän tutkimukseen osallistuneista opettajista ei pitänyt sitä, että heillä ei ole lapsia merkityksellisenä asiana ammatillisuutensa rakentumisessa, kaikki kertoivat silti esimerkkejä siitä, miten lapsettomuus on näkynyt heidän työssään.

Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset eivät ole yleistettävissä sellaisenaan. Tutkimus lisää kuitenkin näkemystä siitä, millaista on olla opettaja, jolla ei ole lapsia, ja siihen millaisia kokemuksia heillä on ollut työssään.

Asiasanat/Keywords Fenomenologia, lapsettomuus, opettajuus, sukupuolierot

Table of contents

1 Introduction

This thesis examines the connection between teacher professionalism and not having children. The written accounts from 12 female teachers who do not have children were analysed using qualitative data-based content analysis to find out how they viewed their professionalism, and whether they experienced that not having children would have somehow been a relevant factor for the construction of their professionalism or in their work as teachers in general. The research questions of this thesis are: How is not having children perceived in society? How do the assumptions of care differ for women and men, and how does this relate to the teaching profession? How do teachers who do not have children see their professionalism, and the influence of not having children in their work?

The process of arriving to my research topic was a long one. The topic is very personal to me, as my initial research interest sparked from personal experience: a conversation I had with my sister in the summer of 2012. She is also a teacher, and at that time was on maternity leave. She was talking about how, before she had children, parents or colleagues would sometimes make the comment 'You will understand once you have children of your own' when discussing certain things that had happened in the school. This kind of argument struck me deeply: was this something that more teachers who do not have children had to deal with in their work? Is this going to be something I have to deal with once I start working as a teacher? This conversation also made me think of the conversations I had sometimes had with people when they found out that I was studying to become a teacher and did not want to have children of my own. To them this seemed odd, but I for one did not see how my personal preferences had anything to do with my professional choices.

It seemed that there was an assumption behind all these comments that all teachers – if not indeed, all women – want to have children at some point in their lives. I had thought that the idea of a woman not having children would not have been anything out of the ordinary in today's world, but apparently, at least when associated with the teaching profession, this was not the case. I found this very interesting, especially since teaching is a highly regarded profession in Finland and teachers have a Master's degree. Still it seemed as if education and professionalism did not amount to much when compared to the fact that these teachers did not have children. I wanted to know whether more teachers who do not have children have experienced that their professionalism would have been contrasted with not

having children, and whether this was something that both male and female teachers had encountered.

Although both voluntary and involuntary childlessness have been studied a lot, there is not much research about teachers who do not have children. This is a significant aspect to the discussion because of the nature of the teaching profession. It links to certain aspects associated with parenting: the teacher also is responsible for the wellbeing of the children in her or his classroom, and supports their growth and learning. This creates an interesting situation where the role of the teacher as the professional meets the role of teacher as the carer. Teachers who do not have children are in a central position when thinking about whether a teacher's professionalism is somehow influenced by having – or not having – children.

In society, the assumption that all women want to have children still exists. This can be seen in public discussion and political documents as well as in attitudes towards people who do not want to have children. These attitudes are especially pronounced towards women. In history women who did not become mothers were often seen as 'unnatural', or represented as child-hating or selfish. Similar attitudes can still be detected in discourses on voluntarily childless women, who are seen as deviants or child-like themselves. Female teachers who do not have children are in an interesting position in this discussion: although they do not have children – and some might never want to – they have still opted for a profession in which they work closely with children or young people. This opens up an interesting perspective to the role of women in society and in the teaching profession, as female teachers might be more strongly associated with the assumption of care in education, and at the same time face societal pressures of having children more pointedly than their male colleagues.

The structure of the thesis is the following: in the next chapter I will examine the research questions in more detail, and provide the definitions for the concepts used in this thesis. In chapter 3, I will move on to explaining the feminist framework in which I have constructed this thesis, as it has been highly significant both to the topic itself, as well as the way I have conducted the research. After this I will move on to the theoretical part of the thesis. To understand and explore the experiences of female teachers who do not have children, the attitudes and discourses surrounding not having children in society are discussed in chapter 4. To further understand how professionalism links to this discussion, the different

aspects of teacher professionalism are explored in chapter 5. This chapter includes an introduction to the Finnish context of teaching to make the findings from the data more understandable to a reader who is not familiar with the Finnish educational system. After these theoretical considerations I will move on to describing the methodological considerations in chapter 6, and the data and the analysis in chapter 7. The findings from the data are presented in chapter 8, which is divided into two parts: the findings linked to the teachers' experiences on the construction of professionalism; and the teachers' experiences related to not having children. In the final chapter I will connect the findings from the data to the wider societal and theoretical context to provide new insights on the issue. Issues related to ethical considerations and the reliability of the research are also discussed in the final chapter.

2 Research interest and research questions

The aim of this Master's thesis is to map out the work-related experiences of teachers who do not have children. This is done by analysing teachers' written accounts on the construction of their professionalism and their experiences of the influence of not having children in their work as teachers.

I started my research on the area of teacher professionalism and its connection to not having children already in my Bachelor's thesis, in which I examined the differing expectations towards the professionalism of female and male teachers, especially with regard to the societal assumptions of care. This Master's thesis builds on the work of the Bachelor's thesis, but focuses on the *experiences* of teachers who do not have children by analysing the teachers' written accounts. The empirical data of teachers' experiences brings in a new aspect to the discussion, by giving the teachers themselves a voice in describing how they see their profession, and how they experience the possible influence of not having children.

2.1 Research questions

My research questions started to take form through considerations such as: Is not having children still considered to be something outside the norm? What are the experiences of teachers who do not have children? Why would not having children even be meaningful in the work of a teacher? What is the assumed added value of having children in the profession? Is there an assumption of care in the teaching profession, and does this apply to both female and male teachers? Is the professionalism of teachers questioned because they do not have children?

To find out answers to these questions I decided to collect experiences from teachers who do not have children, and find out how they themselves experience the situation. To shed light on these questions it was also necessary to examine the societal assumptions related to having – or not having – children, and how these apply to women and men. To understand how not having children might influence the work of a teacher, it was also important to examine the professionalism of teachers and what it is considered to consist of, and how the professionalism of female and male teachers might be perceived differently.

My research questions are the following:

1) How is not having children perceived in society?
2) How do the assumptions of care differ for women and men, and how does this relate to the teaching profession?
3) And finally, how do teachers who do not have children see their professionalism, and the influence of not having children in their work?

These questions are examined through the theoretical discussion on childlessness and teacher professionalism in an international context, although special attention is paid to the Finnish context as well. The empirical part of the research focuses on these questions only in the Finnish context. Because of the connection to the societal aspects of expectations of motherhood and care especially towards women, my research has been heavily influenced by feminist research, and I consider it to be the framework in which I construct my whole thesis.

I would characterize my research as feminist research also because the principles of feminist research have been influencing my view of my research topic from the very beginning – in fact, the whole interest in the topic started because I was looking at the phenomenon through my 'feminist lenses': 'Were female teachers still expected to want to have children? Do male teachers face similar expectations? What is the relationship between the professional and the personal?' Since the teaching profession is segregated by gender both horizontally and vertically, and most school teachers are female in the primary school level, the research topic touches upon women especially. For this reason the link between motherhood, care and the teaching profession can best be examined and challenged through a feminist perspective. By giving a voice to the teachers who do not have children, I attempt to give them a chance to define their own professionalism and, if they so wish, to deconstruct the traditional assumptions related to motherhood and its relation to the teaching profession. Like mentioned before, there is research done on both voluntary and involuntary childlessness, but not much research has been done of teachers who do not have children. This suggests that this research might have captured one of the features of feminist research – a different perspective to asking questions (Harding, 1987, p. 7). I will elaborate on the features of feminist research in more detail in the next chapter.

2.2 Definitions

Childlessness: The term *childlessness* carries many negative connotations, and I chose not to use it in my writing instruction or in the analysis of my data. I will, however, use it in the theoretical discussion on discourses on childlessness for the reasons of clarity: in research *childlessness* is the term most often used, although most writers do acknowledge the pitfalls in the choice of wording (see for example Wood & Newton, 2006). Rich (1976) described the difficulty of talking about women who do not have children, because all word choices available linked the woman to motherhood somehow – whether the woman was seen as *childless*, *unchilded* or *childfree*. In all of these terms the woman is defined by not having children – there is no word to describe a woman without children without linking her to the absence of motherhood. (Rich, 1976, p. 249)

Teachers who do not have children: Much like in the discussion of using the prefix 'female' in describing a profession – for example a *female* pilot – using the prefix 'childless' implies that there is an assumption of something else. Using the term *female pilot* reveals that the underlying assumption is that the pilot is a man, just like using the term *childless woman* implies that *a woman* is assumed to have children. For this reason I have chosen to use the awkward chain of words when describing teachers *who do not have children*. When something is prefixed to a word the prefix becomes to define the whole word following it, and I wanted to avoid that. Being *childless* or *childfree* is not something that defines these teachers; they are just teachers who happen not to have children for whichever reason. Many of the respondents in fact used the term 'childless' in quotes, as to put distance between themselves and the common use of the word.

Professionalism: Professionalism in this thesis is used in two ways – in the theoretical part it is connected to the research tradition on professionalism and to the study of teacher professionalism in particular. In the empirical part of the thesis professionalism is used as a translation for the Finnish word *ammatillisuus* which can be understood to encompass aspects linked to formal professionalism as well as to aspects of 'everyday professionalism', of behaving like a professional in the work, and to the multifaceted aspects of *being* a teacher.

Gender in this thesis is used as a category which is culturally constructed and manifested in actions and ways of being – Butler (1990) saw gender as being *performed*. Gender becomes visible through these acts of performance (p. 33). This view of gender emphasises

the importance of culture, and the gender roles produced by this culture. Boys and girls are socialised into these gender roles still today. Gender is not to be confused with biological sex, which is determined by biological factors, and is by no means as simple as the sex-dichotomy would have us understand. For the purposes of clarity I still refer to two sexes and genders – namely female and male – even though I do recognise that there are a lot of people who do not identify with – or even biologically simply fall in – either of these categories.

Rearing: Throughout the thesis, but especially in the analysis, I use the term *rearing* (in Finnish *kasvatus*) to refer to the educational tasks of a teacher which are not directly connected to any subject matter or content knowledge, but rather to growth as a person and a member of society – tasks which are often connected to behaviour, treatment of others, and the like. I chose to use this term instead of *teaching*, which I use when referring to areas related to subject matter and content knowledge, or the acquisition of new skills, or *upbringing*, which I regard as more closely connected to the continuing process of raising a child, which is usually done by parents. *Education* is used when talking about a more holistic idea of education encompassing the whole system, not just individual acts of teaching or rearing. The terminology in this area differs to some degree between Finnish and English, and the words are not exact equivalents, and as I have had to interpret the nuances of the respondents' choice of words, I felt it most clear to state my understanding and use of the words here.

It should be noted that although the language of the thesis has been English from the start, the responses were collected in Finnish in a Finnish teachers' magazine (Opettaja). The responses were never fully translated, as I felt that the meanings came through better in the original language. However, some of the key parts of the data were translated during the analysis. The process of translation is described in more detail in chapter 7.4.1.

3 Feminist framework

As mentioned before, it was my personal experiences and interests that started the research process. In feminist research one of the crucial starting points is that the researcher does not try to hold on to the illusion of objectivity, but recognises that the cultural beliefs and practices of the researcher shape all research. No research can be objective or free from bias, because all researchers bring in their own background, own values and own assumptions, and interpret the data and findings through these lenses. Different researchers would find different things in the same data. (Harding, 1987, p. 9)

For this reason, feminist research underlines the importance of making one's standpoint visible to the reader; when the background and affiliations of the researcher are explained to the reader, the reader can be the judge of the 'objectivity' – or in this case, the 'subjectivity' of the research. This increases the transparency of the research process, and gives the reader an opportunity to evaluate the choices made by the researcher, and be aware of the bias in the research. The researcher does not attempt to be an anonymous voice of authority, but gives the reader the tools to evaluate the results of the research in the context of the interests of the individual researcher. (Harding, 1987, p. 9; Letherby, 2003, p. 6) This view of subjectivity increasing objectivity is known in feminist research as 'strong objectivity' (Harding, 1991) or 'theorized subjectivity' (Letherby, 2003).

3.1 The researcher

As Harding (1987) explains in her analysis of feminist methodology and feminist research, to achieve a higher level of objectivity, many feminist researchers explicitly tell the reader about their background (p. 9). For this reason it should be said that I am a 27-year-old teacher student originally from Southern Finland, but now living in Oulu in Northern Ostrobothnia. I am a white middle class female, with no strong affiliations with any religion, although I was brought up in a Christian family, and I am still a member of the Lutheran church.

I am in my sixth year of studies in the Intercultural Teacher Education programme, which gives primary school teacher qualifications, and focuses on intercultural and global educa-

tion. It is quite obvious from my choice of profession as well as the specialisation in it, that I find education extremely important – I think it is one of the few ways in which we can actually hope to address the inequalities in the world today. In the future my hope is to work as a classroom teacher in Finland or abroad.

I do not have children, and at this point in my life, I do not wish to have children in the future. My research interest is thus self-centred to a certain degree – I am studying a phenomenon which might very well affect me in my future career as a teacher. I have a background in gender studies having studied them in the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, as well as University of Oulu. This gears my interest especially towards the societal aspects of my research topic, as well as the differences or similarities between the male and female experience.

3.2 Understanding feminist research

There is no one separate feminist methodology, and feminist research is carried out in different fields in different ways. What these different approaches have in common is that they all strive to expand on the shortcomings of traditional analysis, correcting the distorted, biased and partial view of the world traditional research has produced. This is not just about adding something to research, but about fundamentally changing the way research is done: which things are problematised and why, what is the purpose of research, and what is the role of the researcher. (Harding, 1987) Letherby (2003) drew attention to the political aspect of research – that all choices made by the researcher – whether with regard to the methods, choice of topic or anything else – are political in themselves. In feminist research, the product and purpose of research are seen as inseparable from the process of research. (Letherby, 2003, pp. 4-5) As Letherby pointed out, feminist researchers 'not only acknowledge this but celebrate it' (ibid. p. 6).

Traditionally research was only conducted from, and focused on, men's experiences. Things that men found meaningful or problematic in their lives were studied. The experience of women – or the experiences of non-white, non-middle-class men, for that matter – went unrecognised in Western research. What is one of the crucial aspects of feminist research is that it focuses on women's experiences. (Harding, 1987, p. 7) The need for feminist research was also clear to thinkers like Dorothy Smith (1974), who saw that the way men research and conceptualise the world does not correspond to the experiences of

women. Women had to conceptualise their world through the experiences of men, consequently feeling like their own experiences were not valid, because they were not reflected in research and theory (Smith, 1974, pp. 7-8). Feminist research introduced topics more closely related to everyday experience, and the experience of *women* in particular. This meant that women's perspective was introduced to previously studied topics, but also that completely new topics for research were introduced – topics which would not have gained the attention of traditional research. (Harding, 1987, p. 7)

One should still keep in mind that the experiences cannot be labelled as *female* or *male* experiences – there are differences within the groups as well, and the individual experience varies across different categories. Harding (1987) stresses the importance of keeping in mind that there is no one feminist research or feminist science. Experiences of women differ, and there is no one voice that would represent all women. The experiences of women of different race, class, religion, and generation, just to mention a few, are diverse and equally valid (Harding, 1987, pp. 7-8). For this reason, feminist research cannot really be simplified into one definition – in Harding's words, there can only be 'many stories that different women tell about the different knowledge they have' (ibid. p. 188). I would expand this to referring to the stories of each individual – whether female or male or something outside those categories – and consider it important to respect the voice of whoever is telling their story or sharing their knowledge.

These ideas have been the guiding principles in my research throughout the research process. The influence of the ideas of feminist research can be seen everywhere in my thesis, and I will also draw specific attention to it when need be. The principles of feminist research have influenced the way I formed my research questions and how I see the ontological and epistemological issues related to my topic, as well as the take I have on the methodology and the specific method of qualitative content analysis. Also the process of analysing and interpreting the data has been guided by these same principles. The methodological considerations and process of analysis will be explained in more detail in chapters 6 and 7. I will now move on to exploring the theoretical bases of childlessness and teacher professionalism, which will shed light on the underlying assumptions behind my research questions – the assumptions related to having children, as well as the assumptions related to teacher professionalism.

4 Childlessness

Research on the area of both voluntary and involuntary childlessness has been extensive. This connects tightly to how women are seen in society, and to the kinds of discourses that are prominent with regard to having children. In order to map out the different implications this has to especially women who do not have children, I will now examine the ideas surrounding women and motherhood in history and in society today. I will examine the different discourses on childlessness, and then examine how these considerations link to the position of the teacher.

4.1 Motherhood and the female identity

Historically, regardless of some exceptions, the general rule has been that women should have children. However, since the 20th century, feminism has had a strong influence in how women see the choices available for themselves. The first wave of feminism in the 1920s emphasised the empowering aspects of motherhood to women, while the second wave of feminism in the 1960s gave start to the discussion on alternatives to motherhood. The third wave of feminism recognises motherhood as one important aspect of female identity, but does not regard it as necessary for the development of female identity. (Ireland, 1993, pp. 1-6)

Being associated with motherhood has long been the 'natural' role for women (Miller, 1998, p. 66). Gillespie (2000) crystallised this thought when she wrote that '…the nurturance of children has historically been seen to be what women *do*, and mothers have been seen to be what women *are*' (Gillespie, 2000, p. 225). This has for long been seen as the core of 'normal' female identity and a basis for what constitutes being a woman. Gillespie saw the construction of female identity around motherhood in Western societies as resulting from a number of different things, including the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, right wing politics with its emphasis on family values, as well as modern science and modern medicine with their focus on the female body and reproduction (ibid. p. 224). In this way, 'motherhood can be seen to be drawn from, and enmeshed in powerful, hegemonic ideological doctrines' (ibid. p. 225). It is thus no wonder that these traditional notions still persist in Western societies today.

