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Author(s):	Hujala, Eeva; Eskelinen, Mervi
Title:	Leadership Tasks in Early Childhood Education
Main work:	Researching Leadership in Early Childhood Education
Editor(s):	Hujala, Eeva; Waniganayake, Manjula; Rodd, Jillian
Year:	2013
Pages:	213-233
ISBN:	978-951-44-9172-6
Publisher:	Tampere University Press
Discipline:	Educational sciences
School /Other Unit:	School of Education
Item Type:	Article in Compiled Work
Language:	en
URN:	URN:NBN:fi:uta-201311131585

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# Leadership Tasks in Early Childhood Education

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## Abstract

Leadership research in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is quite a young arena. It combines leadership concepts from school research as well as from business. There are common aspects in leadership profession in general but the context and the mission define the content of leadership tasks and responsibilities. In Finnish early childhood education pedagogical leadership, human resource management, and daily managerial tasks are the main functions of leaders' work. An ECEC leader's work either as a centre director or as a municipal administrative ECE leader is quite the same. Human resource management dominates most of their leadership work. Importance of leadership tasks and time management differ according to the position of leadership. Full time leaders consider human resource management important and this work can dominate the allocation of their time. Pedagogical leadership dominates part-time leaders' working day but they define daily managerial tasks as being most important. The splintered nature of the daily work profile can frame EC leadership. That is, the leadership tasks are not clear and the concept of pedagogical leadership is silenced in ECEC centres. In order to implement high quality ECEC programs, the mission, core tasks and leadership responsibilities connected to them must be clearly defined.

## Tiivistelmä

Varhaiskasvatuksen johtajuustutkimus on Suomessa jokseenkin nuorta. Siinä löytyy vaikutteita sekä koulumaailman että liike-elämän johtajuustutkimuksista. Vaikka johtajuudessa on paljon yhteisiä piirteitä, kunkin organisaation toimintakonteksti ja perustehtävä määrittävät johtajuuden vastuita ja sisältöjä. Suomalaisessa varhaiskasvatuksessa keskeisiä johtajuustehtäviä ovat pedagogiikan johtaminen ja henkilöstöjohtaminen sekä päivittäisjohtamiseen liittyvät tehtävät. Varhaiskasvatuksen alalla toimivien johtajien työssä painottuvat paljolti samat asiat riippumatta siitä toimivatko he päiväkodin johtajina vai varhaiskasvatuksen johtajina

Eeva Hujala and Mervi Eskelinen: Leadership Tasks in Early Childhood Education.  
Eeva Hujala, Manjula Waniganayake & Jillian Rodd (Eds)  
*Researching Leadership in Early Childhood Education.*  
Tampere: Tampere University Press 2013, 213–234.

kunnan tasolla. Johtajat panostavat henkilöstöjohtamiseen. Johtajan tehtävien tärkeys ja ajankäyttö riippuvat kuitenkin johtajan positiosta. Päätoimiset johtajat pitävät henkilöstöjohtamista tärkeänä ja se viekin heidän työajastaan suurimman osan. Ryhmässä toimivien johtajien aikaa vievin tehtävä on pedagoginen johtaminen, mutta tärkeimpänä he pitävät päivittäisjohtamista. Päivittäisen työn pirstaleisuus luo kehyksen johtajana toimimiselle: johtajuus vastuineen ei ole selvää ja pedagoginen johtajuus voi jäädä päiväkodeissa näkymättömäksi. Varhaiskasvatuksen korkean laadun takaamiseksi päivähoiton perustehtävä ja siihen kytkeytyvä johtajuus pitäisi määritellä tarkemmin.

## Introduction

Leadership in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a holistic process that involves not only the leader and the administration, but also personnel and indirectly parents and everyone else who has an influence on the implementation of early education practices. According to the contextual leadership model (Hujala, Heikka & Halttunen, 2011), leadership is determined and guided by the mission of ECEC, which defines core tasks of the practice in child care. Managerial responsibilities comprise the professional work of centre directors and municipal ECE leaders, defined according to their professional profile and professionalism.

