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Enacting Distributed Pedagogical Leadership in Finland: Perceptions of Early Childhood Education Stakeholders

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate pedagogical leadership in early childhood education (ECE) contexts. It focused on investigating how ECE leaders, centre directors and ECE teachers in Finnish municipalities perceived the enactment of pedagogical leadership. Using focus groups, the data was collected in 6 municipalities in Finland. It was found that the enactment of pedagogical leadership was connected with the employment positions of the participants. The participants perceived an imbalance between the aims of pedagogical improvement and the role-based enactment of pedagogical leadership. However, this paradox seemed to fuel new constructions of ECE leadership amongst the stakeholders involved in this study. The conclusions include suggestions for leadership development through the creation of interdependence in enacting pedagogical leadership within the ECE contexts.

Tiivistelmä

Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli tutkia pedagogista johtajuutta varhaiskasvatuksessa. Tutkimuksen tehtävänä oli selvittää miten päivähoidon johtavat virkamiehet, päiväkodin johtajat ja opettajat näkivät pedagogisen johtajuuden. Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin kuudessa kunnassa focus group -menetelmällä. Osallistujien keskusteluissa pedagogista johtajuutta tarkasteltiin johtajan position kautta. Johtajuustasot toimivat etäällä toisistaan, jonka nähtiin heikentävän pedagogiikan kehittämistä. Osallistujien

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kokema ristiriita toimimattoman johtamisen ja pedagogisen johtajuuden tavoitteiden välillä nosti esiin jaetun johtajuuden konstruktioita osallistujien keskusteluissa. Tutkimuksen johtopäätöksissä esitetään kehittämisehdotuksia, joiden avulla eri tasojen välistä johtamistoimintaa voidaan kytkeä toisiinsa.

Introduction

This article is based on a study conducted in Finland, involving 6 municipalities providing ECE services. The rationale for studying distributed pedagogical leadership was connected to the contextual factors of Finnish ECE leadership. Municipalities are required to plan and implement community services, including ECE services. Within municipalities, ECE leadership is dispersed among geographically distanced macro and micro-level stakeholders. This distancing can create certain challenges for the enactment of pedagogical leadership, particularly in developing co-operation between stakeholders. Those stakeholders involved in this study, being municipal ECE leaders, centre directors and teachers emphasised pedagogical leadership being significant to pedagogical improvement. It was found that the interdependence between leadership enactments of the stakeholders was perceived essential for efficient pedagogical improvement. The study provides developmental suggestions to create better collaboration that can enhance the interdependence amongst the early childhood stakeholders within municipalities.

When connecting distributed leadership perspectives with pedagogical leadership approaches, one needs to focus on the interactions between the systems of how leadership focuses on developing pedagogical practices. The practice of distributed leadership can increase the depth of understanding about pedagogical leadership addressing it at a system level, as interactions between stakeholders. The theoretical underpinnings of this research were connected with the contextual model of early childhood leadership (Nivala, 1999) and informed by the distributed leadership approaches of scholars such as Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004; 2001) and Harris (2009). Although connections between pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership have not yet been explored fully in early childhood research (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011), there is research to support the strong connection between shared thinking of teachers and pedagogically sound ECE programs (Lunn & Bishop, 2002; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007).

It should be noted that in Finland there was a significant policy change impacting on the curriculum and pedagogy of ECE due to the launching of the *National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland* (STAKES, 2003). In this chapter, for ease of reference, from now on this document will be referred to as the Finnish National Curriculum (STAKES, 2003). These policy reformulations raised the need to enhance leadership capacity within ECE and explore effective leadership approaches. The literature reviewed by Heikka, Waniganayake and Hujala (2013) suggest that distributed leadership approaches can assist in the implementation of leadership responsibilities by bringing about better interconnection, consistency and coherence in service delivery among diverse stakeholders.