Compared to motherhood, fatherhood has not reached a similar central position in defining the life and identity of the 'typical' male. As Ireland (1993) pointed out, because of the centrality of motherhood to adult female identity, 'all women begin their pathway to adult identity by positioning themselves toward motherhood – either positively or negatively' (p. 14). As fatherhood is not a key reference point for adult male identity (Ireland, 1993. p. 7), it could be assumed that men, growing up, do not necessarily need to consider their position towards fatherhood if it is not relevant in their lives. Because women are faced with pronatalist pressures more strongly than men, women still have to build their identities in relation to motherhood at least to some extent. Rich (1976) captured the position of women with relation to motherhood accurately: 'Any woman who believes that the institution of motherhood has nothing to do with *her* is closing her eyes to crucial aspects of her situation' (p. 252). Even today, all women have to consider their stance towards the ideas and expectations of motherhood – whether they associate themselves with it or not – because regardless of their personal inclinations society still views them as potential mothers (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991, p.13).

4.2 Discourses on motherhood and childlessness

Ireland (1993) pointed out the interesting fact that in history women who did not have children – and thus were deviants to this 'natural' role of women – had certain roles reserved for them, and these roles were often negative: witches were a prime example of this. The woman without a child was represented as selfish, often child-hating and 'a threat to the institutions of society' (Ireland, 1993, p. 7). Rich (1976) saw the persecution of 'childless' women resulting from the threat they supposedly posed for male hegemony, as they were not tied to the family and resisted the heteronormative assumptions of society (pp. 251-252). Female teachers who are not mothers have an interesting position; they are in the very centre of a societal institution and could thus be seen as a threat in their 'unconventional choice' – but at the same time, they have opted for a profession which involves working closely with children, and thus show some traits of the traditionally female characteristics. Although we have come a long way since the time Rich wrote her book, a grown up woman who does not have children is still often considered as outside the norm. The reasons for not having children, however, strongly influence the discourses on the topic.

Gillespie (2000) drew attention to the fact that *involuntary* childlessness can be seen to exist within the traditional discourse on motherhood and femininity; women who want to have children but are not able to, are met with sympathy and support, whereas women who do not want to have children in the first place are considered to be deviants to the 'natural' role of women (p. 225). There have been studies, however, which reveal the negative portrayal of childlessness and its effects on women who suffer from involuntary childlessness as well (Woollett, 1991, p. 51). In general, it is still women who voluntarily do not have children that often feel that they are being negatively evaluated by others (Wood & Newton, 2006, p. 342).

When focusing on the discourse on *voluntarily* childless women, Gillespie (2000) found three prominent discourses in this area: other people met the explanations of the voluntarily childless either with disbelief, disregard or saw voluntary childlessness as deviance. The view that childless women will change their mind once they grow into the 'normal' adult female role, or once they 'meet the right man' was also visible in Gillespie's study. The women in Gillespie's study expressed the patronising nature of these types of comments – as if they were themselves childlike and not capable of rational decision-making. (Gillespie, 2000, pp. 228-229) Even though Gillespie's study was conducted in 1996, not much seems to have changed – I personally have experience of these types of comments, and have found them both frustrating and patronising. I also have personal experience of being a 'deviant' to the 'natural' role of women: I was quite recently told by a young man that I was '*an amazing person, yet there's this side of you'* when he talked about the 'abhorrence' of me not wanting to have children. In his mind all the good qualities I had were cancelled by the fact that I did not want to have children.

With regard to working life, Wood and Newton (2006) described two approaches to childlessness: materialist and post-structuralist. Materialist approach sees childlessness as a societal issue resulting from discriminatory practices in the workplace, which either prevent women from having children or delay the decision for so long that having children is no longer possible. The post-structuralist approach gives more agency to women and allows for a view of childlessness as a valid choice and as a new way of being feminine. (Wood & Newton, 2006, p. 339) Both of these discourses can be detected in public discussion, and the individual situations of women are probably affected by aspects described in both.

It is quite obvious from these examples that discourses on childlessness are very value-laden. The persisting assumption that all women do – and should – want to have children can be detected in the Finnish society as well. One clear example of this is the Finnish law on sterilisation (Ministry of Justice, 1970). In Finland one can only be sterilised under certain conditions: 1) the person has three or more children, 2) is 30 years old, 3) pregnancy would compromise her health, 4) the person cannot use other means of birth control, 5) the children would have or develop a difficult physical condition, 6) the person has a physical condition which radically reduces their ability to take care of children, 7) the person is transgender (Ministry of Justice, 1970).

It is important to note that the law only allows for sterilisation under strict and unlikely conditions related to health, or if the person already has more than three children. The mere wish to be sterilised is not reason enough until the person is 30 years old or older. Considering that 18-year-olds are allowed to drink alcohol legally, drive a car, join the army and vote in elections, it seems rather interesting that the decision *not* to have children can only be made when reaching the age of 30. This is a clear indication of pronatalist pressures in society: one's body is not one's own, or at least its reproductive ability is state business. This also links to Gillespie's (2000) findings of childless women being viewed as incapable of rational decision-making, and to the idea that they will change their mind at some point (pp. 228-229).

The pronatalist pressures in society can also be detected in a document by Statistics Finland (Tilastokeskus) on fertility rates in Finland, where increasing childlessness was described in very pronatalist terms:

> Even though the fertility rate in Finland is good by European standards, the increasing number of women who are completely childless is worrying. Women's high level of education has its downside as well, as it is especially highly educated women who are left childless, either by choice or involuntarily. (Tilastokeskus, 2006, own translation)

Referring to childlessness as *worrying*, and as *being left childless* echoes the traditional assumptions that all women will – and should – become mothers at some point in their life. The choice of words here is by no means neutral – women who do not have children are described as being left childless, as if there would be something missing from their lives – a common conception of the state of childless women (see for example Gillespie, 2000;

Ireland, 1993; Miller, 1998; Rich 1976). The increasing number of childless women is described as *worrying* – another example of how society views as women without children as outside the norm, and as something that should not be encouraged. The article also refers to the high education level of women as being at the root of the 'problem', thus echoing the materialist discourse of the delay in having children (Wood & Newton, 2006, p. 339), but now links it to the high education level of women rather than the practices of the workplace.

Despite these traditional discourses on motherhood, many studies have noted a slight trend towards more accepting attitudes towards motherhood and childlessness (Wood & Newton, 2006, p. 338); this links to the wider trends of increasing diversity and the increase of different family models in society. This leaves room for 'creative social imaginary' on the ideas of femininity without the link to motherhood (ibid. p. 338). Childless women also construct this wider discourse on feminine identity by resisting traditional discourses where motherhood is central to femininity, and make room for a wider diversity of feminine identity (Gillespie, 2000, p. 223). This was also one of the aims for my research: by giving a voice to teachers who do not have children they themselves had a chance to define their professionalism and teacher identity.

4.3 Societal assumptions of care

Caring is mostly seen as a feminine characteristic. Traditionally women and girls were the ones who were expected to care for their family, and the situation has not changed drastically to this day. Furthermore, women still continue to be the majority in 'caring professions' which involve looking after children, the sick, and the elderly. Different things are still expected from women and men, as well as girls and boys.

In 1970s, Chodorow drew attention to the fact that social environment is different for boys and girls, and that girls are less individuated than boys, and define themselves more in relation to other people (as cited in Gilligan, 1979, p. 433; see also Gordon, 1990). This is still seen in the expectations of male and female behaviour as early as kindergarten level. Ylitapio-Mäntylä (2010) found in her study where Finnish kindergarten teachers reflected on the gendered practices in their work, that boys were not allowed to show emotions as openly as girls (p. 81). Boys and girls were also seen – and expected – to play different games; when a boy brought a doll to kindergarten it was seen out of the ordinary, although

the kindergarten teacher was careful not to show the boy in any way that his choice of toy would be somehow unorthodox (Ylitapio-Mäntylä, 2010, pp. 108-109). Girls are expected to play house, and have nurturing aspects in their actions, but caring is not expected from boys. It is thus no wonder that the same line of thinking seems to persist from decade to decade. However, like the example in Ylitapio-Mäntylä's (2010) study shows, attitudes might slowly be changing, as teachers are becoming more aware of the influence of their actions and attitudes to the gender specific behaviour of children.

Women are assumed to have empathy and care built into them, as if these traits would be innate and come naturally to them, but the same is not expected of men. Gilligan (1979) pointed out that even though relationships and care have become to be appreciated in the lives of men as well, the development of these traits in the life cycle of women have gone unstudied just because of this assumption of innateness (pp. 440-441). Rich (1976) referred to her own experience when arguing that the assumption of care and nurture being innate to women does not, in fact, hold true. She wrote: 'We learn, often through painful self-discipline and self-cauterization, those qualities which are supposed to be "innate" in us: patience, self-sacrifice, the willingness to repeat endlessly the small, routine chores of socializing a human being' (Rich, 1976, p. 37). Even though Rich, among others, challenged this myth already in the 1970's, this view of care as innate to women persists in public discussions and everyday practices even today. Hochschild (2012) drew attention to how the supposed innateness of care in women shows also in the labour market, for example as different expectations of emotional labour for men and women. Especially in fields related to caring, women are expected to have an emotional connection to the work. (Hochschild, 2012, pp. 150-151) Work related to caring is thus not considered merely in terms of *work*: a deeper connection to the work is assumed – if not in fact, expected – to exist.

Teaching is a profession which links to the notion of care quite strongly: a teacher is responsible for the wellbeing of the children in her or his classroom, supports their growth and learning, and also disciplines them when needed. All these aspects of the work require a certain level of care. Care in this regard is usually related to the traditional notion of care as a female domain, although different notions of care in the work of a teacher have been brought forward for example by Noddings (2005, 2003) (see also Laursen, 2004; Skinnari, 2000).

Female teachers are in an interesting position with regard to the assumption of care in schools, since societal expectations of care are associated more strongly to motherhood than fatherhood, and thus to women in general. This leads to a situation where female teachers, regardless of their personal inclinations, might face the assumption of care even more pointedly than their male colleagues. I will next examine the perceived differences in the professionalism of female and male teachers, and link this back to the societal assumptions of care.

5 Teacher professionalism

When studying the possible implications of having or not having children for a teacher's professional identity or working life, it is important to explore the different aspects of teacher professionalism. In this chapter I will first give background to the Finnish context in which teachers operate. In Finland teachers are highly educated professionals who enjoy a relatively high status. Still, the idea of teachers as professionals does not seem to prevent the assumption that having – or not having – children would somehow influence a teacher's professionalism: it was examples of these incidents that sparked my research interest in the first place. After describing the background of the Finnish context of teaching, I will outline the general views on the development of teacher professionalism, and then move on to examining the perceived differences in the professionalism of female and male teachers.

5.1 The Finnish context

Teachers in Finland hold a different position compared to teachers in many other countries. To be able to understand the nature of the teaching profession in Finland, it is important to look at how the teaching profession developed, the place teachers hold in society, and how the educational system works today. The fact that teachers in all levels of education – starting from kindergarten – have a university degree speaks for the view of the importance of education in the society. Teachers on different school levels work in very different situations however, and to be able to understand the contexts in which the respondents of this research work, the structure of the educational system and the nature of the teaching profession in different school levels are also described. Teaching is also a highly segregated field of work, and this aspect of the Finnish context will be examined as well.

The professionalisation of teaching in Finland has its roots in the University of Helsinki and its training of educated workforce for public offices in the 19th century. Secondary school teachers, who were initially considered as a part of the clergy, were a part of this group. The rise of the nationalist Fennocist movement gave rise to the teaching profession, as educating the common Finnish people was seen as important. (Konttinen, 1996, pp. 55-57) Simola pointed out that this link to the clergy as origins of the teaching profession explains why teaching was for a long time closely associated with the idea of calling and vo-

cation (as cited in Konttinen, 1996, p. 70). This idea of 'calling' still persists today, and is often offered as a reason for the relatively low salaries of teachers, reflecting the attitude that money would not be a relevant factor for teachers as they are fulfilling their 'calling'.

During the 19th century, university education became an important factor in separating between the classes, and having university education became a symbol of belonging to the gentry. The value Finnish people put on higher education still today can be seen to trace back to these times. (Konttinen, 1996, pp. 61-64) The elevation of primary school teachers to university education was initiated in 1968 by a committee rethinking the organisation of the comprehensive school. The committee recommended that all teachers from primary school level upwards should have a university degree in education. In 1971 the Teacher Training Act and following legislation transferred all teacher training to universities and to Master's degree level. (Kivinen & Rinne, 1996, pp. 86-87)

Today the Finnish educational system consists of basic education lasting nine years, of which first six are considered primary education, while the following three years make up lower secondary education. After completing basic education students can choose between upper secondary school or vocational school, and later continue to universities or universities of applied sciences if they wish to do so. In Finland all teachers in basic education, from kindergarten teachers to upper secondary teachers go through university education: kindergarten teachers have at least a Bachelor's degree while primary school teachers and lower and upper secondary teachers have a Master's degree.

This high level of education required from teachers combined with the notion of teachers as professionals creates an interesting situation where highly educated professionals work with young children in tasks which in some other countries are done with much shorter education. The tasks of a teacher link closely not only to education and learning, but also to upbringing and rearing. The primary school teacher does not only teach subjects, but is responsible for the holistic growth of the pupil as a person and as a member of society (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004, p. 12). Primary school teachers in Finland usually teach almost all of the subjects to their class. In general, the primary school teacher teaches her or his class for a year or more, although in many schools the first grades are taught by teachers specialised in early childhood education. Some primary school teachers acquire the qualifications to teach certain subjects in lower secondary or upper secondary level as well.

Subject teachers, who typically teach in lower secondary and upper secondary level and in adult education, usually have a Master's degree in the subject they teach, and often acquire the qualifications for teaching other subjects as well. Teaching qualifications are acquired through pedagogical studies and teaching practices at the university. Subject teachers in lower and upper secondary level teach their subject to multiple classes, and do not have a class of their own, although they can work as a homeroom teacher for a class. Typically subject teachers do not have extensive interaction with any class in the same way a primary school teacher does, for example.

5.2 Gender segregation in the teaching profession

Teacher education is a very popular field of education in Finland. It is also a very competitive field: only about 12 percent of applicants were accepted into programs for primary school teachers in 2010 (Finnish National Board of Education, 2010, p. 25). This reflects the position of teachers in the Finnish society, and the popularity of teacher education today shows that being a teacher is still a desired profession. Many countries suffer from low status of the teaching profession which is reflected in the lack of applicants, but this is not the case in Finland.

The teaching profession is, however, highly segregated by gender especially at the level of basic education. In a survey done for the Finnish National Board of Education [FNBE], in Finland in 2010 over 74 percent of primary school teachers and pre-primary teachers were women, but only 43 percent of the headmasters were female (FNBE, 2010, p. 40). The situation is similar in most European countries. A study by Eurydice compared the gender differences in education between different European countries, and found that in all European countries except for Turkey, female teachers were in the majority in primary school level: in some countries a striking 98 percent of teachers were female. The younger the children are, the more female teachers there are. Teachers in lower secondary level are still mostly female, although the difference is not as clear as in primary level. In upper secondary level differences have levelled out much more. (Eurydice, 2010, pp. 89-90)

A crucial aspect to examine is the division of tasks within the teaching profession, especially managing positions. This gender difference within a profession is called vertical segregation, and refers to what in public discussion is often referred to as the 'glass ceiling' (Eurydice, 2010, p. 14). In Bulgaria, France, Iceland, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden and the

United Kingdom, over 70 percent of headmasters in primary schools are women. (Eurydice, 2010, pp. 89-90) The difference here is quite striking: like mentioned before, in Finland the percentage of female headmasters is 43. The percentage of female teachers in these countries is higher than in Finland – ranging from Iceland's 79,9 percent to Bulgaria's 93,3 percent, but mostly between 80-85 percent. In Finland the percentage of female teachers is 74. Although the percentage of female teachers is higher in these countries than in Finland, it would not seem to explain why the difference in the percentage of female headmasters is so great. The headmasters in Finland have rather a high status and better salary; consequently there are more male than female headmasters – a situation which is reflected also at university level when comparing professors and other staff.

In Finland the same pattern exists in all levels of education. In upper secondary education 66 percent of teachers and headmasters were women, but again when looking only at headmasters, the percentage is 35. Although the percentage of male teachers grows when moving from primary school level to lower and upper secondary level, men dominate the managing positions in all levels of education. (FNBE, 2010, pp. 9-11) The type of contracts teachers have seems to be also segregated by gender to some extent. 74,4 percent of female teachers had a permanent contract, while for male teachers the percentage is 77,9. (ibid. p. 42) The difference here is not great, but still confirms the commonly held belief – at least among teacher students – that it is easier for male teachers to be employed. If this really is the case, it might be explained by male teachers' specialization in subjects; many specialize in physical education where boys and girls are usually separated, as well as technical work, which is a subject that is still stereotypically seen as boys' subject. Since most teachers in primary school level are female, teachers for boys' P.E. as well as technical work are often sought after.

In her study of German teachers, Horstkemper (1999) found that many teachers work part-time: 47 percent of teachers worked part-time in primary schools in 1998. A very large majority of these teachers were women. In Germany, working part-time has been considered one of the reasons for the lack of female teachers in managing positions (Horstkemper, 1999, p. 57). In Finland it is not common to work part-time as a teacher at least in primary school level, so the same argument does not seem to apply here. However, in Finland, as in so many other countries, women are still mostly responsible for taking care of the children and often stay at home taking care of their children for multiple years at a time despite vast possibilities for paternity leave. This could be seen as one of the rea-

sons why women do not hold managing positions as often as their male counterparts. Still, teaching is often seen as a 'woman-friendly' choice, as it allows for security while having children. It is considered quite common that after securing a permanent teaching job, many young women start their families as they do not need to fear for losing their job. Hilary Burgess pointed out in the 1980s that teaching was a good job for a woman, but a career for a man (as cited in Coffey & Delamont, 2000, p. 44).