The literature review in this article describes what the leadership arena in ECEC looks like, and what the leadership and management responsibilities are inside ECEC organisations. In light of international research (Nupponen, 2005; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003; Mäkelä, 2007; Isosomppi, 1996) it seems that leadership arenas appear similar regardless of school type or the context of the society. The content and amount of daily responsibilities performed by leaders can vary significantly. The discourse of leadership and the emphasis of the management work can vary according to the leadership context (Hujala, Heikka, & Halttunen, 2011). In addition, in this chapter, results of Finnish ECEC research will be introduced, and based on these findings future challenges for EC leadership development will be discussed.

## Research review on leadership responsibilities

The number of research on what EC directors do in child care programs is limited. Most of the existing research is conducted in freestanding centres instead of centres, which are part of a larger system (Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis, & Sakai, 2011). This is the case in Finland, where child care is mainly organised by municipalities and led according to macro level decisions.

Nupponen (2005, 62) has analysed international leadership research in ECEC, and based on that meta-analysis she has listed leaders' roles and responsibilities. These responsibilities consisted of: 1) to create a professional environment in child care centres, 2) to build and maintain strong interpersonal relationships, 3) to provide leadership and management that shapes the organisation, 4) to influence and provide quality of ECEC, 5) to ensure that outcomes are related to the quality of care and education, and 6) to guide staff and monitor centre activities.

Nupponen (2006) emphasised that the centre director's role was crucial in ensuring high quality ECEC. In the heart of a director's vision and perception of quality is the child and his or her needs. This has been perceived to be one of the main aspects of leadership and a significant dimension of pedagogical leadership. The directors emphasised the importance of a qualified team of teachers who were engaged in their work with children.

According to Rodd (2006, 26) the main responsibilities of centre directors were coordinating "time, talent and task". Jorde Bloom (2000) approached centre directors' responsibilities and tasks from the point of view of their personal competence and professional self-awareness, legal and fiscal management, human relations, educational programming, and facilities, marketing and public relations and advocacy. Scrivens (2003) characterised the crucial tasks in ECE leaders' daily work focusing on people (staff and parents), centre management (program development, curriculum planning and implementation, children and monitoring child/adult ratios), program guidelines and practices (human resource management, financial management, safety and wellbeing, curriculum dissemination, inclusive practices) and property maintenance.

According to a Finnish leadership study by Hujala and Heikka (2008) EC directors' greatest challenge was the lack of time in pedagogical leadership. They identified the contradiction between pedagogical leadership and daily management. Instead of developing pedagogy the directors' daily working

hours were spent in maintaining the structures of the program. Other challenges that directors faced included dealing with staff members' different educational backgrounds, reluctance to pursue self-direction, avoidance of collective development responsibility and conflict between professionals. Ho (2011) suggests that in meeting the needs of the multi-professional staff, the director's responsibility was to be a mentor for staff, especially when dealing with pedagogy or curriculum development work. Staff also wanted more pedagogical feedback from the director when evaluating the quality of their work.

Portin, Schneider, DeArmond and Grundlach (2003) identified seven essential areas in a school principal's duties: instructional leadership, cultural leadership, managerial leadership, human resource leadership, strategic leadership, external development leadership and micropolitical leadership. They criticise this separation of management duties into seven areas, because it may give a false impression of their independent existence.

Writing about school education, Sergiovanni (1995) saw leadership as consisting of various forces. He refers to these forces as technical, human, educational, symbolic and cultural dimensions of leadership. Technical dimension was an ability to manage, organise and plan the school's activities. Leading people was the human dimension and the educational dimension reflected pedagogical leadership. The symbolic force was concerned with participation in school activities with students and teachers and the cultural force was about strengthening the unique identity of the school. According to Sergiovanni (1995), a competent school principal was an education expert who performed well in financial and administrative tasks as well as in leading people. An excellent principal also needs to master symbolic and cultural forces in addition to technical, human and educational dimensions of leadership.