In Finland, typically, the public ECE services formulate the context of leadership. Leadership is connected to educational work with children and is realised through the actions of a wider set of stakeholders. The three key stakeholder groups responsible for ECE services within municipalities are employed as ECE leaders, centre directors or teachers. ECE leaders are responsible for arranging ECE programs within the municipality ensuring that centres meet the requirements of the national ECE laws and local policies. ECE centre directors are responsible for multiple centres and programs within a specific municipality. Teachers work with children in different age groups at their centre. The study focused on examining participants' perceptions of how pedagogical leadership was enacted and represents a collectively constructed picture of their lived work experiences in local communities.

Based on the literature reviewed elsewhere (Heikka et al., 2013) the core elements of distributed leadership are firstly the involvement of multiple individuals in leadership; secondly, a focus on leadership enactment rather than leadership roles; thirdly, interdependence of the leadership enactments by multiple individuals, and fourthly, the connection of the significance of leadership to educational work.

The successful achievement of distributed leadership is determined by the interactive influences of multiple members in an organisation. Basing their argument on leadership thinking explained within distributed cognition (see Hutchins, 1995a; 1995b), Spillane et al. (2004, 11) state that leadership is best understood as a practice "distributed over leaders, followers, and the school's situation or contexts". Spillane et al. (2004, 9) discuss distributed

leadership practice as being "stretched over" the whole school, social and community contexts. In these contexts, leadership involves multiple personnel, consisting of those with either formal leadership positions and/or informal leadership responsibilities.

Interdependence between people and their enactments of leadership is a core element of implementing distributed leadership. Spillane et al. (2001, 25) refer to leaders who work towards a shared goal through "separate, but interdependent work". Likewise, Harris (2009) connects two properties, "interdependence" and "emergence", with distributed leadership. Spillane et al. (2004) focus on interdependence between leadership practices by analysing the enactment of leadership tasks. Interdependence of leadership practice exists when the implementation of leadership tasks involves interactions between multiple individuals.

When applying distributed leadership perspectives to ECE leadership, it is essential to remember the unique characteristics of this sector. The organisational contexts in their structure and governance incorporate a variety of programs and the personnel employed in these organisations. In addition, the purpose of ECE is twofold. Firstly, entitlement to services as a part of labour policy serves parents. Secondly, ECE supports children as users of services as according to the Act on Children's Day Care (Laki lasten päivähoidosta 19.1.1973/36), ECE has to support the overall development of the child. This study focused on studying ECE leadership from the point of view of ECE pedagogy.

Nivala (1999; 2001) has developed a contextual leadership model which provides a framework for examining leadership within contexts unique to ECE. Contextual leadership model is based on the core purposes of ECE and addresses interactive influences of micro and macro systems. (Hujala, 2004; Nivala, 2001.) According to Hujala (2010), contextually appropriate leadership is where the roles and responsibilities are based on the core purpose of ECE at all contextual levels. Distributed leadership methodologies can supplement contextual perspectives by enabling a deeper level of investigation of the interdependencies between stakeholders implementing ECE within Finnish municipalities.

In writings on pedagogical leadership, the role of teachers and learning in educational communities is emphasized. Here, teachers are seen as essential decision makers and builders of pedagogy for individual learners (Sergiovanni, 1998). According to Heikka and Waniganayake (2011)

pedagogical leadership is connected not only to children's learning, but also to the capacity building of the teachers' profession, as well as values and beliefs about education held by the wider society or community. In ECE settings, pedagogical leadership means taking responsibility for the shared understanding of the aims and methods of learning and teaching of young children.

Research task and methods

This study investigated how ECE leaders, centre directors and ECE teachers perceived the enactment of pedagogical leadership. In Finland, ECE leadership is interwoven and distributed in municipalities involving a variety of stakeholders. Accordingly, the findings were analysed within a distributed leadership framework.