Wood and Newton (2006) had similar results in their study of men and women in management, and concluded that a career in management still seems to be enabled by having someone at home taking care of the needs of the family – and usually this responsibility falls on the wife (Wood & Newton, 2006, p. 346). When this idea is translated into teaching, it would seem that many female teachers do have families, which might account for the lack of females in management in the field of teaching. Men do not experience this 'burden' of the family in their careers, as they usually have someone at home to take care of family responsibilities. The social understanding that women are – and should be – the most loyal to the institution of the family is still reflected in research and everyday life (Wood & Newton, 2006, p. 345). Some research has shown, however, that domestic and family responsibilities are starting to be divided more equally, and that the working life of both men and women is affected by family (Maume, 2006, p. 860). This development could pave the way for getting more women in management positions.

Gender is thus visible in the field of education in many ways, and the results and reasons are not necessarily straight-forward. For example, the distribution of female and male teachers in teaching different age groups might result from many things. The traditional notions of women taking care of children might influence career choices even on a subconscious level, and direct men away from choosing a career which involves working with young children. The choices of women can also be influenced by these traditional notions. In public discussion the lower pay and lower status of teaching at lower levels has also been speculated to be the reason for the lack of male teachers for example in kindergarten level. However, in the kindergarten level an explanation for the lack of male teachers can also result from the fact that it was only in 1968 that men were accepted into kindergarten teacher education programmes in Finland (Kinos & Laakkonen, 2005, p. 141) – which of course again reflects the traditional notion of care of young children being a female domain. Over forty years have passed since the first male kindergarten teacher graduated, so to me it seems quite surprising that these traditional notions still sit so tightly in society.

The association between women and teaching younger children undoubtedly links to care and nurture that young pupils need, and as the idea of care is still quite closely linked with women, it begs the question: are different things expected from male and female teachers? This connects to the idea of whether male and female teachers face different assumptions also with regard to having a family; whether having a family is considered a part of a female teacher's professionalism, but not a part of a male teacher's.

5.3 Development of professionalism

Before looking at the development of teacher professionalism, it is important to note that there has been much discussion about whether teachers can be considered professionals. This requires defining what professionalism is seen to consist of. Squires (1999), for example, identified seven different views on teacher professionalism: 1) teaching as a common sense activity – in which case training would be unnecessary; 2) teaching as an art – in which case training would be impossible as teaching is a gift; 3) teaching as a craft – whereby it could be analysed; 4) teaching as an applied science – which would see teaching as based on theoretical knowledge; 5) teaching as a system – in which case specific goals would be set and evaluated; 6) teaching as a reflective practice – in which case the work would be constantly developed through reflection; and 7) teaching as a competence – which would link it to the real-world context (pp. 3-17). Teaching, depending on one's perspective and the particular situation would seem to entail many of these aspects at the same time. Features of most of these views can be detected also in the data of this research.

According to Day (1999), the key proponents of teacher professionalism include *expert knowledge* of subject, pedagogy, and students, as well as having a degree of *autonomy* in the work. Day argued that even though teachers do not typically have autonomy over the standards of their profession – which is usually seen as a component of professionalism – they still have a degree of autonomy over their practice in the classroom. (Day, 1999, p. 5) In Finland teachers typically have quite a high degree of autonomy in their work, as the national core curriculum only provides a broad framework of learning objectives (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004), and it is up to the regions and schools to create a more detailed curriculum. Since the teachers often take part in the development of the curriculum in their own school, it could be seen to increase the level of autonomy in their work. Teachers also choose the teaching methods and materials with which they work, which can

again be seen to increase autonomy. Day, however, points out that there is a trend towards decreasing autonomy in the teaching profession, which can be seen to result from decreased resources and increased external monitoring (Day, 1999, pp. 6-7). The same trend is visible in Finland also, where resources are cut from education, and at the same time there is an increasing enthusiasm towards different ranking lists – the PISA results being a prime example of this.

The development of teacher professionalism has been discussed a lot, and the elements of the discussion vary depending on the context, but some common features can be found. Tahkokallio (2014) described the general view on teachers' professional development as a multifaceted phenomenon: it is usually seen to entail aspects of the life history and personal development of the teacher, the knowledge related to her or his subject area and the working environment, as well as the more general socio-political context in which she or he works (p. 3). Teacher professionalism is thus an area which consists of many different aspects, and the unique situation of each teacher shapes their professionalism in a different way.

Tahkokallio (2014) pointed out that professional development is increasingly seen as a continuous process, which is not necessarily a linear progression, but a more flexible process which can be influenced by multiple things (p. 9). Kelchtermans (2004) pointed out that sometimes the influential things can be events that trigger a change in a teacher's professionalism: a problematic situation challenges routine behaviour, and the teacher feels 'forced to react by reassessing certain ideas or opinions' (Kelchtermans, 2004, p. 225). Kelchtermans called these events *critical incidents* (ibid. p. 225).

Kelchtermans (2004) also pointed out the specific aspect of teaching compared to other professions: the personality of the teacher influences the work a lot, and cannot be separated from the work quite as easily as in other professions (p. 220). The development of professionalism is thus not only connected to subject knowledge, but indeed has a lot to do with one's development as a person as well. In the case of teachers of small children, the birth of one's own child has been seen as what could be considered a *critical incident* in the development of one's professionalism (Tahkokallio, 2014, p. 10). This is definitely a significant notion when thinking about teacher professionalism in general. Since a teacher's professionalism is quite closely tied to the teacher's personality, it would be fair to conclude that becoming a parent shapes one's personality, and thus also one's profes-

sionalism. Yet, what I would like to ask is whether having children really increases a teacher's professional competence.

In order to develop their professionalism, teachers need to be actively involved in the process. It is through reflection of one's own work, as well as in cooperation with colleagues that one is able to change and develop the premises on which one works. (Tahkokallio, 2014, p. 19) The importance of reflection for teacher professionalism has been emphasized by many researchers (e.g. Schön, 1987; Day, 1999; Kelchtermans, 2004).

5.4 Perceived differences between male and female professionalism

The perceived differences between the professionalism of female and male teachers have been studied quite a lot. The whole origins of the discussion on the 'feminisation' of the teaching profession are linked to the underlying assumption that there would be a difference in how women and men are as teachers. As I see it, the stereotypical assumptions of male and female professionalism persist also in the minds of teachers themselves. I will now examine these assumptions and the research conducted in the area more closely.

5.4.1 Feminisation of the teaching profession

As discussed before, in Finland, as in many other countries, female and male teachers are distributed unequally in different levels of education. Teaching is a largely female dominated field, especially in primary school. This has lead to discussions about the school system being more adapted to the needs of girls, and the call for increase in the number of male teachers has surfaced in public discussion time and time again. Finland is among few European countries where the feminisation of the teaching profession has been considered a problem also on a political level (Eurydice, 2010, p. 91). Lahelma (2000) pointed out that in Finland the discussion on the feminisation of the teaching profession was topical especially in the 1980s as a result of abolishing male quotas in primary teacher education in 1987. The discussion continued through the 1990s as the percentage of male teachers was decreasing. (Lahelma, 2000, pp. 173-174) The same discussion still persists today.

Horstkemper (1999) also examined the different attitudes towards feminisation of the teaching profession. Feminisation is often either seen as a negative thing for the teaching profession, which, in her words, 'prevents its development into a fully-qualified profes-

sion' (Horstkemper, 1999, p. 55). This position is opposed by one where female teachers are seen to bring more 'humane' aspects to education. Both of these positions assume that there is a difference in the way male and female teachers perceive and practice their profession. Horstkemper argued that this juxtaposition is unnecessary and even harmful, but that gender hierarchy should rather be examined and deconstructed. (ibid. p. 55)

Public discussion seems to brush over these kinds of arguments, and often shows the simplified view of female and male teachers, which relies heavily on traditional and stereotypical notions, and does not attempt to move beyond the gender dichotomy. The same can be seen also in the way teachers themselves see female and male professionalism. I will now examine the assumed 'masculine' and 'feminine' qualities of teachers, after which I will focus on whether female teachers can be seen to have some advantages in the profession.

5.4.2 The need for 'male' characteristics in schools

Lahelma (2000) studied Finnish lower secondary level students' perceptions of their teachers, and also the perceptions of the teachers themselves. Her research showed that teachers often take the supposed need for male teachers for granted, and justify it by the need for male role models in schools especially for boys, but for girls as well. Teachers argued that 'male characteristics' are needed in schools and the teachers' lounges, and having more men would raise the status of the profession. (Lahelma, 2000, pp. 173-174) Yet, when the students reflected on their relationship with their teachers, and the kinds of teachers they liked or disliked, the teacher's gender was not relevant. Both male and female students valued similar qualities in male and female teachers – such as fairness and sense of humour – but did not regard these traits as either 'male' or 'female', and found them in both male and female teachers. (ibid. p. 175)

The 'male characteristics' that teachers argued were needed in schools reflected their view of male teachers as more relaxed and having a better sense of humour. Quite contradictorily, however, the teachers also argued that male teachers would be needed in schools in conflict-situations. Female teachers were seen as more thorough and conscientious, but traits that were regarded 'female' often had negative connotations. (Lahelma, 2000, p. 175) Similar results have surfaced in other studies. The Finnish context was also studied by Levomäki and Keskinen (2005), who found that male kindergarten teachers considered

male teachers to be more relaxed, and to allow more freedom and choice for the children than female kindergarten teachers. Female kindergarten teachers saw the differences between male and female teachers along the same lines, but not as pronouncedly as the male teachers. (Levomäki & Keskinen, 2005, p. 120) However, Levomäki and Keskinen found in their study that male kindergarten teachers actually used more verbal and active management than female kindergarten teachers, which goes against the initial idea the teachers had about male teachers allowing more freedom for the children than female teachers (ibid. p. 126, 135). Similar results were also found in a German study by Flaake in the late 1980s on how male and female teachers viewed their profession. In this study, male teachers were found to put more weight on official school structures and focus more on competition and achievement than their female colleagues (as cited in Horstkemper, 1999, p. 60).

Despite some contrasting evidence, the myth of the relaxed male teacher still seems to be present everywhere. Lahelma (2000) suggested a reason for this; in her studies students liked teachers who were not too strict and did not give too much homework, but who still were competent teachers and made sure that the students did their work. Lahelma argued that it is often the teachers of less academic subjects who can be more flexible and not give much homework – and teachers of less academic subjects are often male. Lahelma also argued that this reflects the common situation at home, where fathers do the more 'fun' things with children whereas mothers make sure that the child has done her or his homework, for example. (Lahelma, 2000, pp.178-179)

5.4.3 The perceived advantages for female teachers

Kaiser saw that being socialised in a gender-specific way would give women an advantage in schools because teaching could be seen as a 'housework-like profession' (as cited in Horstkemper, 1999, p. 59). Händle also saw that taking care of the domestic sphere as well as the professional, would give women a 'double qualification' (as cited in Horstkemper, 1999, p. 59). That women are still socialized more into care behaviour still holds true today, but whether this would make them better teachers is debatable.

In Finland where teachers are highly educated professionals, it does not seem plausible to call teaching a 'housework-like profession'. With the high level of professionalism, it would also seem a contradiction to regard a role in the domestic sector as a 'qualification'. And further – would this apply to male teachers with families also, or would it still be as-

sumed that in their families, the domestic responsibilities would be on the wife? Studies show that this is often still the case (see for example Dempsey, 2002). It is important to note here that all these studies seem to take for granted that all families are heterosexual, and comprise of two parents. This assumption undermines the care work done by many single parent fathers, as well as fathers in same-sex relationships – not to mention heterosexual fathers who take on the responsibility of care equally to their spouse, or even more so.

The assumption of the more 'humane' approach to education of female teachers is backed up by some studies. Schümer, for example, analysed data from 1988 to find out what kind of ideas German male and female teachers had of their teaching (as cited in Horstkemper, 1998, pp. 58-59). The answers the teachers gave varied within both groups, and there was a lot of overlapping of attitudes and behaviour. Interestingly, age was more important a factor than gender in explaining the differences in answers. In general the analysis revealed that men tended to base their lessons more on the textbook whereas their female colleagues emphasized the social and emotional aspects of learning, but the differences were not great. The same analysis found that female teachers cooperated more with their colleagues than male teachers did. (as cited in Horstkemper, 1998, pp. 58-59) Similar results were found by Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher & James (2002) in their study of the perceptions American preservice teachers had of effective teachers. These findings seem to suggest that there might be some truth in the assumption of female teachers emphasising social aspects more in their work.

A study by Flaake from the late 1980s found that both male and female teachers considered the most important aspect of their work to be interaction with the students (as cited in Horstkemper, 1999, p. 60). Horstkemper (1999) saw the importance of relationships in teacher's work as one of the reasons for regarding 'feminine' traits as assets in teaching – building and taking care of relationships has traditionally been seen as a female domain, where feminine skills such as empathy play a big role (p. 60). Whether this kind of behaviour and skills are expected from female teachers, or indeed, from *all* teachers, is a good question. Teaching has moved on from the traditional way of emphasizing performance and competition to a more rounded development of the individual at least in Finland, so it could be argued that a more holistic way of teaching and meeting the individual pupil is expected from all teachers regardless of gender (cf. FNBE, 2004).

In Flaake's study, male teachers, even having themselves emphasised the role of relationships, still used the teacher's position of dominance to keep distance from the students, whereas female teachers' relationships to the students were more personal (as cited in Horstkemper, 1999, p. 60). This would again speak for female teachers' softer approach to teaching. This point is relevant also in the Finnish context, where relationships between teachers and students are comparatively informal – the teachers are often called by first name, and there is no formal dress code, for example. These things might seem trivial, but are evidence of the non-hierarchical nature of the Finnish educational system. The informality of teacher-pupil relations in Finland is visible especially in primary school. It could be argued that since the Finnish educational system does not support strict hierarchies or the teacher's position of dominance as strongly as the educational systems in some other countries, both male and female teachers would be able to form a close personal relationship with the students.

Although some studies do suggest that there are differences in how female and male teachers perceive their profession and how they conduct their work, in reality, the most important aspects of teaching seem to be the same for both female and male teachers, as was found for example by Flaake (as cited in Horstkemper, 1999, p. 60). Even though teachers seem to think there are differences in how male and female teachers work, and what they are like as teachers, these assumptions are not necessarily carried out in the everyday life of the school. Teachers are personalities, and 'female' and 'male' characteristics can be equally present in both male and female teachers. This links back to the idea of teacher professionalism as being very tightly connected to one's person.

The ideas on teacher professionalism and how it links to the traditional notions of gender stereotypes have now been examined. I will now move on to describing the methodological choices I have made, and then move on to describing the analysis of my data. The findings from the data are presented in chapter 8. In the final chapter of this thesis I will link the findings from my data back to this discussion on teacher professionalism, as well as the discourses on childlessness in society.

6 Methodological considerations

To get to the core of why not having children might be seen as influential for teacher professionalism, I collected written data from 12 female teachers who do not have children, and work in different school levels from kindergarten to upper secondary and adult education. After much consideration, I chose hermeneutic phenomenology to be the methodology of my research. As my data was in the form of written responses, I chose to analyse it with qualitative content analysis, and data-based content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009) in particular. In this chapter I will describe the journey of choosing my methodology, the way it shapes my research, and the background of my method.

6.1 On the methodological choices

The initial starting point for the research was to look at the work experiences of teachers who do not have children, and specifically whether they had ever experienced that their professional competence had been questioned because they were not parents. I wanted to collect the accounts of teachers' experiences as widely as possible in order to map out whether the phenomenon existed in the first place, since there is not much previous research on the topic. For this reason collecting written accounts seemed to be the best way forward. I assumed that the attitudes towards not having children could vary quite a lot depending on the area – I could imagine, that not having children might be a more controversial issue in more religious regions, for example. For this reason it was important not to focus only on a certain area.

Since the interest was on the experiences of teachers, it geared my research towards phenomenology with its focus on people's *lived experiences* (Creswell, 2007, p. 78). This restricted the collection of data to a certain extent, because I could not know whether the data collected by the writing instruction would be substantial enough to allow for phenomenological analysis. For this reason I decided to include the option for a follow-up interview in the initial data collection phase.

To test out my writing instruction, I conducted a small scale pilot study before sending out the actual writing invitation. The main part of the data was collected through a writing invitation in the Finnish Teachers' Magazine (Opettaja). After receiving the responses I realised I would have needed more extensive data to be able to do a thorough phenomenologi-

cal analysis of it. For this reason, I decided to focus on the written responses, but decided to do a qualitative content analysis on them, to see what teachers in different school levels had to say about the phenomenon. Hermeneutic phenomenology, however, still remained the wider methodology within which I placed my research.

This complex path during which I moved back and forth in my decisions regarding methods and the collection of data means that my ideas on the research have been influenced by many different paradigms. As the influence of the feminist framework on my own research was already discussed in chapter 3, I will now move on to describing the ontological and epistemological starting points for my research. I will then describe the features of hermeneutic phenomenology, and pay special attention to the role of the researcher, as it something that is considered central both in feminist research and in hermeneutic phenomenology. I will then move on to mapping out the process of qualitative content analysis.

6.2 Ontological and epistemological starting points

In social sciences, it is important to make the ontological and epistemological starting points for research visible. Drawing on previous theories on the topic, Cohen and Manion (1994) outline the different assumptions about social reality in terms of ontological and epistemological questions. They separate two opposing views of social reality in the lines of the nominalist-realist debate, where the nominalist view sees social reality as something which is created in the consciousness of individuals, whereas the realist view sees reality as something that exists outside individuals and is not dependent on them. (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 6) My own view of social reality follows the lines of the nominalist view.