Pennanen (2006, 180) argues that approximately two thirds of a principal's time was spent on "managing things", whereas only one third was spent on leading people. Already in Graham's (1997) research the principals considered themselves more as chief executive officers than education specialists. Research by Vuohijoki (2006), Karikoski (2009), and Mäkelä (2007) show that administrative and financial management were emphasised in a school principal's work. The amount of paperwork and managerial tasks has increased without corresponding increase in available resources. The majority of principals felt they were regularly occupied

with tasks that would rather belong to a caretaker, a secretary, student welfare services or other professionals. Even though these principals valued knowledge management and school development, not enough time was allocated to perform these tasks.

A principal's work can be fragmented, consisting of small and prompt activities. Their work will comprise mainly daily routines (Isosomppi, 1996). Working hours were often spent on filling in forms, handling mail and other routine business. Considerable amount of a principal's working time was spent on reacting to impulses coming from outside or from above. The hierarchical structure of school organisation was reflected in a principal's work. Mustonen (2003, 93) however sees that principals have much more power and possibilities in leading and developing their schools than their predecessors ever had.

## Key concepts in researching EC leadership

The literature review above introduced the main leadership and management responsibilities in educational organisations. In the following literature review we will clarify some key concepts found when researching EC leadership.

### *Pedagogical leadership*

Pedagogical leadership has traditionally been connected to improving and developing educational and teaching practices in educational organisations (Kyllönen, 2011). Portin et al. (2003, 18) talk about instructional leadership instead of pedagogical leadership. Instructional leadership was seen as guiding teaching practice, managing and supervising the curriculum work, ensuring quality of instructing and taking care of teacher's professional growth. In the implementation of instructional leadership Portin et al. (2003, 7) referred to the principal's way of leading the pedagogy, for example, through classroom observations. Taking care of students' safety and security, to maintain contact with their parents and to reassure there were enough enrollments, were seen as the most important tasks of the principal's duty. In her research Kyllönen (2011) broadened the concept of pedagogical leadership to include human resource management and

strategic leadership. Thus it seems that the term “instructional leadership” was a narrower concept than pedagogical leadership.

According to Hujala, Heikka and Halttunen (2011) pedagogical leadership consists of three elements: developing educational practices, taking care of human relations and administrative management from the point of view of educational goals. In ECEC pedagogical leadership means supporting the educational goals and accomplishing curriculum and its decision-making. Leading the pedagogy means leading the core tasks of the educational organisation by all who were involved with the program. According to Heikka and Waniganayake (2011, 505, 510) pedagogical leadership can be shaped by children’s learning, professionalism of the EC staff and society’s values. Therefore, pedagogical leadership was socially constructed and was aligned with both the centre director and the teacher. Pedagogy was also influenced by national and local information steering, teaching practices and curriculum planning theory. Importantly, leadership was necessary to create connections between these dimensions.

The goals of pedagogical leadership can be reached by creating a vision of future directions and by developing procedures. Organising pedagogical meetings, documenting and keeping statistics on pedagogical work were the means of pedagogical leadership and application of the changes in practice. (Nivala, 2002; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2010.) According to Sergiovanni (1998) pedagogical leader was in charge of securing the children’s education and upbringing processes. Most important goal was to awaken teachers to realise the obstacles of these processes and to take initiative to remove these obstacles. O’Sullivan (2009) emphasised the pedagogical leader’s ability to understand how children develop and learn. Without theoretical knowledge and a vision about pedagogy, the director cannot engage staff to develop the quality of ECEC practices.

Kagan and Hallmark (2001, 9) have found that a pedagogical leader’s main task was to be “a bridge between research and practice”. A pedagogical leader reflects on research findings based on her/his own experiences in the field and disseminates these interpretations to centre staff. In addition, a pedagogical leader is responsible for informing the stakeholders concerning the deficiencies she/he has realised.