Data was collected through focus group method commonly used by educational researchers (Hydén & Bülow, 2003). Each focus group consisted of a small number of participants meeting to discuss a specific topic under the guidance of a moderator, who is an outsider to the research discussion (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Wibeck, Dahlgren, & Öberg, 2007). During the meeting, participants express opinions, form points of view, and discuss their perceptions of the phenomenon and its various dimensions (Wibeck et al., 2007). Focus groups were chosen as a research method for this study because of it could generate collectively constructed perspectives of leadership enactment within municipalities on a day-to-day basis. By analysing the perspectives of each group of stakeholders separately as well as across the groups, it was possible to interpret the enactment of ECE leadership in Finnish contexts.

The municipalities were selected for the study based on their willingness to participate in the study, as well as their diversity in relation to population size and location in Finland. Participants were identified with the assistance of a key contact person from each municipality. The goal was to assemble a maximum of 10 people in each focus group and the actual number of participants varied between 2–10 in each group. Each focus group comprising ECE leaders, centre directors, and teachers, was conducted separately. The number of the participants was lowest among ECE leaders group in small municipalities. Two main questions were formulated for

the discussion: 1) The core purpose of ECE and 2) leadership of ECE. A total of 18 focus group interviews were conducted across six municipalities. Altogether there were 34 ECE leaders, 50 centre directors and 49 teachers, making a total of 133 participants.

The substantive inquiry of the content of the discussions among each stakeholder group was conveyed by qualitative content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). In qualitative content analysis, theoretical concepts and conclusions are generated through the process of interpretation and inference of participants' original expressions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). The data of each focus group was analysed separately in order to form categories describing pedagogical leadership discussed within each stakeholder group.

This qualitative content analysis began by identifying analytical codes by reading the transcribed data and selecting key ideas that reflected connections with the research question. After coding a couple of transcripts, sub-categories were formulated by clustering the initial codes. These initial sub-categories were then used when analysing the rest of the data among the stakeholder groups and categories were altered during the process where appropriate. In the second phase of the analysis the main categories of each stakeholder group were formulated by combining the sub-categories of codes. The content of the categories were condensed for use in across-group examination.

Cross-group examination of the substantive content of the discussions between the stakeholders included parallel investigation of the stakeholders' perceptions and identification of relative contents of the discussions. The researcher set the contents which were linked side by side enabling the dialogue between the different groups of the stakeholders. This phase of the analysis was inspired by the method introduced by Gergen and Gergen (2007, 472–473) naming it as 'distributed representations'. In distributed representations, the researcher allows for dialogic relationship between the differing voices. By examining the perceptions of leadership between these participants, the study discussed the enactment of ECE leadership from a contextual and distributed perspective. Original expressions of the participants could be followed in verbatim citations of quotations when reporting the results of the study. For ethical reasons the names of the municipalities and the individual participants in focus groups were withheld.

Results

The enactment of pedagogical leadership

During focus group discussions, the participants discussed the contents of pedagogical leadership and which stakeholders were expected to perform these tasks and responsibilities. The perceptions of how pedagogical leadership was enacted by ECE stakeholders comprising municipal ECE leaders, centre directors and teachers as agreed to by the respective participant groups are presented in Table 1.

Providing care, up-bringing and teaching of children were topics repeatedly discussed as was the content of the core purpose of ECE by each of the participant groups. ECE pedagogy and leadership were seen as holistic phenomena combining the elements of providing care, education and teaching in daily practices. Leadership of pedagogy was highly valued among all participants.

A significant finding was that the teachers were seen as leaders in pedagogy only when they had a formal appointment as an assistant director within a centre. Teachers were also seen to be capable of operating as professionals who understood ECE pedagogy and in developing their own skills and knowledge in relation to pedagogical work with children. When working as classroom teachers however, teachers were not acknowledged as leaders. It appears that leadership was perceived as being tightly linked with the director's position at the centre.

All stakeholders who participated in this study perceived the enactment of pedagogical leadership as being connected with the position of the centre director. The tasks performed by the centre directors in pedagogical leadership were seen to provide training for teachers, to enhance the discussions of pedagogy in centres, and to increase teachers' expertise and commitment. Although centre directors were considered responsible for pedagogical leadership, they were also perceived as having primarily a workload comprising administrative duties. They reported that their efficiency was estimated according to various non-pedagogical aspects of leadership, such as their capacity to manage finances. Some of the centre directors worked with children on a daily basis and for them balancing between diverse responsibilities was even more challenging.