Similar lines of thought hold also when thinking about the epistemological questions which have to do with the nature of knowledge; if we take it that reality is something that exists outside the human being, it follows that knowledge of this reality can be obtained by measuring it somehow. This would lead the researcher to be the objective observer who finds out the 'truth' that exists somewhere out there. This stance towards the nature of knowledge has also been called the positivist view. If, on the other hand, one sees reality as something that is constructed and negotiated between people, and has different meanings to each individual, the researcher recognises her or his own subjectivity, and rejects the idea that knowledge of the world could somehow be obtained objectively. (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 6) My view on knowledge has for years now been very strongly influenced by

feminist research and its starting points, and it is thus very anti-positivist and highly attuned to the influence of the researcher and the partiality of all knowledge.

The starting point for social sciences and research in the anti-positivist tradition is the same one which is emphasised in feminist research: the researcher cannot be an objective bystander, who just observes 'reality' as it happens (Cohen & Manion, 1994, 26). However, whereas anti-positivist research gives room for this kind of idea of science as well but links it to positivist research tradition, feminist research questions the ideas of 'objectivity' in any research – it is simply not possible to achieve, since researchers are all people, and their research is influenced by their own view of the world at all times. Even in the 'hard' sciences or natural sciences – which often are thought of as the world of 'facts' – these 'facts' are shaped by the ideas and preconceptions researchers have of the world. Martin (1991) for example pointed out how societal assumptions can sit so tightly that they end up distorting the results of research, and the illusion of objectivity can be used to strengthen stereotypes and promote certain value systems.

This links back to my questioning of the ideas of objectivity. In my view, in all research, the research process and the research subject cannot be separated from the surrounding society and the language to which it is tied. These factors shape the way the data is interpreted and the ways in which the results are presented. For this reason, complete 'objectivity' cannot ever be achieved. It can be strived for, however, but this should be done by bringing forth one's own assumptions and starting points for the research. This would allow for the interpretation of the research results in the light of the subjectivity of the researcher, not the objectivity.

6.3 Hermeneutic phenomenology

The methodological basis for my research is in hermeneutic phenomenology. Like mentioned before, phenomenology is interested in people's lived experiences (Creswell, 2007, p.78). However, experiences do not just *exist*, they are assigned meaning. It is this *meaning* that is under examination in phenomenology. One crucial aspect of phenomenology is that the relationship an individual has with the world is considered to be intentional – we give meanings to things all the time, and these meanings are shaped by our intentions, likings, beliefs, and so on. (Laine, 2001, p. 27)

6.3.1 Constructing meaning

People construct meanings every day as they negotiate through social situations. Cohen and Manion (1994) outlined how this everyday experience is crucial in phenomenology. Meanings are understood in our everyday life through the lenses we have developed throughout our lives, and thus social context becomes important in giving meaning to experiences. Cohen and Manion drew attention to how knowledge of the world is different for each individual, and our ability to understand other people and their view of the world varies depending on whether our realities meet. (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 30) This means that as a researcher I need to be attuned to the meanings the respondents give to their experiences, and not try to see them through my own experiences. This is where the idea of 'bracketing' – a concept central in phenomenology – comes in. The researcher brackets or puts aside the knowledge she or he thinks she or he has on the subject, as well as her or his attitudes, preconceptions and expectations, and tries to be open to the meanings manifested in the experiences (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004, pp. 147-148).

In my research it is not only about me as a researcher trying to understand the meanings the respondents give to their experiences – the respondents themselves have to negotiate between the meanings of their experiences in different contexts. Within the scope of the research topic, the respondents have to think about how two different worlds – personal and professional – come together in their own life. The focus of the research is on the professional and working life of the teachers, but they need look at it from the perspective of something very personal: the fact that they do not have children. Having or not having children is a topic that comes very close to an extremely personal area of our lives, and thinking about what kind of meanings this personal topic takes on in the professional environment is the crucial question here. The topic thus demands a lot not only from the researcher, but also from the respondents.

The meanings individuals assign to their experiences are not acquired in a vacuum; the way we give meaning to experiences is shaped by our social context (Laine, 2001, p. 28). This means that the context becomes very important in understanding the phenomenon under study. It links more broadly to the ideas of being a woman and a mother, and the societal assumptions regarding it. The context of being a teacher is a very important also; it is important to examine the different expectations facing teachers in general and female and male teachers in particular. The examination of the social context of teaching is also

interesting because it does not only touch upon the social context we live in now, but the social context we raise other people in as teachers.

6.3.2 Understanding and interpretation

Because phenomenology examines the meanings assigned to experiences, understanding and interpretation are crucial in this examination. Hermeneutics gives tools for the interpretation. (Laine, 2001, p. 29) Instead of striving for the 'correct' interpretation, I recognise that my interpretation is only one of many possible interpretations, and focus on giving the reader the tools to evaluate the interpretations I have made, and decide for her or himself whether they consider them to be valid.

Every researcher has some kind of understanding of the research topic already before conducting the research. This pre-understanding is what everyday life is based on. When the way the respondent experiences her or his everyday life is examined by the researcher, the researcher tries to go beyond this pre-understanding. In an ideal situation the respondent does not analyse her or his experiences, but just describes them as they were. The researcher then tries to make sense of the meanings given to the experiences by reflecting and conceptualising them. (Laine, 2001, p. 30)

I do not know whether it is possible for a respondent to only describe her or his experiences without analysing them or reflecting on them, since reflection takes place all the time when we think about our experiences – let alone describe them to someone else. There are also things that we choose not to share with the researcher, and this omission is also a result of reflection. The idea that the researcher would be able to make sense of the meanings better than the respondent is questionable in my view. In fact, as Lindseth and Norberg (2004) pointed out, since the respondent makes sense of her or his experiences through her or his own pre-understanding, and I, as a researcher, try to interpret the respondents' experiences through my pre-understanding, there is a lot of room for misunderstanding (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004, p. 152). Since my data was collected by written responses and I did not have further contact with the respondents, it was my responsibility as a researcher to constantly be on guard and check whether my initial understandings were valid, and look at my interpretations from the perspective of the questions: Is this what the respondent meant? Is this what they were trying to convey?

To minimise the chance of misinterpretation, in my writing instruction I already asked the respondents to reflect on whether not having children had been influential in their professional development and working life. I felt that this type of reflection was necessary because of the method of data collection; in an interview it would have been easier to have respondents just describe the different experiences they have had and I could have made inferences. I could have also asked the respondents to clarify the meanings and check the validity of my interpretations. This was not possible when collecting written responses. For this reason the instruction needed to have some guidelines in order to be approachable and maximise the chance of receiving meaningful responses.

Laine (2001) emphasised that it is the shared meanings of the researcher and the respondent that enable understanding (p. 31). I, however, have doubts about whether I can actually truly understand another person as our life experiences, beliefs and attitudes can be very different. Could it be that I, as someone who does not want to have children, understand someone's experiences related to not having children differently than a person who wants to have children, for example? This area of experience is very value-laden, and I cannot even be sure I understand the experiences of others even if I knew them very well. For this reason it is important to recognise that when the respondents' experiences are being interpreted by the researcher, the experiences stop being the sole property of the respondent. The researcher looks at the experiences through her or his 'filter', and thus makes them her or his own.

Understanding someone else's experiences still has to be strived for. The idea of stepping out of one's own perspective is crystallised in the idea of the hermeneutic circle, which consists of the 'dialogue' between the researcher and the data. The data gives start to initial interpretations, which are then examined and questioned by the researcher. After this initial phase, the researcher returns to the data and tries to see it with an open mind to discover new things that went unnoticed during the first phase of analysis, or which went against the initial interpretations. This process continues and deepens the understanding until the researcher feels that she or he has come to the most likely interpretation of what the respondent meant. (Laine, 2001, pp. 34-35) This is what I tried to achieve in my own analysis of the data as well. I went back to the data on multiple occasions during the process; first to make sure that I had gotten all the impressions from the data that I could, and then again in the later phases of analysis to make sure my interpretations were still the valid. This process is described in more detail in chapter 7.3. The researcher should employ self-criticism

throughout the research process and constantly evaluate and re-evaluate her or his assumptions. This task is then complemented by the reader's critical view, examining the choices and interpretations made by the researcher. For this reason I have described my process of analysis as clearly as possible, so that the reader could follow my thought-process, and evaluate the choices and interpretations I have made.

6.4 Qualitative content analysis

I chose to analyse my data using qualitative content analysis. The use of *qualitative* content analysis as opposed to using *quantitative* content analysis, as presented by Neuendorf (2002), for example, stems from the demands of my research questions and data: the goal of my research is to find out what kind of experiences teachers who do not have children have, and how they make meaning of these experiences, which requires a deeper interpretative analysis than quantitative content analysis could offer. My data is also quite limited in number, which again speaks for the use of qualitative content analysis in order to gain a deeper understanding of the data rather than making generalizations from a larger body of data.

Content analysis has been understood and used differently by different researchers. My view of content analysis is based on the ideas presented by Krippendorff (2004) on the general view of content analysis as a method, as well as Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) with regard to the specific steps of applying qualitative content analysis. Krippendorff (2004) outlined three main approaches to content analysis as a method, and the definition of *content* in each. The first approach regards content as something that is inherent to texts, and can be extracted from them. The second approach regards content as something that is created by the source of the text in relation to its intended recipient, not acknowledging the analyst's own influence in the reading of the text. The third approach regards content as something that is created in the reading and analysis of a text in a certain context. (Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 20-21) Krippendorff based his view of content analysis on the third approach, which is what I – giving the emphasis I place on the influence of the researcher – see as the basis of my take on content analysis as well. Although Krippendorff's take on content analysis is mostly based on the analysis of texts which are not produced specifically for the research – unlike in the case of my research – certain principles of Krippendorff's content analysis still apply to my research as well.

Krippendorff (2004) highlighted some important features of texts which are crucial to content analysis. In his definition, texts do not have qualities or meanings that would exist independently from readers and their interpretations. There is also no need for consensus over the different meanings different readers find in texts – the context of the reader as well as the context of the text influences the interpretations one makes. Analysts are not different in this regard: they look at texts in the light of their own context and the context of their research questions. The process of analysis is just more structured and systematic than the process of analysis done by an ordinary reader (Krippendorff, 2004, pp. 22-25). This view of content analysis and the emphasis on the influence of the researcher in interpreting the texts links to my view of the role of the researcher in general, as it highlights the fact that the interpretation of the analyst is only one of many possible interpretations.

For the actual process of analyzing my data, I will rely on the views of Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009). They listed some main phases of the analysis of data as follows: First the researcher searchers the data for things of interest in the light of the research questions. These findings are separated from the rest of the data, and are further categorized according to theme or type or any other classification the researcher sees fit. Coding can be used in the classification process to help in locating and comparing the findings. In the process of analysis the data is organised according to different themes, which can then be looked at in relation to one another. The researcher can also look at the data under each theme and try to find typical features. These 'typical' features can be used to make generalizations of certain themes. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, pp. 92-93) The goal of content analysis is to organise the data in meaningful ways in order to make inferences, and create a description of the phenomenon in question. The data is divided into pieces, conceptualised, and then reassembled to make up a logical whole. Analysis and interpretation is applied in all stages of the process. (ibid. p. 108)

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) and Krippendorff (2004) all discussed the different ways of making inferences from the data. These are often divided into three different types: making inductive inferences from the particular to the general; making deductive inferences from the general to the particular; and making abductive inferences from the particular to a particular of another kind, backed up by contributing conditions. Krippendorff saw making abductive inferences the most useful in content analysis, but Tuomi and Sarajärvi offered a different perspective for analysis: they based their view on Eskola's (2001; 2007) approach to analysis (as cited by Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 95). Eskola divided analysis of data

into three types: data-based analysis, theory-led analysis and theory-based analysis. In data-based analysis, the data is not analysed according to preset principles - the units of analysis rise from the data. Theory guides the analysis only so far that the methodological bases and principles are stated and guide the process of analysis. Although data-based analysis is strived for in the hermeneutical phenomenological tradition for example, Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) drew attention to the difficulties in this approach: since the starting point for every research is based on certain theories and assumptions, can any analysis truly rise from the data? The researcher always influences the analysis and makes inferences according to her or his own interests. This is why it is critically important that the researcher be open about her or his own assumptions and understandings of the phenomenon, and be conscious of these during the process of analysis as well. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 96)

In theory-led analysis the units of analysis are chosen from the data, but the analysis is guided by previous research and theory. The purpose of analysis is not to test a previous theory, however, but to expand on the theory. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, pp. 96-97) In the case of my research this approach was not possible, as there is no previous research on the topic of teachers who do not have children, and thus no ready concepts or units of analysis which I could have made use of in my own analysis. Theory-based analysis is most common in natural sciences, where a research is conducted to test out a known theory (ibid, p. 97). Although some aspects of theory-led analysis could have worked in my analysis of teacher professionalism, I decided to use data-based analysis in my research because the primary focus is on the experiences related to not having children.

Based on previous theorists, Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) described the process of data-based analysis. Firstly, the researcher finds expressions that link to the research interest in the data. These expressions are then simplified. These simplified expressions are then grouped together with similar expressions, forming categories. Tuomi and Sarajärvi consider the process of categorising the most crucial one, since this is where the researcher's interpretation shows: the researcher decides which expressions fall into the same – or different – category. These categories are then grouped together with similar categories, making new, more comprehensive categories. These main categories are then grouped together under one, all encompassing umbrella term. These different levels of categories are utilised when answering the research questions. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 101) I will go through these phases in the analysis of my own data.

Before the analysis, the researcher should have decided what will be the unit of analysis in her or his research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 110). Since my approach is hermeneutic phenomenology with its importance on the *meanings* given to their experiences by the participants, the natural unit of analysis for me is centred on meaning. My unit of analysis was thus any group of words or sentences that carry the meanings that I was looking for.

7 Data and analysis

7.1 Data collection

For my research I collected written responses from teachers who do not have children. I collected data in two ways: some of the data was collected via email in the spring of 2013 while testing my writing instruction in a pilot study, and the rest of the data was collected through a writing instruction in the Finnish Teacher's Magazine in early summer 2013 (see appendix A). The formulation of the writing instruction proved to be a very time consuming task, since I wanted to consider all the aspects and possible problems before sending it out. One of the challenges I faced was with wording and the concepts I was using – I did not want to talk about 'childless' teachers for its negative connotations – the use of the word child*less* implies a lack of something (Rich, 1976, p. 11). Finding a neutral way of referring to the issue was thus important for me as discussed in chapter 2.

The formulation of my writing instruction was influenced by Moustakas´s (1994) view on data collection in phenomenology: the participants are asked broad questions to get to their experiences; the kind of experiences they had had, and what kinds of situations or contexts these experiences were typically linked to. These guidelines helped me to shape my questions so that I would not narrow them down too much, or ask questions that were too specific and actually already assume a certain answer. I also wanted to get responses from teachers who felt that not having children had had no impact on their professional identity and had not had experiences of this phenomenon and thus might feel like they would give an 'empty' response. For this reason I broadened the scope of the research, and included questions about professionalism in general, so that all teachers who did not have children felt that there were questions for them to answer as well. I also felt that by first getting the teachers to think about their ideas on professionalism, it might be easier for them to continue to consider whether not having children had been influential for them in their work. I do not know whether it was because of this possibility to give a broad response to the topic, but I did get many responses where teachers said that they did not feel that not having children would have been influential for them in their profession.

Another aspect I considered was getting responses from both female and male teachers. I considered spelling out 'male and female teachers' in the title, so that it would catch the

attention of male teachers as well. It was my initial feeling that male teachers might not identify with having or not having children as strongly as female teachers might. In the end, I decided to simply use the title 'Are you a teacher who does not have children?' Whether it was because of the omission of the 'male' in the title, or for some other reason, I did not get any responses from male teachers. One reason for the lack of male respondents could also be that male teachers might not be as willing to write about such an intimate topic.

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) discussed the assumptions the researcher has about the participants of the research (p. 73). Since I collected my data via a writing instruction, I assumed that respondents can analyse and interpret the meanings they give to professionalism, and that they can analyse the experiences they have had with regard to their professional work and not having children. I chose the method of data collection to be a writing instruction because I wanted to give as much privacy and freedom of choice to the respondents as possible: this way the respondents could think about the topic in their own terms, and write about the topic the way they wanted to.

My data consists of 12 responses written by teachers who do not have children. This is not a problem when it comes to generalising the findings, as the purpose of qualitative research is not making generalisations to begin with (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 74). Instead, in the case of my research, the purpose is to understand a phenomenon, and thus it was important to find respondents who had experience of the studied phenomenon. The importance of choosing suitable informants was also emphasised by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009, p. 86). I looked for my informants by placing a writing instruction in a teachers' magazine, which comes to all teachers who are members of the Trade Union of Education in Finland. I saw this as the best channel to reach all kinds of teachers from different parts of the country. I wanted to make the writing instruction as open as possible in order to get responses from as many teachers as possible, therefore I did not make the writing instruction so detailed it would be a deterrent to possible respondents. For this reason the responses I got varied much in length, from a few sentences to many pages. In total the data consists of approximately 5000 words.

7.2 The respondents

Initially I received 13 responses, but one response was only a couple of sentences long and did not offer any meaningful information on the topic, so I decided to disqualify it. This left me with 12 responses. Four of the responses were gathered during the pilot study, while the rest came through the teachers' magazine. I decided to include the responses I got in the pilot study, because the instruction did not change almost at all: for two respondents the writing instruction was one sentence shorter than the actual writing instruction I used in the magazine. The other two respondents from the testing phase read the exact same writing instruction that was in the magazine (see appendix A).

The ages of the respondents varied between 29 and 62 years, although one respondent did not disclose her age. Most respondents were between 29 and 48 years of age. Five of the respondents were primary school teachers, while six were subject teachers. One respondent was a kindergarten teacher. Most of the respondents live in Southern Finland, although there were a few exceptions. The work-experience of the respondents varied from a couple of years to almost twenty years. The respondents worked in a wide range of teaching positions from pre-primary teaching to primary, lower and upper secondary education as well as adult education. The experiences of the respondents were thus very varied, but some patterns or common topics emerged.