### *Human resource management*

In ECEC environments, human resource management consists of managing and leading people. Management of human resources aims at finding a balance between the need for personnel and the amount and quality of personnel, and also that the personnel works towards the goals of the organisation. Human resources management also means all those actions taken in steering and forming the organisation's human resources. In contrast, human resource management can also be referred to as daily routines dealing with personnel matters (Vanhala, Laukkanen, & Koskinen, 1998; Fullan, 2007).

Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis and Sakai (2011) found that according to child care centre managers, human resource management was one of the strongest areas of their expertise. Strengths were found especially in creating and maintaining good staff relationships, ability to set clear goals, to support and to motivate staff to work efficiently, to encourage staff to educate themselves further, to solve conflicts and to communicate effectively with everyone.

In the USA, the accreditation guidelines from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2008) described the EC manager's control over human resources management: supervision of the staff, examination of the procedures and the introduction of new practices were central managerial duties. Managers interviewed by Ang (2012) saw the challenges in human resource management arising from the multi-professional nature of ECEC work – professionals from different fields held differing views about the agenda and the means to achieve goals. The manager needs to understand both the clients' and the employees' views.

### *Leading change*

Rodd (2006) suggests that decision-making usually means change. Implementing decisions require changes in an individual's thinking and skills as well as changes in organisational principles and practices. The most important thing in leadership when implementing change is to take care of staff wellbeing through the change. Feelings of insecurity, pressure and resistance to change can decrease the organisation's ability to perform effectively.

Lakomski (1999) examined change management from the organisational culture point of view. Key factors in change management identified by her

were: the vision created by the director, engagement of the members of the organisation to its values, and director's ability to improve the organisation. Because the dynamic changes in society require significant changes in educational field, leading the change is a crucial part of leadership work (Lakomski, 1999; Rodd, 2006).

Fullan (2001) suggests that an objective of leading change is finding meaning and meaningfulness in work. The manager needs to be able to understand the necessity for the change in order to manage the change. The manager's sense of direction reflects the work to the community. Fullan emphasised the meaning of interaction and sense of community in leading change.

### *Service management*

Service management is strongly culture bound, depending on the structure and function of ECEC. It can be seen as strictly regulated social service for families, as is the case in Finland, or as a flexible client oriented business.

Nivala (1999) has defined service management as acknowledging customer orientation in leadership. The key issue in service management or in customer service is that the organisation is aware of how customers perceive the services and the quality of them, as well as how to provide services that meet the customer needs (Grönroos, 1987). Nivala (2002) and Armistead and Kiely (2003) defined service management in ECEC as developing variety of child care services according to the needs of the families, acknowledging the needs and meeting them by developing the practices, forming common policies and considering new technological service solutions. Rodd (2006) emphasised that providing high quality services requires sharing knowledge and empowering the staff and the parents in service management. From the point of view of service management Armistead and Kiely (2003) demand that staff have an ability to interpret the daily service situations, be proactive in development work, technical knowhow, the use of technological solutions, and the ability to understand organisation's viewpoint in providing services to be examples of service capabilities. Armistead and Kiely (2003) also found connection between the customer satisfaction and productivity. This is pivotal in ECEC as well, but it is difficult to make the connections visible because of the interdependence of different things (Nivala, 2012).

### *Financial management*

In recent years demands for cost-effectiveness and business expertise have risen in the field of ECEC in Finland. Public economy sets the boundaries for solutions and actions taken. In publicly funded procedures public interest, resources and responsibility of clients' wellbeing always comes first. (Niiranen, Seppänen-Järvelä, Sinkkonen, & Vartiainen, 2010.) Because funding of ECEC is part of municipal economy, the budgeting is based on forward estimates, made in advance by municipal decision-making bodies.