All groups highlighted the important role of municipal ECE leaders as creators of the prerequisites for ECE pedagogy. These leaders set the goals for their municipality and allocated the resources necessary to achieve these goals in centres. ECE leaders were seen as the designers of visions, frameworks and guidelines for centre-based practice. It was their responsibility also to highlight the need to provide and develop ECE services in their communities. These ECE leaders saw it as their responsibility to find ways to support teachers' development of pedagogical skills.

Imbalance between the enactment of leadership and pedagogical improvement

According to the participants, pedagogical leadership was closely connected to the changes in practice connected with the implementation of the Finnish National Curriculum (STAKES, 2003). These situational aspects were highly emphasised and influential in the way leadership was perceived. In the analysis of data from the focus groups of centre directors and teachers, it was found that the resources allocated to curriculum implementation were insufficient and that pedagogical discussions in centres with parents were inadequate in identifying appropriate issues of general concern. These participants also believed that achieving the goals or targets set for ECE programs required more time for discussion. They also felt that teams in centres did not have enough time for discussions to acquire a shared understanding of goals. The examples below illustrate this:

> "It is a big challenge that it is a leader who should implement the early childhood plans and preschool curriculum; making these plans work or realized. So, when there are, because of the huge administrative workloads they could not do it. The lack of time is so great and this kind of extra work is coming all the time. Consequently we will no longer be so convincing." (Teacher focus group)

> "There is no time for discussion, so that you could really go deep into it." (Centre director focus group)

Some of the centre directors felt that they lacked the means and the time to organise, plan and assess the quality of their work and needed training in improving curriculum implementation. In this way, centre directors highlighted the importance of monitoring quality and their own leadership

Table 1. Perceptions of Pedagogical Leadership by ECE stakeholders

Participant groups	Perceptions of ECE leaders	Perceptions of Centre directors	Perceptions of ECE teachers	Enactment of pedagogical leadership according to the participant groups
Municipal ECE leaders in pedagogical leadership	ECE leaders secure resources, create visions and networks.	ECE leaders secure resources and create visions and guidelines. No enough means to share issues with ECE leaders – Anticipation for shared decision-making and construction of visions with ECE leaders.	ECE leaders secure resources, create visions and set targets. They provide support for pedagogical leadership. Remain from the field; no means to share issues with – anticipation for shared construction of visions. ECE leaders should create structures for information sharing.	**Provision of prerequisites for ECE**
Centre directors in pedagogical leadership	Centre directors have responsibility for pedagogy. They provide teachers with opportunities for training, discussion and visionary environment. They enhance teachers' expertise and commitment, implementation of Finnish National curriculum and quality improvement. Anticipated development of co-operation with centre directors.	Centre directors have responsibility for pedagogical development and teachers' expertise. They provide teachers with opportunities for training and discussion. They create visions and have responsibility for the implementation of the Finnish National curriculum. Centre directors provide information for decision makers. Inadequate time and resources for pedagogical discussion and assessment within centres.	Centre directors have responsibility for pedagogy, development, assessment and implementation of Finnish National curriculum. Centre directors should have influence on resources. They should create structures for information sharing. Inadequate time and resources for pedagogical discussion within centres.	**Pedagogical improvement within centres**
Teachers in pedagogical leadership	Teachers develop their own skills and knowledge. Teachers voices should be heard in decision-making.	Teachers develop their own skills and knowledge. Implementation of curriculum by an assistant director. Anticipation for discussion with the teachers and sharing responsibilities.	Teachers develop their own skills and knowledge. Inadequate time and resources for discussion among teachers. Confusion about the development work –evaluation systems should be developed. Self-appointed leaders among teachers.	**Developing as professionals**

skills. The teachers also considered that there should be clear quality assurance systems for ECE within municipalities:

> "Tracking and evaluation. Where we are going to. This maybe is what I think should happen in our municipality." (Teacher focus group)

Although all participant groups perceived that teachers were seen as responsible for their own professional development, who was responsible for the overall pedagogy in the centres was not shared between the teachers and centre directors. Centre directors were seen as experts who could transfer skills and knowledge to teachers, provide support and answers problems encountered with children and families and enhance the teachers' learning and well-being. Teachers were also expected to take on more responsibility for the children's education programs in the centres. However, the teachers emphasised that it was the centre directors' responsibility to guide curriculum implementation, assessment and securing of resources and cooperation with families.

Varying constructions of leadership

The ECE stakeholders participating in this research believed that pedagogical leadership reflected both distributed and disjointed leadership enactments. In distributed leadership enactments the development work involved coordinated leadership functions between a centre director and a assistant director. Assistant director was a positional title used in some municipalities involved in this study. It was used to identify a teacher who had designated leadership responsibilities within a centre. This process involved a centre director and an assistant director in the shared construction of understanding of the pedagogical improvements within a centre. The assistant director implemented pedagogical improvements within a centre according to the plans formulated jointly. This however was a small part of the ways in which leadership was enacted in the municipalities participating in this study.

Usually, participants' perceptions reflected disjointed, role-based leadership enactment. The participants repeatedly mentioned difficulties in information sharing between the stakeholders about development work. According to the teachers this resulted in confusion and uncertainty about the directions of the development work carried out in centres:

> "Information does not come to the level of subordinates, which feels as if we are in a fog then also. That you do not really know where we are going and there are different projects and new ones are also coming all the time." (Teacher focus group)

The expression also reflects that teachers do not necessarily perceive the developmental projects as jointly decided means for pedagogical improvement. Furthermore, the centre directors and teachers felt that there were no means to participate in the decision-making with the ECE leaders as reflected in the following excerpt from a teacher focus group:

> "Often it is said that this is an agreement. But who was involved in this agreement? Is it an agreement coming from the municipal decision making level? Has anyone asked the staff what they think about these issues?"

The centre directors and teachers wanted greater participation in leadership and more discussion and information sharing with ECE leaders about the visions, guidelines and quality improvement demands in their daily work.

Teachers' participation in pedagogical leadership

In the construction of leadership among each stakeholder group, leadership was not explicitly connected to the professional roles of the teachers. However, teachers' participation in pedagogical leadership was apparent in the teachers' discussions in various ways. There were self-appointed leaders, who were reported to emerge easily among teachers when a director was not permanently present in a centre. However, this was not felt to be a desirable phenomenon among teachers because of its tendency to disrupt the coherency of the usual pedagogical approaches in place in a centre. Therefore, teachers believed that there should be a position specifically named as a 'leading teacher' in each centre to be responsible for the pedagogy and discussions thereon. The teachers also discussed the delegation of leadership tasks by a centre director. The teachers were however, not positively disposed towards delegation. They reported that these tasks did not belong to teachers and might take them away from the children. These tasks were reported to be consistent with the managerial duties of centre directors. The teachers also considered that participation in planning teams also took them away from

children, and that this was also not appropriate in terms of doing their pedagogical work.

The teachers considered that the ECE leaders' responsibility was to create organisational structures to support pedagogical leadership, cooperation and knowledge sharing between teachers and centre directors. The teachers also claimed that ECE decision-makers and administrators in the municipalities were not sufficiently familiar with what happens in ECE centres. Similarly, the ECE leaders also believed that the teachers should have more say when decisions about strategies and resources were being planned in the municipality. ECE leaders considered that together with centre directors, they should give the teachers more feedback about their work. One other reason which was considered to inhibit the flow of information within municipalities was that the use of information technologies by the teachers was perceived as being inadequate, either due to poor access to facilities or because of the lack of sufficient IT skills among teachers.