It is important to keep in mind that not all the teachers in this study are voluntarily 'childless' and thus would have opted for that identity – some teachers might have identified with motherhood but for some reason could not have children, have not had children, or have lost their children. In this way some respondents might be at a crossroads of negotiating identities between involuntary and voluntary childlessness. Individual situations are often not as simple as theory would have us understand. Some of the teachers who participated in this study might still have children at some point in their lives, so they might look at the questions differently – not only as teachers who do not have children, but also as *potential* parents.

7.3 Steps of analysis

In my analysis, I followed the structure of analysis as suggested by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009, p. 109), which is portrayed in figure 1.

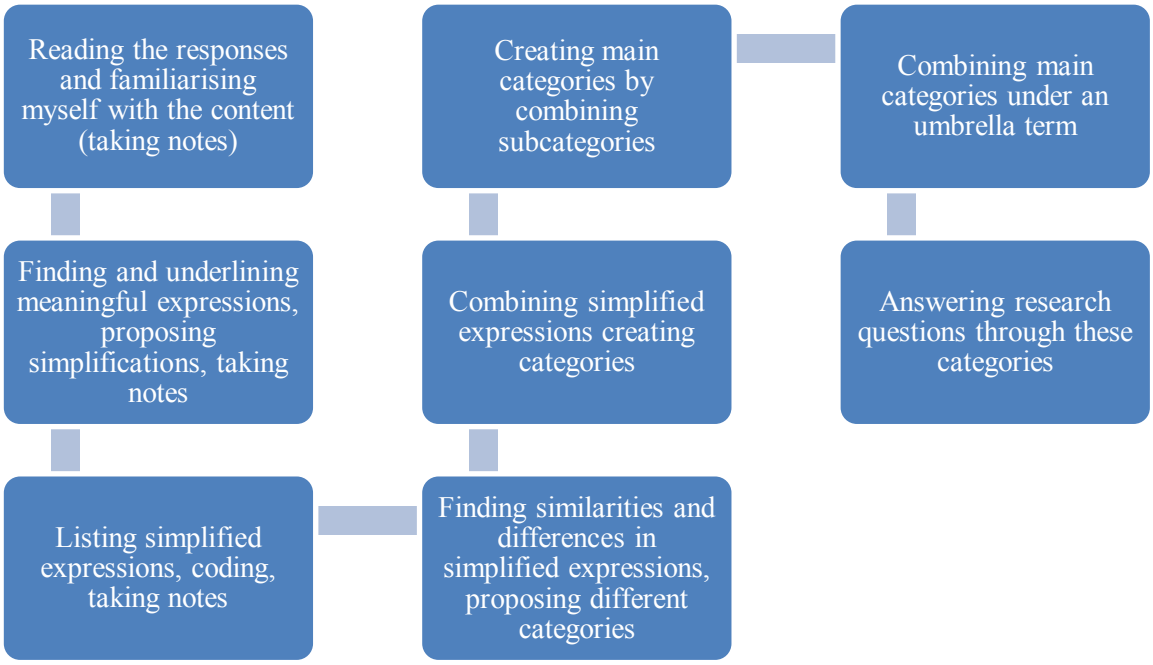

Figure 1 The process of analysis

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2002) stressed the importance of giving a detailed description of the steps taken during the research process, so that the reader can better understand how the researcher has come to the results (p. 138). This is also important in helping the reader judge the validity of the procedures and the choices made by the researcher, as was discussed in the previous section on methodological considerations. The researcher's own role in questioning one's own assumptions is also crucial for achieving understanding. This is enabled by analysing the data in phases, so the initial interpretations are not the ones that would automatically persist (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 113). My process of analysis is shown in figure 1, where each phase has been gone through and returned to multiple times for this exact reason. It is important to note that my process of analysis started already in spring 2013 when I started to receive the responses. I returned to the responses many times during autumn 2013, but started the systematic process of analysis in January 2014.

In the actual process of analysis I first printed out the individual responses and read them and familiarised myself with their content. I made notes on the margins about my initial impressions as I read through them. I wanted to familiarise myself with the content of the individual responses, but also to get an overall picture of the data as a whole. After reading all the responses, I read through them again very carefully, testing whether my initial im-

pressions still held, and paid attention to things I might have missed during the first reading. Again I made notes on the margins. After this close reading I printed the responses out again, this time for starting the actual analysis. The 'actual' analysis refers here to the phase where I started coding and following the steps of analysis as proposed by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) more closely.

I printed the responses out again. This time I assigned each response with a letter of the alphabet (A-L) to be able to break the data down to expressions. I also assigned a different colour code to the three main questions in my writing instruction (see Appendix A) to separate expressions related to each question in the data. I once again started a close reading of the responses, underlining expressions relevant to my research questions and used the colour coding for this process. During this process I also made suggestions for simplified expressions in the margins. All the while I was re-reading and rethinking my previous comments and notes, trying to see whether my interpretations were still valid.

After this third reading I went through the data one more time, and wrote down each simplified expression to a separate card, which I then coded with the colour referring to the question in the writing instruction, as well as the alphabetical code indicating the respondent. I wanted to be able to refer back to the original text in case I needed to check something later on. I chose to write down each expression to a separate card to be able to move them around manually as I tried to find similarities and differences in them. This enabled me to see them all at the same time and keep the bigger picture in my head the whole time. It could be compared to trying to put together a big puzzle – and not quite knowing where to start, or what the outcome would be.

The next step was to combine the similar expressions and create categories for them. The categorising process and the categories I created are described next. A more thorough description of the findings is provided in chapter 8.

7.4 Categorising of the data

My process of categorisation followed the steps proposed by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) as described previously. In the coding phase I had coded the expressions according to the three main questions in the writing instruction. In the categorising phase I decided to handle the two first questions on the construction of professionalism on a general and on a

personal level together, as many of the respondents did not distinguish between these two perspectives in their texts, but rather treated them as one question. The similarities in the responses regarding the two questions also suggested that treating them as a combined category was justified. Thus the analysis of my data is two-fold: first I analysed the aspects regarding the construction of professionalism, and then the aspects regarding the influence of not having children.

7.4.1 Construction of professionalism

I found 98 simplified expressions regarding the construction of professionalism in the data. I used the coded cards to group expressions together with similar expressions and thus began to form the categories. I tried many different groupings before settling with the ones I thought organised the data in the most meaningful way. I made notes during this process, and tried different names for the categories which I also wrote down on cards in order to better visualise them. This is also the phase where my initial coding which was done in Finnish started to change language, as I started to think of English translations for the names of the categories. I ended up dividing the data into 15 different categories (see Appendix B).

Translation of the concepts and expressions used is by no means a simple task. In the translation process one automatically makes selections, and chooses one translation over another. The reasons behind these choices can be manifold, and many even subconscious. The process of translation is one where the researcher emphasises certain things over others, which makes translation a fine act of balancing between what the respondent tried to say, how the researcher understands and interprets it, and what the languages in question allow. I have done all the translations myself, and am very aware of the problems in translation having studied translation and interpretation of the English language. I thus have some experience in translation, and this has made me attuned to the difficulties in it. But, since the whole process of analysis is about interpretation – even when done in one language only – I do not see the translations as an overwhelming problem. As the researcher works through the data, she or he by necessity 'translates' the respondents' expressions into her or his own. For the reader who understands both Finnish and English, I have included the initial categorising in both languages (see Appendices B & C). My style of

making notes and trying different names for categories is also visible in those initial categories.

After creating the 15 categories, I took the cards with the names of the categories and went through a similar process of organising and reorganising them in different groupings to find similarities in them. I created 4 main categories (see figure 2): 1) 'Formal' professionalism, 2) Experiences that shape, 3) Values, and 4) Personal involvement. These categories are grouped under the umbrella concept of 'Teachers' experiences of construction of professionalism'. After this, I started to work my way down from the main categories, and organise the findings within the categories by using the simplified expressions as a point of reference. I also used the coding to locate the exact expressions used by the respondents in their original responses – although the quotes I use are translations and cannot thus be considered completely 'original'. I will describe my findings more closely in chapter 8.

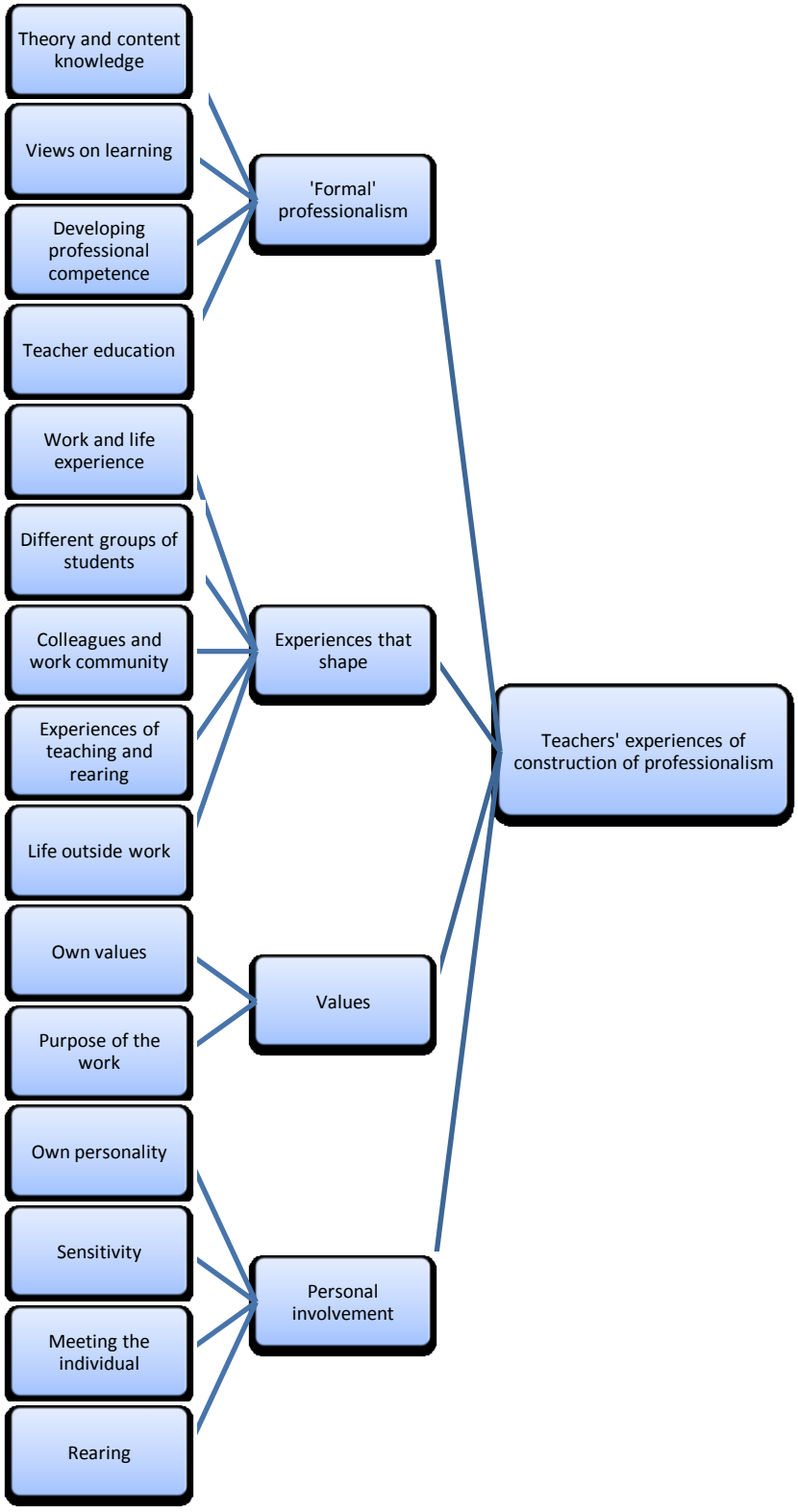

Figure 2 The 15 subcategories, 4 main categories and the umbrella category of construction of professionalism.

7.4.2 The significance of not having children

The process of categorising the second part of the data follows the same steps as the categorisation of the first part. I found 80 simplified expressions regarding the question of the influence of not having children in the respondents' work as teachers and for their professionalism. I divided the expressions into 10 different categories (see Appendix C) and then further into 3 main categories (see figure 3): 1) Influence on the work, 2) Feelings of insecurity or difference and 3) General attitudes towards not having children. The main categories are combined under the umbrella concept 'Experiences related to not having children'. The findings from these categories will be discussed in chapter 8.

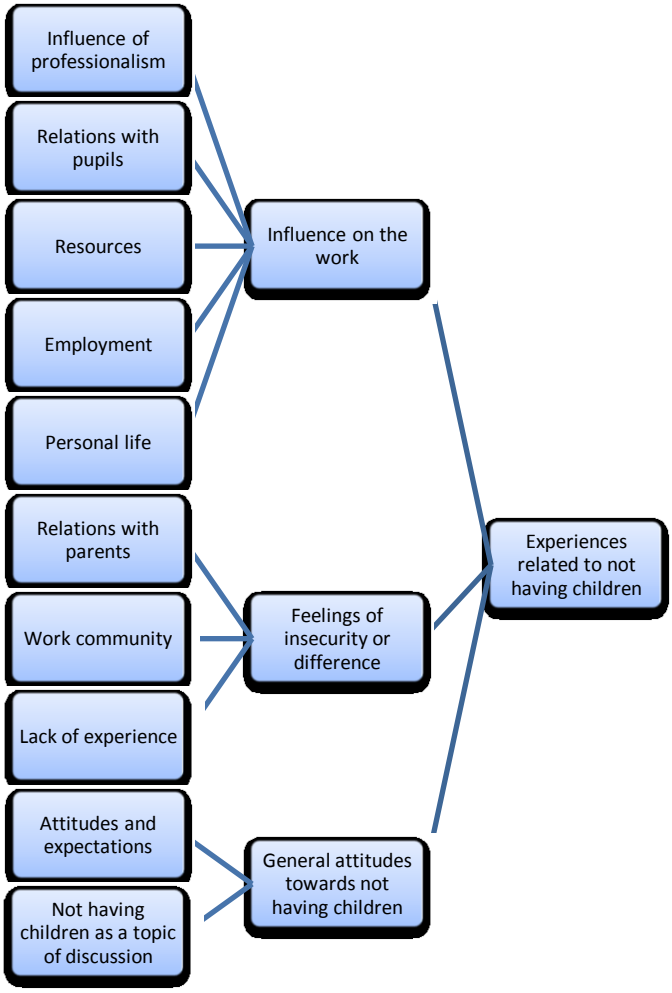

Figure 3 The 10 subcategories, 3 main categories and the umbrella category of experiences related to not having children.

8 Findings

The findings are presented in two parts. First, in chapter 8.1, I will present the findings regarding the question about the construction of professionalism. In chapter 8.2 I will present the findings regarding the teachers' experiences related to not having children. The findings will be linked to theoretical considerations in chapter 9.

8.1 Teachers' experiences of construction of professionalism

The first part of the data consisted of the expressions teachers who do not have children used in describing their experiences and views of the construction of professionalism on a personal as well as on a general level. This chapter is organised by main categories, and I discuss the findings under each subcategory.

8.1.1 'Formal' professionalism

Under the main category ''Formal' professionalism', are the subcategories of 1) Theory and content knowledge, 2) Views on learning, 3) Developing professional competence, and 4) Teacher education. These are all subcategories that deal with the more theory-related or intellectual aspects of the work. In this category the respondents conceptualised their experiences in the terms of their education and learning experiences, and saw themselves as professionals who consciously evaluate and develop their own competence. The 'formal' in the title is in quotation marks because it refers more to this type of intellectual work done by the teacher, rather than formal education only.

Theory and content knowledge

Some respondents considered theory and content knowledge to be an integral part of their professionalism. The importance of theory was seen as the basis for pedagogical knowledge and application, whereas the importance of content knowledge was more visible in subject teaching. The responses in this area were quite interesting; most respondents did not explicitly mention the importance of theories or content knowledge for their professionalism at all. Theory and content knowledge can be seen to be linked tightly with the

category of 'Teacher education' or the category of 'Developing professional competence', as in both categories the idea of theoretical knowledge is implied.

Views on learning

Views on learning also link to theoretical knowledge to some extent, although in the data it was represented more as a personal trait. One teacher wrote that one thing that has been of utmost importance in the development of her professionalism is '*the belief that every pupil has the ability to learn in some way'*. She also linked this to the general view of construction of professionalism, where she mentioned *'ideas on learning, knowledge, and of the human being'* as shaping how a teacher's professionalism develops. These fundamental ideas on how a teacher perceives the world are reflected in the responses of the other teachers as well – although not as explicitly. The ideas on how the teacher perceives the pupils for example, can be seen to be directly reflected in the category of 'Meeting the individual' (see chapter 8.1.4 on personal involvement).

Views on learning were not discussed by most respondents, which is rather interesting. The views on how people learn are at the core of teaching – when planning a lesson or any other kind of learning activity the teacher bases the activities on some model of learning whether this is a conscious contemplation or not. The lack of references to the ideas on learning in the data could reflect the fact that these assumptions might have become so internalised and automatic that they do not surface immediately when thinking about one's professionalism.

Developing professional competence

In the category of 'Developing professional competence', two different approaches were visible. Some respondents wrote about actively developing their professional competence, while in some responses more emphasis was put on more formal ways of developing professional competence: there were mentions of in-service training, supplementary courses and the like. Some respondents mentioned both aspects, and many remarked something along the lines that professionalism also continuously develops throughout one's career, almost automatically through experience. Some respondents also mentioned the changing demands of the work as propelling professional development. Developing one's professionalism was seen not only as something one wants to do in the job, but also as something

necessary for being able to do the job. The differences in the emphasis came through already in the choice of words; some respondents wrote about *developing* their competence while some wrote about the *development* of competence (in Finnish 'kehittäminen' cf. 'kehittyminen'). Many respondents expressed the idea that '*a teacher's professional development is never complete'*.