Mitchell (1997; in NAYEC 2008) has analysed areas of EC leadership and concluded that efficient leadership can be described as consisting of two areas of expertise. ECE leader must have a strong business expertise and good personal leadership skills. However according to Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis and Sakai (2011) and Nupponen (2006) child care centre directors do not have sufficient financial management skills. They point out that during this time, EC directors were trained as teachers, not as specialists in administration and business.

Portin et al. (2003) argue that financial management, such as budgeting and sharing resources, take a considerable amount of an EC manager's working time. It is an important skill area, due to the fact that fiscal management decisions regulate program practices. Rohacek, Adams and Kisker (2010, 90) state that "it is not surprising that variations in financial stress or comfort were associated with variations in observed classroom quality". They concluded that centres with the lowest observed quality were typically characterised as struggling with funding, and centres with the highest observed quality were all characterised as financially comfortable, with higher resource levels.

### *Network management*

Fullan (2001) emphasised a shift away from highlighting the system, strategies and statistics, towards highlighting people and human interaction in management. Human and institutional networking was considered a prerequisite for future management. To facilitate collaboration instead of focusing only on individual development is a pathway to development of ECEC. When learning in a collaborative working context, information by itself is meaningless. In collaboration the information can be turned into meaningful and useful knowledge.

Kagan and Hallmark (2001) refer to community leadership, when the ECEC institution was aware and responsive to its neighborhood and took into account its community's needs. Furthermore many studies (for example Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis, & Sakai, 2011) emphasised that public relations were often maintained only for funding purposes in ECEC institutions.

In network management leaders transmit the voices of children, families and employees, and act as advocates of various ECEC matters. This takes place when participating in discussions and influencing local level decision-making, for example, in recommending amendments in legislation (Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Kagan & Hallmark, 2001; NAYEC 2008). Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis and Sakai (2011) emphasised that "leaders of preschool programs must not only improve and sustain quality in their own work environments but also collaborate with other leaders across differing programs". The Australian leaders in Nupponen's (2006) research felt that bringing children's advocacy to macro-level would require more skills than ECE leaders had at that time. Advocacy was connected to the political dimension of leadership.

Moyles and Yates (2004; Rodd, 2006) clarify that becoming politically aware can mean understanding how policies about the public, private and voluntary sectors can affect the lives of children, families and the EC profession. Those leaders who kept up with local policy and other issues, understood who was involved and how the political scene operated at the local level, and networked with key people to champion individual settings or the profession within the community. Leaders who act as advocates on behalf of the early childhood profession need the support of others – such as parents, the general public, politicians and administrators – to help them achieve their goals (Rodd, 2006).

Sergiovanni (1995) points out the importance of human relations and networks. He sees that the quality of human relationships determines the quality of the school. Creating interpersonal collaboration and care, information seeking and information sharing, and acceptance and love of pupils are the main duties of a leader. To succeed in this, the leader should have good interpersonal and networking skills.

### *Daily management*

Daily management seems to be typically a Finnish concept referring to ‘secretarial’ tasks connected with leadership (Nivala, 1999). Daily managerial tasks were mechanisms and routine tasks that have to be carried out on a daily basis. These included recruitment of substitute staff, matters to do with maintenance of the property and making small purchases. No particular expert knowledge was needed to perform these tasks, but they can be very time-consuming.

Kagan and Hallmark (2001) list daily administrative tasks: financial and personnel management, knowledge management, immediate stakeholder collaboration, planning, pedagogy and services provided to families. Also in a research conducted in Hong Kong by Ho (2011, 54) was noted that ECE leaders must take care of “keeping the wheels turning” in their day care centre. This included for example, allocation of resources, monitoring daily activities and personnel management. Ho claimed that the reason why leaders had to perform these administrative tasks was the lack of middle management in daycare.

## Researching leadership tasks in ECEC contexts in Finland

In Finland ECEC has two aims: to provide child care service for families and provide early childhood education for children. The early childhood education is embraced as the concept of ‘EDUCARE’. It reflects the integration of education, teaching and care (Hujala, 2010). The aim of EDUCARE is to promote children’s positive self-image, develop expressive and interactive skills, enhance learning and develop thinking as well as support children’s overall wellbeing (STM, 2004).