Emerging constructions of leadership

The perceived imbalance between the responsibilities for pedagogical improvement and the way leadership was enacted raised discussions of leadership development among the study participants. The centre directors believed that sharing responsibilities and creating structures for discussion with the teachers, could improve teachers' attainments in pedagogy, contribute to their expertise and shared approaches in practice. In turn, they assumed, there might be more a comprehensive professional performance in the centres. Similarly, teachers perceived that enactment of leadership by applying distributed leadership approaches within centres could support their professional development by enabling them to reflect on the shared experiences and ideas. Participants highlighted the importance of distributed leadership by focusing on solving challenging issues together, sharing decision making and the construction of a shared vision between stakeholders as reflected in the next excerpt from one participant:

> "For the leader, it is important that pedagogical leadership can present all these visions and values and ask teachers to consider and discuss these ideas further." (Teacher focus group).

The Finnish National Curriculum (STAKES, 2003), was mentioned repeatedly by each stakeholder group and its implementation was connected to new and emerging constructions of leadership. All stakeholder groups perceived the implementation processes as a tool for providing a framework to guide or support the quality of pedagogy and equality in ECE in Finland. Furthermore, the processes of developing and updating the local curriculum as a shared activity was also believed to enhance ECE teachers' professional learning.

According to teachers, leaders would be able to promote quality and enhance capacity and commitment to changes by involving all stakeholders in leadership and enhancing participation by a collective way of leading. Similarly, the ECE leaders believed that the development of cooperation would foster learning and knowledge sharing between the ECE leaders and centre directors.

Discussion

Pedagogical development through the implementation of the Finnish National Curriculum (STAKES, 2003) was perceived as one of the most important leadership responsibilities. The way in which leadership was enacted was perceived to have an impact on the efficiency of curriculum implementation and pedagogical improvement within centres. In this study, disjoined enactment of pedagogical leadership was not perceived to be sufficiently efficient for pedagogical improvement. This notion emerged from discussions of ideas about more coherent ways of leading among the study participants.

The participants perceived distribution of tasks to be significant for the efficient practice of pedagogical leadership. However, albeit the ECE leaders had an important role in creating visions and tools for pedagogical improvement, it seemed that they were too remote from the field to create shared visions and efficient strategies to implement these visions. The gap between ECE leaders and centre directors resulted mainly from challenges in information sharing and lack of structures enabling shared decision making and the construction of visions and strategies. This study showed that it was only the centre directors who were perceived to be responsible for taking care of pedagogical leadership, thus having little impact on the resources

and means to improve practices. The development of interdependence in the enactment of organisational responsibilities by promoting shared decision-making could enhance the implementation of pedagogical leadership in ECE organisations.

Furthermore, the findings of this study confirmed concerns raised in earlier studies about the debate on directors having too little impact on the educational development of young children because most of their time was spent away from children, working on managerial tasks (Halttunen, 2009; Hujala, Heikka, & Fonsén, 2009; Nivala, 1999; Karila, 2004). Participants noted that the work of the centre directors involved the reconciliation of competing aspects of leadership and management work, and this was a major frustration for both centre directors and teachers. This meant reorganising the allocation of managerial duties and thereby supporting directors to enact pedagogical leadership more efficiently.

The main factors inhibiting the distribution of leadership between centre directors and teachers were shown to be the cultural conceptions of the organisational roles of the stakeholders, qualifications and lack of support and resources. Having a pedagogically strong centre director was seen as a prerequisite for practice development, with the teachers having only a minor role in enacting pedagogical leadership. Efficient pedagogical improvement was not shown to be dependent only from sufficient information transferring from centre directors to teachers, rather, it was perceived as a shared construction of understandings and practice of pedagogy. Distribution of leadership responsibilities between teachers and centre directors could construct shared consciousness of the aims and strategies of pedagogical improvement by the processes which can enhance distributed cognition. Salomon (1993) addressed the relationship between individuals and distributed systems and concluded that participating in the practices which enable distributed cognition had an influence on an individuals' cognition. The relationship is reciprocal for an individual and it can also give something to the system. Applying this idea to the contexts of ECE, one could assume that teachers' active participation in the negotiation and planning processes of pedagogy could enhance their capacities for pedagogical improvement and bring relevant information about practice to the macro level leaders of ECE organisations.