The respondents who put an emphasis in actively developing one's own competence referred, for example, to having to work very hard especially early in their career to be able to feel confident in teaching a class or meeting parents. The development of working skills was seen to develop other aspects of professionalism as well – a respondent wrote that after becoming more able to see the '*big picture'*, she has been able to develop her vision of the purpose of education, and develop the planning and evaluation of her work. This idea of consciously developing one's own work and being critical of one's own actions and competence came through in other responses as well. It seems that these teachers continuously employ self-criticism and try to become better at their work. This can have its downsides as well however, as became clear from the response of a teacher who wrote that her own enthusiastic attitude about developing her own professionalism and becoming better at her work lead her to work very hard, and caused a burn-out. Similar experiences were shared by other respondents as well. In the data this seemed to link to the holistic nature of the teaching profession, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 8.1.4 on 'Personal involvement'.

The respondents who put more emphasis on the 'formal' side of professional development wrote about the influence of in-service training or other kinds of courses, or the acquisition of new skills in developing their competence. Some respondents had studied further and acquired new qualifications for example in special education. In-service training and other forms of education were seen to give inspiration and new ideas for the work, as well as provide an opportunity to expand on one's professional skills. What the views on the development of professionalism had in common was that a teacher was seen to be able to develop her or his own professionalism in multiple ways in everyday life and through special training, and this development is something that will continue throughout one's career.

Teacher education

Many of the respondents also mentioned their education as influential in the construction of their professionalism. As the respondents have different type of education depending on whether they are kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers or subject teachers, they have had a different combination of subject studies and pedagogical studies during their education. For the purpose of clarity I will refer to all this education as 'teacher education', as all of the respondents have gone through some education which consists of teacher education.

Although many of the respondents mentioned teacher education as being a part of the construction of their professionalism, many also point out that it was only the *beginning* for their professional development. Many of the respondents wrote that while teacher education gave tools for teaching and the actual organising and conducting a lesson, teacher education did not prepare for the other aspects of the work of a teacher – the increasing responsibility for rearing or the social aspects of the work of a teacher, such as home-school cooperation and multiprofessional cooperation. One respondent even wrote that she sometimes wished that she could *'just concentrate on teaching'*. Other respondents pointed out the lack of preparation in teacher education for the rearing responsibility of the teacher.

While most respondents who mentioned teacher education did see the influence of education for their teaching abilities, one respondent also described the time of her studies as being more influential for her personal growth, and providing the opportunity to really reflect on her values and the kind of teacher she wants to be. This experience of contemplating teacherhood and the kind of teacher one wants to be during teacher education studies was shared by another respondent as well. All in all it could be said that the respondents had experienced their studies as a time for growing and acquiring new skills for teaching, but they did not feel that their education provided them with all the skills for the work, but rather that their professionalism started to be constructed mostly in working life. This was expressed quite pointedly by a respondent who wrote that her studies gave the basis for the construction of her professionalism, and she *'imagined being well prepared for working life, but the illusions shattered once she started working and had to start everything almost from scratch'*.

8.1.2 Experiences that shape

The main category 'Experiences that shape' consists of many different aspects. At first I considered naming the category according to some aspect of social relations, but realised this concept was not broad enough – not all the aspects described by the respondents as shaping their professionalism had to do with social contacts. This was the thought that gave the name to the category: it was about *experiences that had shaped* the respondents as teachers. Under this main concept are the subcategories of 1) Work and life experience, 2) Different classes, 3) Colleagues and work community, 4) Experiences of teaching and rearing, and 5) Life outside work.

Work and life experience

The category of 'Work and life experience' is the biggest one under the umbrella category 'Teachers' experiences of construction of professionalism' as expressions related to work or life experience were used by 8 out of 12 respondents. Work experience was mentioned as the most influential thing in the construction of their professionalism by most respondents. Many remarked that the actual development of their professionalism only started once they started working. One respondent described the work as '*shaping how you will become as a teacher'*. Many also emphasised the role of work experience in building confidence in oneself as a teacher, and becoming more secure in one's actions and choices. One respondent described it as constructing professionalism by '*doing the job'*. What came through in the responses was the idea that one constructs one's professionalism every day by learning on the job.

Some respondents also emphasised the influence of life experience and age. One respondent wrote about how her life experiences have shaped her as a person, and thus shaped the way she is as a teacher as well. She also wrote that her own versatile life experiences help her in empathising with the different life situations of her students. Like is seen in the rest of the data also, being a teacher is something that is seen very holistically (see chapter 8.1.4 on personal involvement) and as something that has to do with one's personality. Thus it is quite natural that life experiences are seen as something important to one's professional identity also.

Different groups of students

The influence of teaching different groups of students was also expressed many times in the data. The relationships between the pupils/students and the teacher was seen as a two-way street: the pupils also taught the teacher. The reference to experiences with different classes in shaping the professionalism of the teacher did not only include the pupils or the students, but also their parents or guardians – one respondent mentioned having discussions with parents about views on rearing, for example. The emphasis on teaching *different* kinds of classes was visible in the data. The teaching experience is always different with each class; one respondent described the shock of moving from teaching a specialised class for several years to teaching a first grade – suddenly almost all the aspects of the work were new. She called this transition a '*leap*'.

Two of the respondents described the importance of teaching one's own class from interesting perspectives: one recalled the amazing feeling of having her own class for the first time, and having the pedagogical freedom to teach them as she wished – she described this as a '*wonderful opportunity to grow professionally'*. Another respondent who is a subject teacher and thus does not have one class of her own described how the experience of being a homeroom teacher and a tutor teacher had strengthened her identity as a teacher. Having a class of one's own or having similar responsibilities can thus be seen as an important experience in identifying with being a teacher.

Colleagues and work community

Many respondents also emphasised the influence of their colleagues and different work communities in the construction of their professionalism. As mentioned previously in the section on teacher education, the social aspect of teaching was considered something that one only learns in the work. This again emphasises the importance of social relations in the work of a teacher. Discussions with colleagues as well as working together more closely with a colleague were among the things that were mentioned in the data. One respondent also mentioned the negative impact of a work community which does not offer support in the work.

Colleagues were seen as important in many ways. Learning from one's colleagues and discussing different aspects of the work with them was seen as important. Some respondents

also mentioned working closely together with a colleague, for example when teaching parallel classes, as a great resource and learning opportunity. One respondent described this as being very important for her especially in the start of her career when teaching her first class, but mentioned that the colleague had also told her that she had gotten a lot of energy from a newly graduated teacher. This example shows that cooperation with colleagues is valuable for all teachers, not just early in the career.

The importance of the work community especially for a newly graduated teacher was emphasised in some responses. The work community was seen as valuable in teaching the practicalities of the new environment and the work to a new teacher. Mental support along with practical support was seen as valuable especially for a new teacher – it was seen as important that even a newly graduated teacher feels appreciated and supported in the work community. *Different* work communities with different atmospheres vary greatly as working environments, and thus they also teach a lot about the work. One respondent recalled having negative experiences of a work community where the atmosphere was not good and she did not get to know her colleagues. The respondent felt that this was a hindrance in the construction of her professional identity. She wrote that her professional identity started to fully develop only after she switched her workplace.

Experiences of teaching and rearing

A few of the respondents mentioned their own experiences of teaching or the teachers they had had as something that had shaped the way they are as teachers, or what they consider a good teacher to be like. One respondent drew attention to the fact that her own upbringing has influenced her views especially on rearing. This is probably true for many respondents although they did not say so explicitly, as being a teacher was seen by most respondents as something that links to the way you are as a person. Some respondents also connected the way in which one looks at the world to the way one is as a teacher. From this respect it is quite a safe assumption that most respondents would agree that their own upbringing has shaped their personalities, and thus the way they are as teachers.

The respondents who mentioned experiences of teachers or successful teaching situations as something that had shaped their teacherhood described these experiences quite vividly – it seemed like the situations had made a lasting impression on them. One respondent also pointed out that memories of one's own teachers are something most people probably

have, and that these memories link to the way we see good or bad teaching. In fact, while some respondents described memories of good teachers, some remembered teachers they *did not* want to be like. Experiences of one's own teachers thus act as a reference point; there are teachers we strive to be like, and there are those we definitely do not want to be like. One respondent described a wonderful teacher as a reason why she herself wanted to become a teacher in the first place.

Life outside work

The respondents described a variety of different things also outside their work as having had an impact on their professional development. The profession of a teacher is interesting in the respect that all of your personal capabilities can be an asset in your work also. Especially in Finland, where the teacher has a lot of freedom in deciding how she or he teaches, personal interests can often be made use of. One respondent touched upon this aspect of the work when she described her hobbies as being useful in her work and professional development. She wrote that she could develop her personal characteristics through her hobbies, and thus develop herself as a teacher as well. The example she gave was the development of her creativity. A similar line of thought was also expressed by a respondent who described the influence of work experience from other fields for her professional competence as a teacher. This again underlines the versatility of the teaching profession, and the many abilities that can be utilised in it.

Other things that respondents mentioned were the experiences with, and contact to, young people outside school – the interaction with young people outside work was seen to give tools for understanding their lives better as a teacher also. Life outside school can influence the work negatively as well. One respondent described how a difficult situation in her own life reflected in her work – she put all her energy in her work and ended up working too conscientiously, which later resulted in a burn-out. This experience again links to the idea of personal involvement (see chapter 8.1.4) and teaching being a profession that requires a lot from the teacher. Being a teacher was often presented in the data as a very complete way of being, and thus can easily lead to the immersion of oneself in the work.

8.1.3 Values

The importance of values came through in many of the responses, sometimes explicitly, but even more often implicitly. As mentioned before, teaching was seen by the respondents as work which involves the whole personality of the teacher, and thus cannot be separated from how the teacher is as a person. Values – whether personal or more connected to the work – thus become central in being a teacher. Under the main category of values are the categories of 1) Own values, and 2) Purpose of the work.

Own values

Many respondents wrote about how their own values influence the way they are as teachers. These values were discussed in relation to many different things. Many respondents expressed the importance of active contemplation of their own values, especially with regard to how they want to be as teachers, the kinds of values they want to promote in their work, and the values they want to live by in their work. Some respondents linked this period of contemplation especially to teacher education or further education.

The contemplation of values is not always only a private exercise, however. One respondent wrote that the subject she teaches requires a lot of contemplation of values, and cannot be separated from her own personality and worldview. This is an interesting situation, because most subjects can probably be taught without the subject touching too much upon the teacher's personal values and beliefs. The way one is as a teacher of course touches upon values, but the subject usually does not – at least not so expressively.

Purpose of the work

Many respondents also mentioned that the way they see the purpose of their work has been influential in the construction of their professionalism. One respondent wrote that *'it is her job as a professional to help pupils learn'*. She saw this as the key aspect in her work, which she connected both to learning goals and to practicing studying skills. She also mentioned rearing as one of the key purposes of the work.

The importance of rearing was mentioned by many respondents, and it was seen as one of the most important aspects of being a teacher. One respondent described the development of her professionalism in this regard – she wrote that in the beginning of her career she

focused more on the learning goals and content knowledge, but with time, the emphasis in her work switched more to rearing and helping students develop abilities which will help them cope in *'real life'*. This respondent still saw learning goals and content knowledge as important, but the importance of rearing had taken priority.

One respondent saw the contemplation of the wider *meaning* or *purpose* of her work as important for her professionalism. She linked this to her views on the meaning or purpose of life in general, which for her was the maximising of good. This was something she considered to guide all her actions as a teacher from how she interacted with her class to how she planned her work, to how she saw the profession in general. It was this idea of *guiding principles* in her own life that guided her professional life as well.

8.1.4 Personal involvement

The idea that the teacher is present in her work completely and utterly came across in many of the responses. A teacher's personality was seen as a tool in her or his work, and there was a certain demand of authenticity and genuine involvement in the work. Being a teacher was described almost as a *way of being*, which makes the division between the personal and the professional quite hard to distinguish. Many different aspects of professionalism were discussed with relation to how a teacher should be, and how a teacher should interact with her or his pupils. I contemplated different names for the category, which had mostly to do with social interaction or human relations, but decided on 'personal involvement', because the fundamental assumption behind all aspects of interaction seemed to be that a teacher needs to be genuinely involved and invested in the work. Under the main category of 'Personal Involvement' are the subcategories 1) Own personality, 2) Sensitivity, 3) Meeting the individual, and 4) Rearing.

Own personality

What came across from the responses was the strong emphasis on how being a teacher has a lot to do with one's personality and way of being. Two different perspectives emerged from the data in this regard: firstly, the importance of one's personality and personal characteristics, and secondly, the need for 'giving' in the job. Teachers were expected to commit fully to the job, and be willing to invest a lot in it.

The importance of one's personality was emphasised in many of the responses. Like discussed before, teaching is a profession which allows for a lot of personal, and it is often seen that teachers can only work through their own persona – one's own persona could be seen as the most useful tool in the profession. This same idea was reflected in the data: respondents emphasised the importance of personal qualities such as sense of justice and sympathy. Good self-esteem was also mentioned as a personality trait which is useful in the work. Self-knowledge was also seen as important, and as something that could be developed in order to develop professionally as well. The importance of one's own attitudes and feelings both *towards* the job and *in* the job were mentioned as well. All in all being a teacher was seen as something that connects to one's own personality, identity, and personal life very strongly.

What was also common in the responses was the idea that a teacher should commit to the work fully. One respondent wrote that '*you cannot do the job if you don't really want to do it, or do it haphazardly'*. Another respondent wrote that keeping the joy in the work is crucial, and that '*a gloomy teaching robot is a travesty of professionalism'*. These types of comments reflect the demands towards the teacher: a teacher is expected to give a lot from her/himself in the job, and do the job with joy and love. Teaching thus demands a lot more personally than many other jobs. One respondent referred to this when writing about the importance of finding a balance between the demands of the work and taking care of one's own wellbeing. This seems to be very important in the light of the data as well, as more than one respondent described their experiences of being burned out in the job. One respondent summarised the ideas about teaching presented in the data quite well when she wrote that '*the most important thing in the work is the genuine will to do it'*.

Sensitivity

Many of the responses emphasise the need for a teacher to be sensitive in many different aspects. One of the most common aspects that surfaced with regard to this was the need for people skills in social interactions. These included the ability to relate to people and put oneself in their position, as well as the ability to '*read between the lines'*. This was seen as important in dealing with the pupils or students: a teacher needs to sense whether the pupils are doing alright to be able to support their wellbeing.

The need for being able to 'read between the lines' was also considered important when dealing with parents: one respondent described this as '*being attuned to things that might be behind a parent's answers, and try to get to the core of the issue somehow'*. All in all it was seen as important that the teacher is sensitive towards issues that might be troubling pupils and parents alike, and is empathetic towards them. Sensitivity and empathy were also considered to be things that can be developed and practiced.

Meeting the individual

Another topic that surfaced in many responses in connection to empathy and being able to put oneself in another's position was the idea of meeting each pupil as an individual. Listening was something that many respondents emphasised in this regard. It was considered important the teacher is actually present in the situations and listens to the pupil. The importance of listening was also mentioned with regard to parents. Listening was linked to the idea of showing respect towards parents and pupils, as well as a way of knowing more about the pupils and being able to do the job better.

The idea of seeing one's pupils as individuals was also reflected in the idea of *knowing* one's pupils. Knowing one's pupils was something that was regarded as affecting the everyday work tremendously; when the pupils and the teacher all know each other and each other's way of working, teaching and learning are enabled in an effective way. However, one respondent emphasised the importance of drawing lines in the interaction with the pupils: she was clear not to ask personal things from the pupils even though she *'took an interest in them as people*'. This respondent saw the need for teacher to take a personal interest in the pupils, but still remember the role of the teacher.

Many respondents emphasised the importance of 'people skills' with regard to knowledge of human nature. These skills were seen as something that develop during time and experience with different people and different individuals. One respondent wrote that '*the development of my knowledge of human nature helps me to develop as a teacher and a professional also'*.

Rearing

Rearing was also seen as one aspect of interpersonal relations with the pupils. Rearing (in Finnish *kasvatus*) can be seen to entail many things; it links to discipline and rules, but also to a larger view of supporting the pupils in their growth. The teacher is responsible for the wellbeing of the pupils, as well as guiding them and supporting them both academically as well as personally.

Some respondents pointed out the fact that rearing seems to have increasingly become the responsibility of the school instead of being the responsibility of the home, and this was seen as a new challenge for teachers as was discussed also in the responses regarding the influence of teacher education in section 8.1.1. Many respondents considered rearing as one of the most important tasks of the teacher, but did not specify what their ideas on rearing are, or how they see rearing in practice. One respondent saw rearing as being based on '*common sense'*. Another respondent wrote that her views on rearing are based on the rearing and upbringing she herself had experienced when growing up, which might link to the same idea of experiencing rearing as something based on 'common sense'. Of course there is no agreement on what this 'common sense' is, and it probably means very different things to different people depending on their experiences – it would have thus been interesting to find out more about the kinds of thoughts or notions teachers had of rearing. Now it remains more a universally accepted idea, but which might mean very different things to different people.

8.2 Experiences related to not having children

The second part of the data consisted of the expressions teachers who do not have children used in describing their experiences as teachers. The teachers described many different kinds of experiences of how not having children had – or had not – influenced their work as teachers. Although most teachers described their professionalism as not having been influenced by the fact that they did not have children, all still shared some perspectives on how not having children had still been influential in their working life in different ways. This section is again organised by main categories, and I discuss the findings under each subcategory, just as in the previous section.

One of the things I needed to consider after receiving the responses was how I defined 'not having children'. I had considered this aspect already before when trying to describe who were suitable respondents for my research purposes. I had been asked questions about whether gay teachers, or teachers with adopted children, or teachers who were step-parents could take part in my research, and I had always responded that as long as a teacher does not have children or regard her/himself as a parent, they can take part. One of the responses I received, however, was from a teacher who had had children, but whose children had died at a young age. This situation required considering what 'having children' or 'parenting' is. It cannot be defined by having given birth, as fathers do not give birth and still are parents, and some women may give birth but not be parents for many different reasons. Did raising children have something to do with it? Could someone who has taken care of or practically raised their younger siblings considered to be parent? (See Rich, 1976). After contemplating on the issue, I decided that I would of course include this response, since the respondent defined herself as 'not having children'. For the purpose of this research it was most important that the teachers themselves identified with 'not having children' and looked at their work experiences and professional identity from that perspective.