Child care in Finland is a universal and public service for families. Every child has a subjective right to have early education regardless of their parents’ employment status. Municipalities are obliged to organise child care for every child under school age if families need it. 62 percent of Finnish children aged 1–6 years were in child care. The child care as a service is typically full-time (80%) and mainly provided by municipal child care centres. There are also other forms of child care, such as family day care, private child care centres and part-time child care. Pre-school is voluntary for children aged six. (Karila & Kinos, 2012.)

The child care is regulated by legislation under the Act of Children's Day Care (36/1973), Decree of Children's Day Care (239/1973) and steered by the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC (Stakes, 2004). Pre-school for 6 years old children is steered by Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Finland (OPH, 2000). Qualification requirements for ECE leaders are defined in the Act on Qualification Requirements for Social Welfare Professionals (272/2005). Centre directors are required to be qualified EC teacher and to have adequate management skills. Administrative ECE leaders are required to have higher university degree, knowledge of the sector, and adequate management skills. In this legislative framework municipalities can define EC directors' tasks.

## Conducting research

Leadership in the Finnish context was studied by clarifying the leadership responsibilities and tasks of centre directors and municipal administrative ECE leaders. Participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire where they assessed what kind of leadership tasks they did and what kind of responsibilities they had during the day. They were asked to assess what kind of tasks they felt were the most important and what tasks they felt were important but did not have enough time to accomplish. The questionnaire contained both open ended and structured closed questions. The data was analysed both quantitatively as well as qualitatively. The informants comprised of three groups: full-time directors (n=56) and part-time directors (n=18) in child care centres, and ECE leaders (n=16) that worked in local city offices. Part-time directors worked as directors or vice directors as well as teachers in a children's group.

## Leadership tasks in Finnish ECEC

The informants of this study were asked to assess how they allocated their work time between different leadership tasks. They were asked to assess approximately what proportion of their daily working time was used in following management functions: pedagogical leadership, service

management, human resource management, financial management, leading change, network management, and daily managerial tasks.

**Table 1. Leaders' time used in different leadership responsibilities (%)**

	Centre directors (n=50)	Part-time directors (n=13)	ECE leaders (n=14)
Pedagogical leadership	18	32	18
Service management	13	12	13
Human resource management	26	16	25
Financial management	8	7	12
Leading change	11	7	15
Network management	8	5	11
Daily managerial tasks	17	19	16

The results of this study showed that main responsibilities of Finnish leaders were connected to pedagogical leadership and human resource management. Table 1 shows that there were differences between the respondent groups, and the percentages estimated their working time in allocated to different tasks. The total working loadings varied between 0 to 130% because for many informants it was difficult to divide their tasks exclusively into a certain category which then raised the percentage over 100.

Full time leaders – centre directors and ECE leaders – spent most of their time in human resource management. Directors working with a child group reported they spent most of their time in pedagogical leadership. This may indicate that the orientation of those directors working simultaneously as teachers was mainly pedagogical. It might be that the concept asked, such as pedagogical leadership, was not clear for them. The part-time directors also referred to pedagogical leadership as part of their teaching rather than pedagogical leadership at the centre level. Pedagogical leadership and daily managerial tasks were the second most time consuming areas for the full time directors. These results may imply that work time profiles of full time directors and ECE leaders were alike. Although in ECE leaders work profile the financial management, leading change and network management took slightly more time and resources than in centre directors' work loading. Part-time directors' work profile differed from the full-time directors

work profile. Daily managerial tasks were more loaded in part-time centre directors' work than in the full time directors' work.