Andrews (2009) states that leadership can be seen as a strategy for creating opportunities for learning, not as a source of solutions. Activities

of individual learning are community bounded and influenced by the social processes and resources available in the environment (Hatch & Gardner, 1993; Moll, Tapia, & Whitmore, 1993). Teachers were inclined to adopt leadership roles, but this activity was not coordinated to be parallel with macro level decisions and development programs implemented in the municipality. This activity should be investigated to foster development and evaluation of leadership among teachers, and would in turn assist in maintaining consistency of ECE practices in municipalities.

According to Karila (2008), in Finland, teacher professionalism is strongly shaped by contextual factors, including the enactment of national ECE policy statements. In this study, leadership seemed to be distributed through municipalities by the Finnish National Curriculum (STAKES, 2003). These macro level decisions constituted an anchor for the enactment of distributed leadership between the stakeholders. A deficiency of interdependence could, however, be seen when there was no designated pedagogical leader in a centre. Several studies (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Harris, 2008; Mascall, Leithwood, Strauss, & Sacks, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2007) indicate that functioning distributed leadership with teachers demands expertise, ongoing development of leadership, planning, trust and cooperation. Structures, shared vision and support from administrative staff have also been shown to be crucial. Structures for pedagogical leadership at the team level within centres could be promoted by making this the responsibility of the University qualified ECE teachers as can be seen in Australian ECE centres (Waniganayake et al., 2012). At the moment there is a debate going on in Finland of ECE teachers not having sufficient possibilities for using their pedagogical expertise within centres. In general, the multi-professional teams in ECE centres comprised an ECE teacher, and an upper secondary vocational qualified practical nurse with specialised knowledge of young children. The culture of teamwork has long been dominated by the idea that everybody does everything, emphasising equality of responsibility in pedagogy amongst the team members. However, in reality, pedagogical expertise within ECE centres rests mainly with the University qualified ECE teachers.

Conclusion

In Finnish ECE contexts, distributed pedagogical leadership could be understood as the interdependence between leadership enactments for the purposes of pedagogical improvement. The study suggests that focusing on the development of interdependencies between macro and micro level leadership enactments could eliminate deficiencies in pedagogical improvement identified by participants in this study.

The contextual perspective of leadership affords a productive framework for addressing leadership in ECE in Finnish municipalities. Distributed leadership perspective builds on this by suggesting that not only the *interactions* between the stakeholders but the *interdependence* between macro and micro leadership enactments are crucial in achieving pedagogically sound ECE programs.

Distributed pedagogical leadership could be understood as pedagogical development which involves capacity building of the whole system through creating a zone of interdependence between stakeholders involved in leadership enactment. The zone of interdependence created increases distributed cognition, responsibilities and functions between the stakeholders involved in leadership. It includes structures and tools which enable joint construction of the means and aims for pedagogical improvement. Establishing evaluation systems that monitor and assess the strategies of pedagogical leadership in ECE settings is crucial. Evaluation creates a platform for shared discussion of the developmental areas of pedagogy. These strategies also include support for centre directors to enact pedagogical improvement provided from the upper levels of the municipality. Encouraging teachers' participation in pedagogical leadership is crucial as teachers work closest to the enactment of pedagogy with young children and have the essential knowledge of ECE practice. Sharing responsibilities and actions with teachers in pedagogical leadership includes in addition to distributed cognition, coordinated action of development work within centres. Provision of suitable tools and guidance for the developmental processes within staff teams by the leaders is crucial. Designing the team composition by appointing designated teacher leaders specialised in ECE pedagogy is an essential structural starting point in enhancing distributed leadership within centres.

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