8.2.1 Influence on the work

The respondents described many different experiences regarding being a teacher who does not have children. Many described actual experiences in the work, but all also contemplated their own ideas on how they felt about being a teacher who does not have children, and how they saw the possible effects of this in their work. Some mentioned that this was a difficult aspect of professionalism or teaching to consider, as they did not have experiences of being a teacher who *has* children – how would they know whether they would be different as teachers if they did? These respondents mentioned the difficulty of being sure whether something is the result of not having children or whether it just comes down to personality. These considerations are very valid, and show that since having children is a very holistic experience that influences not only one's life situation but often also one's personality, it is difficult to predict its impact on being a teacher – which also has been described in personal and holistic terms. Under the main category of 'Influence on the work' are the subcategories of 1) Influence on professionalism, 2) Relations with pupils, 3) Resources, 4) Employment, and 5) Personal life.

Influence on professionalism

Most of the respondents wrote that they did not feel that not having children had had an impact on their professionalism – one respondent wrote that she felt that the qualities important for professionalism are shared by all teachers regardless of whether or not they have children. One respondent did write that the fact that she did not have children had been influential in shaping her personality, and by implication the way she is as a teacher as well. Another respondent wrote that she has children and young people in her life although they are not her own, and felt that this contact to children helped her to '*keep track'* of what is happening in the lives of young people.

The wordings respondents used when describing the influence of not having children were significant; some wrote that they did not feel like their not having children was a *problem* in their work; some wrote that it had not been *meaningful* in their work; and one respondent even wrote that not having children '*had not been meaningful in any way whatsoever'*. The tone in which the teachers wrote about the issue seemed to be loaded with meanings. These meanings will be discussed in more detail in the section 8.2.3 about general attitudes towards not having children.

Relations with pupils

Relations with pupils were something that was visible in the data with regard to the influence of not having children. Some respondents drew attention to the fact that there are a lot of differences in teaching young children compared to teaching youngsters. A respondent who is a subject teacher described some difficulties in teaching primary-school-aged children as she mostly taught in lower and upper secondary level. She wrote that she is sometimes uncertain in dealing with practical issues with primary school children; she does not know when to call the parents for example, or does not worry if a pupil is absent from class. The respondent wrote that she had later realised that primary school teachers seem to look after the children more – she felt that her carefree attitude might be because she is not used to teaching in primary school level, or the result of not having children.

One respondent also wrote that because she has not had experience with young children, she has had to study and educate herself on the needs of a small child. She emphasised both the physical and psychological needs of a child from this perspective. The respondent

wrote that she was surprised by '*the physicality of a small child'* which was something she felt she had not been prepared for in her education.

Many respondents speculated on how their not having children might show in their everyday work. Interestingly, most of them referred to things related to discipline and classroom management: some felt that they would be stricter if they were parents, while some felt the exact opposite – that because they did not have children they were stricter and gave more responsibility to the pupils. One respondent mentioned that she felt she was more *impartial* in issues regarding rearing because she did not '*have a basis for comparison at home*'. She wrote that she felt like sometimes her colleagues with children expected different things from their own children compared to the children they taught. Also when contemplating on these issues, respondents expressed the ambiguity in knowing whether they behave or think in a certain way because they do not have children, or because of some other reason.

Resources

Many respondents wrote about the positive aspects of not having children for their work. This was something that took be my surprise when I first read the responses. It made me realise that I had had the preconception that not having children would be regarded mainly in negative terms. This will be discussed further in section 8.2.3 on general attitudes towards not having children.

Most of the comments on the positive aspects of not having children regarded having more time and energy for the work. The respondents mentioned things such as having more time for themselves to relax and unwind, getting more sleep, not having to miss work because of a sick child, and not having certain worries related to having children. One respondent wrote that not having children of her own allowed her to '*focus on the growth of her pupils'*.

Some respondents also wrote that they took more responsibility for the 'extra' tasks in the work, such as organising student council activities, or being more involved in the development of the school. One respondent wrote that a colleague who has children often used them '*as excuse to decline any task that was the least bit voluntary'*. This might suggest that the idea that teachers who do not have children have more time for the work is shared by all teachers with or without children.

Employment

Two of the respondents also mentioned not having children as having been influential in their employment – especially in the situation of applying for a job. Both of these respondents were young teachers, around 30 years of age. One wrote that the principal of the school she worked in had asked her about her plans for starting a family when discussing the teaching posts for the upcoming year. The other respondent wrote that she felt that the fact that she does not have children had disadvantaged her in the labour market. She wrote that '*it is often thought that it does not make sense to hire a childless 30-year-old teacher for a permanent position – she will be on maternity leave in no time'*. She felt that this kind of attitude has influenced her position in the labour market. In Finland it is illegal for an employer to ask questions regarding starting a family in a job interview, but like the experiences of these respondents show, this does still happen. What is more, this kind of 'pre-emptive thinking' in hiring young women is widely considered to disadvantage women in the labour market. Teaching has been considered to be different in this regard as most teachers are women, and it has been considered the norm that they will at some point be on maternity leave. The experience of this respondent indicates that this 'pre-emptive thinking' influences in the field of education as well, and might disadvantage female teachers who do not have children.

Personal life

The influence of personal life on one's work as a teacher was only clearly expressed by one respondent, but I decided to make it into a category of its own, because I considered the experiences to be something that are probably shared by many teachers who did not take part in this research. It might even be that many teachers for whom not having children was a painful experience did not want to take part in the research at all.

The experiences of this respondent are related to a situation where not having children was a painful experience. She wrote that she has processed her own life situation through her work, and also has been able to mourn through her work – sometimes even subconsciously. She gave an example of a situation where the not having children had quietly crept into the contents of her teaching, for example through the texts she chose for students to read. This was a subconscious decision, and as soon as she became aware of it, she modified the contents of her teaching.

The link between the personal and the professional was clear in this respondent's text, where she wrote for example that she tried to achieve a sense of accomplishment in her work which she felt she had not been able to feel in her personal life. She also wrote that as she did not have children of her own, she had invested a lot in her students, and celebrated their successes and the landmarks in their lives as she would those of her own children. Her response can be considered to show that one's own feelings towards not having children might be highly significant in how not having children influences – or does not influence – one's work as a teacher.

8.2.2 Feelings of insecurity or difference

Many of the respondents did express some feelings of insecurity at some point in the career caused by the fact that they did not have children. Some respondents also linked this to having been newly graduated, or without experience. These feelings of insecurity were most often connected to dealing with parents, but arose sometimes in other situations as well. Under the main category of 'Feelings of insecurity or difference' are the subcategories of 1) Relations with parents, 2) Work community, and 3) Lack of experience.

Relations with parents

Many of the respondents mentioned having been insecure about the attitudes of parents or guardians towards a teacher who does not have children. The respondents wrote about having feelings along the lines of '*who am I to give them advice on what to do*'. These thoughts were especially linked to parent-teacher meetings or to communicating with the parents regarding their child. One respondent recalled feeling very insecure and nervous about holding a parent-teacher conference, and being afraid of the attitudes of the parents towards a young, childless teacher. The respondent wrote that she later realised that these thoughts were only a reflection of her own insecurities. Another respondent wrote about having her colleagues who had children read through some messages '*through the eyes of a parent'* to be able to make sure that her messages were received the way she meant them to. The respondents wrote that these types of thoughts and insecurities had faded with experience, as they '*now have confidence in that they know what they are talking about'*. Interestingly, one respondent wrote that she had never felt insecure in her relations with the pupils. As the relations with pupils were not discussed from this perspective by any other

respondent either, it could be assumed that the feelings of insecurity are related especially to dealing with parents or other adults, not the pupils.

One respondent wrote that she had been thinking about her relationships to parents, and wondered whether they would be different if she herself was a parent. She wondered whether she would regard the relations with parents as more important being a parent herself – now she did not consider the relations to parents as central, and did not for example meet all parents if there was no specific need for it. The respondent is a subject teacher, so this might also reflect on her thoughts. In primary school level home-school cooperation is considered much more central in schools, and primary school teachers thus work with parents a lot more closely than subject teachers typically do.

Work community

The respondents also talked about different kinds of feelings in the work community stemming from not having children. One respondent wrote that she was nervous about the attitudes of colleagues towards a teacher who does not have children; the respondent linked these thoughts especially to the time before graduation. Another respondent wrote that she acknowledged the different premises from which she worked, and acknowledged the fact that her ideas on rearing and discipline were often different from the colleagues who had children. One respondent also wrote that she sometimes had feelings of being an outsider in the work community when others talk about their families for example, but emphasised that these feelings were her own, not created by the work community.

Some respondents also wrote about the negative feelings they had experienced in the work community which related to their own life situations. One respondent wrote that because not having children was painful for her, it was difficult for her to be happy for colleagues who had become grandparents for example, and join in on their joy. Another respondent wrote that she had experienced feelings of envy when a colleague started her maternity leave – although she did point out that these feelings of envy were related to the break from work, not to having children. This connects to what the respondents wrote about resources – teachers who do not have children might have more time for their work, but they also do not get a break from work like their colleagues with families sometimes do. Whether this is even a consideration of course depends very much on the individual teacher and her or his life situation.

Lack of experience

The idea of lack of experience influencing one's work as a teacher can be seen in two ways in the data. On the one hand it can be seen as lack of teaching experience which links to insecurities about not having children and its possible effect on one's professionalism. On the other hand it can be seen as lack of personal experience in parenting, and its relation to teaching about topics regarding the development of young children, for example. Both aspects can also be seen to be linked to dealing with parents, as described previously.

One respondent who described the lack of parenting experience as influential in her work teaches a subject which content-wise is tightly connected to having children or being a parent. The respondent described incidents where she had been actually afraid of '*losing face'* in front of her class of young adults if they found out that she did not have personal experience on the matter. As some of her students had children already, the respondent felt that her own authority would be jeopardised, and her theory-based knowledge would not be enough to convince the students that she knew what she was talking about. In this situation she felt that personal experience would have been valued more than knowledge based on theories. This respondent described not having experience on what she teaches as a weak point, and as a possible threat to her professional competence.

The extent to which these demands for experience are required in other subject areas is a worthwhile question. Of course we all feel more confident in talking about something we have experienced firsthand, but whether this is a requirement for competence is another issue. This same consideration was present in the respondents' comments with regard to dealing with parents about issues involving their children. In these situations the *experience in teaching* was described as giving the respondents more confidence in their competence as they knew that they '*know what they are talking about'*. This idea was also expressed by the respondent who mentioned her insecurities with parents as stemming from her own insecurities about being a teacher; maybe it could be seen that overall experience as a teacher helps to overcome insecurities in other areas as well, or that insecurities from other areas stem from not yet having confidence in oneself as a teacher. Either way, experience seems to be the key here.

8.2.3 General attitudes towards not having children

Many of the respondents wrote about the attitudes the writing instruction had evoked in them, and how they feel the subject of not having children is usually dealt with, or the general assumptions and expectations related to it. The respondents described their own attitudes as well as those around them, and the experiences they have had as teachers. Under the main category of 'General attitudes' are the subcategories of 1) Attitudes and expectations and 2) Not having children as a topic of discussion.

Attitudes and expectations

Five of the respondents mentioned that when the topic of a teacher not having children emerges, they feel like they have to defend their own professional competence. They also expressed the idea that a teacher not having children would be generally thought of only as a negative thing. This is something I also caught myself assuming; when I received the first responses, I was surprised at the amount of positive things teachers connected with not having children – only then did I realise that I had also expected them to only describe the negative experiences they had had.

This hidden assumption of mine might have somehow come through in the writing instruction especially in the question of whether anyone had ever questioned the respondents' professional competence – this might have given the respondents the feeling that they had to '*defend their professionalism'*. Some of the respondents also mentioned that their own attitude towards not having children influences the way they see the issue, and how they experience things related to it. One respondent wrote that in her personal life she '*has gotten used to people's reactions'*, and that this had prepared her for the attitudes in the work environment as well.

Another respondent wrote that she felt that her not having children was not considered out of the ordinary because she was still young, but that colleagues had sometimes hinted towards the issue of starting a family, and thus assumed that she would want to have children at some point – which, in fact, was not the case. One respondent wondered whether this kind of assumption is more often directed at female teachers rather than male teachers. This was one of the main questions I also had in mind when I began to collect my data, but this question still remains only a topic for speculation.

Not having children as a topic of discussion

Most of the respondents commented on whether or not their not having children had ever been brought up in the work community or elsewhere, and what their experiences were like. Most wrote that their professional competence had never been questioned because they did not have children. Some respondents, however, seemed to be anticipating these kinds of comments. One respondent for example wrote that her '*professional competence has not been questioned – yet*'.

Some respondents wrote that pupils or students sometimes ask about their children, and clearly expect them to have children. Sometimes when the pupils hear that the teacher does not have children, they have wondered why, but usually left it at that. These questions from the pupils were experienced as friendly curiosity, and not as negative in any way.

Some of the respondents, however, did have experiences of situations where their professional competence had been questioned. These experiences were quite different in nature. One respondent described her experiences in the exact same words as my sister when she described the situations which sparked my whole research interest – '*you will understand once you have children of your own'*. The respondent had heard this sometimes from a parent or a colleague in situations where she had wondered about a practical thing relating to a pupil's behaviour or forgotten homework, for example. Another respondent who teaches young children described experiences with parents where she had had to defend her professional competence as a teacher without children. She had mainly referred to her education in these situations, and justified her decisions by their pedagogical side, which had in most cases resolved the issue. The respondent wrote that her professional competence had been questioned '*only a few times'* – the assumption thus seemed to be that this would happen more often.

One respondent had an experience of a situation that took place in an in-service training course: an unknown female teacher had come up to her and told her that '*the fact that you do not have children does not affect your teacherhood'*. The respondent felt puzzled that '*for some reason she felt the need to tell me that*'. Having children or not having children seems to be some kind of an open ground; many women expecting a baby have described their annoyance at people touching their bellies without permission; parents of young children describe the experiences of strangers commenting on their rearing methods in public places; and now, a teacher who does not have children described her experience of a

stranger commenting on her professional abilities, albeit positively. It seems that this topic is a very value-laden area, and people have different assumptions and attitudes towards it. I will discuss all these findings with regard to larger societal phenomena and the view of the profession of the teacher in the next chapter.

9 Discussion

In this chapter I will look at my findings both in relation to the theoretical discussion surrounding teacher professionalism as well as the discourses on childlessness. After examining the findings in the light of theory, I will look back at my research process, evaluating the reliability of it, and consider the ethical aspects of the research. Finally, I will look at some implications for further research based on this study.

9.1 Reflections on the findings

In general the respondents' experiences of the construction of their professionalism followed the general ideas on teachers' professional development (see chapter 5.3). What could be seen in the data was that the respondents saw the construction and the development of their professionalism as a very multifaceted phenomenon, connected to their working environments as well as their own life contexts (see Tahkokallio, 2014). The respondents also emphasised the active development of their own professionalism through training as well as constant reflection of their work (see Day, 1999; Kelchtermans, 2004; Schön, 1987; Tahkokallio, 2014).

The respondents also strongly emphasised the link between the personal and the professional, and the importance and influence of one's own persona in the work of a teacher. Same was emphasised for example by Kelchtermans (2004) when pointing out the specific nature of teaching compared to other professions: the great influence of the teacher's personality to the work. What is also interesting in the descriptions of professionalism in this data is the emphasis on personal involvement in the work – in the Finnish context this could be seen to link to the historical link to 'calling' in the discussion of the teaching profession, as discussed in chapter 5.1. The emphasis on the personal involvement in the work also seemed to require an emotional connection to the work from the teachers. Lauriala (1997) also found similar emphasis of personal involvement of Finnish teachers who, according to her 'seemed to invest themselves in their work in a very personal way' (p. 118).

Hochschild (2012) drew attention to the expectation of women working in care professions to have an emotional connection to the work (pp. 150-151). As all the respondents in this study were female, it is difficult to tell whether male teachers would have emphasised the aspect of personal and emotional involvement as much as the female respondents in this

study seemed to. In other studies teachers in general are seen to be personally involved in their work (see chapter 5.3), but as teaching is a dominantly female field, it would be interesting to see whether the difference between male and female teachers in this respect has ever been paid attention to.

The general lines of the construction of teacher professionalism in the data can thus be said to follow the existing theories in the area. What is more interesting in the findings of this data are the teachers' experiences related to not having children. Since the area has not been explored much, these accounts are especially interesting and bring new insights into the situation of teachers who do not have children.

One of the most significant aspects in my view were the teachers' descriptions of attitudes and expectations regarding not having children. Many of the respondents drew attention to the feeling that the assumption was that they want to have children, which is in line with the discussion of traditional expectations towards women in society still today (see chapter 4). Some of the respondents also mentioned that they had the feeling that not having children would be regarded negatively (cf. Wood & Newton, 2006), and felt that they had to defend their professionalism.

In section 8.2.3 I already discussed how the writing instruction might have caused these types of feelings in the respondents. Ribbens (1998) described the feelings of being judged often experienced by mothers, and pointed out that this feeling might easily carry over to research situations. She speculated that mothers might detect moral overtones easily in research situations as well, and not trust the researcher or the public not to judge them (Ribbens, 1998, pp. 33-34). Similar feelings could have been experienced by the respondents in this study also, as *not* being a mother is also an area where feelings of being negatively evaluated are quite common. The worry of being judged might have influenced the kind of answers the respondents gave, and thus might have influenced the whole data. This will be considered in more detail later on in this chapter in the section on reliability.

Many of the respondents considered not having children to have considerable positive contribution to their professionalism and work, and mentioned having more resources at their disposal in their work as an example of this. Day (1999) considered autonomy to be one of the key components of teacher professionalism, and resources – such as time and energy – to be some of the most important things in increasing autonomy (p. 6). It could thus be

argued that in not having children these respondents might have, if not more, then at least different, assets for their professionalism.

There were also negative feelings related to not having children. Many of the respondents mentioned occasions at some point in their career where they had felt insecure because they did not have children. It seems quite expected that most of these feelings were connected to dealing with parents, as dealing with parents is something all teachers probably sometimes feel nervous about as it is often a very value-laden area. Moreover, only one respondent expressed having been insecure in encounters with pupils. The rest of the respondents did not seem to be insecure in their relationships with the pupils almost at all – one respondent even drew specific attention to this. It could suggest that the respondents' feelings of insecurity were not connected to knowing how to deal with children, but rather to how they were perceived by others. This could be seen to connect to the wider phenomenon of having, or not having, children being a very sensitive issue, and thus very open for criticism. Since both mothers and childless women alike, according to some studies, describe feeling judged and negatively evaluated by others, it could suggest that these feelings of insecurity might have more to do with the personal than the professional (Ribbens, 1998; Wood & Newton, 2006).

One thing that struck me as particularly critical in the data was the experiences related to employment. As two teachers out of 12 mentioned feeling that the fact that they did not have children had been influential in their employment, it implies that their experiences are probably shared by other female teachers as well. This connects to the situation of part-time work discussed in chapter 5.2. Male teachers have permanent contracts more often than their female counterparts, and this 'fear' for maternity leave could explain this situation to some extent. Not only do female teachers carry the 'burden' of the family to a larger extent than men, which might hinder their career development – female teachers who do not have children are also disadvantaged by the assumption that they will have families at some point and stay at home taking care of their children. Because the societal assumption of care is still largely directed at women, female teachers thus seem to be disadvantaged whether they have children or not. This shows that there is still a lot of work to be done both at the level of attitudes but also at the level of practical work policy.

9.2 Reliability and ethical considerations

The ideas about the position of the researcher and giving the reader the tools to evaluate the decisions and interpretations made by the researcher as discussed in chapters 3 and 6 are all connected to the reliability of the research. Being open about one's own background and interests in the research is important for the transparency of the research (Harding, 1987; Letherby, 2003). Since the topic is very personal to me, I have tried to be as open as possible about my own affiliations with the topic, as well as my own standing with regard to it. Because I have a strong personal interest in the topic, it might be that it is very difficult – if not entirely impossible – to get rid of all my personal bias with regard to what I consider to be important and what not; this is, however, what I have tried to do. Furthermore, I have aimed at giving the reader enough information on my own attitudes and thought-processes so that she or he can evaluate the bias in the research.

Of course it is not just the reader that is responsible for this. I, as the researcher, have a responsibility to be self-critical, and constantly question my own assumptions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, p. 113). In situations where I have not been successful in this, instead of brushing over my initial error, I have tried to be open about it, and brought it to the attention of the reader also. This was the case for example when I was surprised to read all the positive accounts of how not having children had influenced the work of the respondents. The fact I had not anticipated this shows that I had certain expectations as to what kind of answers I would be getting. The positive aspect of this situation was that I did not overlook or ignore the positive things the respondents were describing, but instead became aware of my own assumptions.

In this study the reliability might be weakened by the fact that I knew two of the respondents from the pilot study personally. The reliability in this kind of study depends on whether one can trust the respondents to give truthful answers, or whether they might give answers that they think the researcher wants to hear, or answers that show them in a good light. When talking about things such as professionalism, and about a very personal issue such as having or not having children, it might be difficult to give completely honest answers to a researcher, especially if the researcher is someone you know. However, the respondents also discussed insecurities and other vulnerable things, so the fact that they knew me does not seemed to have prevented them from talking about negative things as well. This consideration was one of the reasons I decided to include the answers from the

pilot phase in the analysis, but collect the main part of my data through the writing instruction in the teachers' magazine.

The ethical considerations of my research are mainly to do with the nature of the research topic, as not having children can be a painful issue for some respondents. Most respondents could choose whether to respond to the writing instruction or not. The issue is more complicated with the respondents who were approached via email in the pilot study. Since I contacted the respondents directly via email, I made them think about the issue at least to some extent, whether they wanted to or not. I tried to take this aspect into consideration when writing the emails and the instruction itself, and be very clear that I talk about teachers who do not have children, not teachers who cannot have children. When I was thinking about to whom I would send the emails, I eliminated some people because I knew this could be a painful topic for them. I contacted only people who I did not suspect of having a very emotional or painful relationship to the issue.

As this study was so small in scope, it cannot be said to very representative or generalisable. However, the findings do offer interesting insights into how teachers who do not have children describe their experiences, and how they see the connection between their professionalism and the fact that they do not have children. The findings also raise fruitful considerations for further research. One of the most intriguing questions is whether male teachers who do not have children have similar experiences as their female colleagues, or whether, in fact, they have had to consider this issue at all.

In further research it would be interesting to examine a larger body of data from both female and male teachers, and include in-depth interviews with the teachers. It would also be interesting to focus on teachers of a certain school level. I, personally, would find studying primary school teachers most meaningful, as their position is between the more care-intensive position of the kindergarten teacher and the more knowledge-centered position of the subject teacher. Primary school teachers work closely with children and parents, and have to constantly balance between the demands of content knowledge and studying skills as well as the aspects of care and rearing in their work. It would thus provide a more specific perspective to the research questions of this thesis.

10 References

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Coffey, A. & Delamont, S. (2000). *Feminism and the classroom teacher: Research, praxis and pedagogy*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Cohen, L & Manion, L. (1994). *Research methods in education* (4th ed.). London: Routledge.

Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Day, C. (1999). *Developing teachers: The challenges of lifelong learning*. London: Falmer Press.

Dempsey, K. (2002). Who gets the best deal from marriage: women or men? *Journal of Sociology, 38*(2), 91-110.

Eurydice. (2010). *Gender differences in educational outcomes: Study on the measures taken and the current situation in Europe*. Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA P9 Eurydice). Retrieved from http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/all_publications.pdf

Finnish National Board of Education. (2010). *Opettajat Suomessa*. Retrieved from http://www.oph.fi/download/131646_OPH_Opettajat_Suomessa_2010_2.pdf on 13.11.2013

Finnish National Board of Education. (2004). *The national core curriculum for basic education*. Retrieved from http://www.oph.fi/english/curricula_and_qualifications/basic_education on 15.11.2013

Gillespie, R. (2000). When no means no: disbelief, disregard and deviance as discourses of voluntary childlessness. *Women's Studies International Forum, 23*(2), 223-234.

Gilligan, C. (1979). A woman's place in man's life cycle. *Harvard Educational Review, 49*(4), 431-46.

Gordon, T. (1990). *Feminist mothers*. Hampshire: Macmillan Education Ltd.

Harding, S. (Ed.). (1987). Introduction: is there a feminist method? In *Feminism and methodology* (pp. 1-14). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press and Open University Press.

Harding, S. (1991). *Whose science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from women's lives*. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.

Hochschild, A. (2012). *The managed heart: commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Horstkemper, M. (1999). Gender and professionalism. In M. Lang, J. Olson, H. Hansen & W. Bünder (Eds.), *Changing schools / changing practices: Perspectives on education reform and teacher professionalism* (pp. 55-64). Louvain: Garant Publishers.

Ireland, M. S. (1993). *Reconceiving women: Separating motherhood from female identity*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Kelchtermans, G. (2004). CPD for professional renewal: moving beyond knowledge for practice. In C. Day & J. Sachs (Eds.), *International Handbook on the Continuing Professional Development of Teachers* (pp. 217- 237). Glasgow: Open University Press.

Kinos, K. & Laakkonen, E. (2005). Mieslastentarhanopettajien työ- ja koulutusura sekä harrastustoiminta. In H. Merisuo-Storm & M. Soininen (Eds.), *Opettajuuden jäljillä: Varhaiskasvatuksesta aikuiskasvatukseen* (pp. 141-165). Turun yliopiston kasvatustieteiden tiedekunnan julkaisuja B:74. Turku: Rauman opettajankoulutuslaitos.

Kivinen, O. & Rinne, R. (1996). Teacher training and higher education policies in Finland since the World War II. In H. Simola & T. Popkewitz (Eds.), *Professionalization and education* (pp. 76- 96). Research Report 169. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, Department of Teacher Education.

Kiviniemi, K. (2001). Laadullinen tutkimus prosessina. In J. Aaltola & R. Valli (Eds.), *Ikkunoita tutkimusmetodeihin II. Näkökulmia aloittelevalle tutkijalle tutkimuksen teoreettisiin lähtökohtiin ja analyysimenetelmiin* (pp. 68-84). Jyväskylä: PS-kustannus.

Konttinen, E. (1996). A continental way to professionalization: on the formation of the "Finnish route". In H. Simola & T. Popkewitz (Eds.), *Professionalization and education*

(pp. 52- 75). Research Report 169. Helsinki: University of Helsinki, Department of Teacher Education.

Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.

Lahelma, E. (2000). Lack of male teachers: a problem for students or teachers? *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 8*(2), 173-186. Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org./10.1080/14681360000200093 on 15.11.2013

Laine, T. (2001). Miten kokemusta voidaan tutkia? Fenomenologinen näkökulma. In J. Aaltola & R. Valli (Eds.), *Ikkunoita tutkimusmetodeihin II: näkökulmia aloittelevalle tutkijalle tutkimuksen teoreettisiin lähtökohtiin ja analyysimenetelmiin* (pp. 26-43). Jyväskylä: PS-kustannus.

Lauriala, A. (1997). *Development and change of professional cognitions and action orientations of Finnish teachers*. Acta Universitatis Ouluensis E 27. Oulu: Oulu University Press.

Laursen, P. F. (2004). *Aito opettaja*.(T. Kontturi, Trans.) Helsinki: Finn Lectura.

Letherby, G. (2003). *Feminist research in theory and practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Levomäki, T. & Keskinen, S. (2005). Mies- ja naislastentarhanopettajien keinot hallita lapsiryhmän tyttöjä ja poikia. In T. Merisuo-Storm & M. Soininen (Eds.), *Opettajuuden jäljillä: Varhaiskasvatuksesta aikuiskasvatukseen* (pp. 117-139). Turun yliopiston kasvatustieteiden tiedekunnan julkaisuja B:74. Turku: Rauman opettajankoulutuslaitos.

Lindseth, A. & Norberg, A. (2004). A phenomenological hermeneutical method for researching lived experience. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences, 18*(2), 145-153.

Martin, E. (1991). The egg and the sperm: how science has constructed a romance based on stereotypical male-female roles. *Signs, 16*(3), 485-501. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174586 on 3.1.2014

Maume, D. (2006). Gender differences in restricting work efforts because of family responsibilities. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 68*(4), 859-869.

Miller, T. (1998). Shifting layers of professional, lay and personal narratives: Longitudinal childbirth research. In J. Ribbens & R. Edwards (Eds.), *Feminist dilemmas in qualitative research: Public knowledge and private lives* (pp. 58-71). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Ministry of Justice. (1970). *Steriloimislaki 24.4.1970/283*. [Data file]. Retrieved from: http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/1970/19700283 on 14.1.2014

Minor, L., Onwuegbuzie, A., Witcher, A. & James, T. (2002). Preservice teachers' educational beliefs and their perceptions of characteristics of effective teachers. *Journal of Educational Research*. 96(2), 116-127.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Neuendorf, K. (2002). *The content analysis guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Noddings, N. (2003). *Caring. A feminine approach to ethics and moral education* (2nd edition). Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.)

Noddings, N. (2005). *The challenge to care in schools. An alternative approach to education* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Phoenix, A. & Woollett, A. (1991). Motherhood: social construction, politics and psychology. In A. Phoenix, A, Woollett & E. Lloyd (Eds.), *Motherhood: Meanings, practices and ideologies* (pp. 13- 27). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Ribbens, J. (1998). Hearing my feeling voice? An autobiographical discussion of motherhood. In J. Ribbens & R. Edwards (Eds.)*, Feminist dilemmas in qualitative research: Public knowledge and private lives* (pp. 24-38). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Rich, A. (1976). *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution*. London: VIRAGO Limited.

Schön, D. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers.

Skinnari, S. (2000). *Pedagoginen rakkaus: Kasvattaja elämän tarkoituksen ja ihmisen arvoituksen äärellä*. Jyväskylä: PS-kustannus.

Smith, D. (1974). Women's perspective as a radical critique of sociology. *Sociological Inquiry, 44*(1), 7-13.

Squires, G. (1999). *Teaching as a professional discipline*. London: Falmer Press.

Tahkokallio, L. (2014). *Lastentarhanopettajan ammatillinen kehittyminen havainnointiin perustuvan reflektion avulla*. Tutkimuksia 351. Helsinki: Unigrafia. Retrieved from https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/42873/lastenta.pdf?sequence=1 on 25.3.2014.

Tilastokeskus. (2006). *Tasa-arvoinen suomineito, osa 1*. Retrieved from www.stat.fi/artikkelit/2006/art_2006-07-06_001.html on 9.1.2013.

Tuomi, J. & Sarajärvi, A. (2002). *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi*. Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi.

Tuomi, J. & Sarajärvi, A. (2009). *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi* (5th ed.) Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Tammi.

Wood, G. & Newton, J. (2006). Childlessness and women managers: 'choice', context and discourses. *Gender, Work and Organisation, 13*(4), 338-358.

Woollett, A. (1991). Having children: accounts of childless women and women with reproductive problems. In A. Phoenix, A, Woollett & E. Lloyd (Eds.), *Motherhood: Meanings, practices and ideologies* (pp. 47- 65). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Ylitapio-Mäntylä, O. (2010). *Lastentarhanopettajien jaettuja muisteluja sukupuolesta ja vallasta arjen käytännöissä*. Lapin yliopisto. Retrieved from http://urn.fi/URN:N:NBN:fi:ula-2011281051 on 2.11.2013.

APPENDIX A

The writing instruction placed in the teacher's magazine

Are you a teacher who does not have children?

In your experience, has the fact that you do not have children been influential with regard to your professionalism? I am conducting a Master's Thesis research on the professional experiences of teachers who do not have children. I ask you to write freely about your experiences especially with regard to the following questions:

Which are the things you feel are important for the construction of a professional identity on a general level?

Which are the things you consider to have been especially important in the construction of your own professional identity?

Do you feel that the fact that you do not have children has been influential in your work as a teacher or in the construction of your professional identity? What kind of situations are these experiences connected to? Has your professional competence ever been questioned because you do not have children?

Please include in your writing your age, location, sex, profession (kindergarten teacher, primary school teacher or subject teacher), as well as the school level which your experiences took place in. You can send your response via email as an attachment or directly in the message section.

I will handle the responses confidentially and anonymously, and the respondents cannot be identified in my research. Please include in your response whether you are willing to participate in a possible follow-up interview. I am happy to answer to any questions regarding the research.

Leena Kaartinen, University of Oulu

email.address

APPENDIX B

Initial categorising of the things the respondents found important in the construction of professionalism (both personally and in general). Numbered in order of frequency (how many respondents mentioned the topic – varied between 8-1)

12)Työn ulkopuoliset asiat (harrastukset, kokemukset nuorten kanssa, muun alan työt, henk. koht. elämäntilanne) **Life outside work**	9)Kasvatus Ideas/views on rearing The importance of rearing **Rearing**	4)Ammattitaidon kehittäminen / kehittyminen (oma aktiivinen kehittäminen & itsekritiikki cf. jatkokoulutus) **Developing professional competence**	5)Koulutus (valmiuksia opettamiseen, ei niinkään kasvattamiseen) **Teacher education**
1)Kokemus (työkokemus ja toisaalta elämänkokemus & ikä) **Work and life experience** (work experience plus life experience)	7)Kollegat & työyhteisö (keskustelut, yhteistyö, erilaiset työyhteisöt – myös negatiiviset kokemukset) **Colleagues and work community /workplace**	8)Luokat & oppilaat (ja sitä kautta vanhemmat) (erilaiset luokat) **Different classes**, students (and their parents)	14)Teoria /sisällönhallinta **Theory / content knowledge**
10)Oma pohdinta / arvot (millainen opettaja haluan olla) **Own values**	11)Näkemys työn merkityksestä / tarkoituksesta **Purpose of the work**	15)Käsitykset oppimisesta **Ideas/views on learning**	13)Aiemmat kokemukset opettajuudesta & kasvatuksesta (millainen opettaja haluaa / ei halua olla) **Experiences of teaching and rearing**
2)Oma persoona työvälineenä/työssä (kokonaisvaltaisuus, itsensä likoon laittaminen, itsestään antaminen, omat tunteet) **Own personality** / Committing to the work	3)Kuuntelu, yksilön kohtaaminen (ihmistuntemus, läsnäolo, toimintatavat) Considering / meeting the individual, actions, presence? **Meeting the individual**	6)Empatia, herkkyys, people skills (rivien välistä lukeminen, ihmistuntemus) People skills, empathy, attitudes? sensitivities? **Sensitivity**	

APPENDIX C

Initial categorising of experiences of teachers who do not have children. Numbered in order of frequency (how many respondents mentioned the topic – varied between 10-1)

8)Epävarmuuden kokemukset, kokemuksen puute Feelings of insecurity, lack of experience **Lack of experience**	4)Suhteet vanhempiin, vanhempien asenteet Relations with parents, parents' attitudes **Relations with parents**	5)Yleiset asenteet ja odotukset General attitudes and expectations **General attitudes**	7)Kokemukset työyhteisössä Work community /experiences in **Work community**	3)Käytännön suhteet oppilaisiin Relations with pupils /students **Relations with pupils**
6)Työhön panostaminen /aika Resources / time **Resources**	10)Oman elämän käsittely työn avulla Own life experiences, channeling to work **Personal life**	2)Vaikutus ammatillisuuteen Influence on professionalism **Influence on professionalism**	9)Työnhaku/ työnsaanti Employment **Employment**	1)Se että ei lapsia puheenaiheena / kyseenalaistaminen Not having children as a topic of discussion /questioning professionalism **Not having children as a topic of discussion**