Open ended questions were analysed qualitatively to gain an understanding of the content of the leadership tasks. This analysis implies that managerialism was present in all parts of Finnish ECE leadership. Managerialism seems to be part of especially centre directors' everyday tasks, as an essential aspect connected with maintaining structures. The most frequently mentioned stressful factor was the replacement of absent teachers with substitutes. Substitutes were difficult to get, and the search was very time consuming for the directors. The lack of time, stress and the feeling of fragmented work seem to burden these leaders.

Table 2 shows that centre directors and ECE leaders ranked the importance of their leadership tasks in a similar way. Full time centre directors and ECE leaders perceived the human resource management as the most important leadership task, and the pedagogical leadership as the second important task. Whereas the directors working with a children's group perceived daily management to be the most important leadership task, and human resource management the second most important task.

**Table 2. The importance of leadership tasks vs. time resources** (1=most important, 7=least important; \*, \*\*, \*\*\*=the more stars, the more time needed for successful completion)

	Centre directors		Part-time directors		ECE leaders	
	Task importance	Time resources	Task importance	Time resources	Task importance	Time resources
Pedagogical leadership	<b>2.</b>	***	<b>3.</b>	***	<b>2.</b>	***
Service management	<b>3.</b>		4.		4.	
Human resource management	<b>1.</b>	**	<b>2.</b>	**	<b>1.</b>	***
Financial management	5.		6.		4.	
Leading change	7.	*	6.		5.	*
Network management	6.		5.		<b>3.</b>	
Daily managerial tasks	4.		<b>1.</b>	*	6.	

The results indicated that directors and leaders felt they did not have enough time for the most important leadership tasks: pedagogical leadership and human resource management were perceived to be important by every respondent group. Part-time directors emphasised daily managerial tasks, although the time to accomplish those tasks was insufficient. ECE leaders considered network management as third important task. Both centre directors as well as ECE leaders wanted more time to lead change, although they did not consider it to be important.

The responses reflect that the directors and ECE leaders were somewhat frustrated. They felt they have responsibility for several tasks, but they did not have enough power or possibilities to influence them. This has been the situation for a long time in leadership reality in Finland (Nivala, 1999). Regardless of this the respondents felt that they were adequately supported in their leadership work. Over half of the respondents felt that peer support from other leaders provided most support for their own professional development. The support from their own supervisors and

the leadership training provided by the municipality were also considered important. The respondents considered their own communication skills as the most significant factor in succeeding in their leadership. In addition to these, professional staff and the support it provided were seen crucial to the leaders' work.

Network management including advocacy for children, parents and the whole community has been shown to be important in many EC leadership research (Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2013; Nupponen, 2005). Yet in Finnish ECEC thus the management leadership of the sector has not been considered to be an area of crucial responsibility (Table 2) and therefore directors did not spend much time with this task (Table 1). It seems that networking and advocacy were delegated outside of the centres to the municipal ECE leaders. Does this imply that centre directors in Finland were well concentrated in centre businesses and did not emphasise their expert role when serving families and children in the society?

## Closing

EC leadership is based on the mission of ECEC. Ultimately, leadership aims at increasing the wellbeing of children through the provision of high quality ECEC services (see also Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2013). Leadership is constantly evolving to be appropriately updated according to the dynamic expectations of the mission of ECEC.

This study showed that in Finnish EC leadership tasks and job profiles were quite ambiguous. One reason for this is that the concepts of leadership are unclear for the leaders themselves. Human resource management and pedagogical leadership were emphasised by all of the respondent groups. These leadership tasks were perceived to form the basis for enhancing the high quality implementation of the core tasks. However, in this research the discourse of the mission was quite invisible. This questions the fact if pedagogical leadership is appropriately connected to the mission, does it enhance the teachers' actual pedagogical work? Also Fonsén (2013) found that directors were uncertain about the implementation of pedagogical leadership although the discourse of it was strong. Concept of pedagogical leadership should first be clarified and then find out how directors comprehend it in daily work. In practice, limited time can hinder both

pedagogical leadership and human resource management. Allocations of sufficient time for important leadership tasks should be more clearly defined to guarantee high quality ECEC programs.

All in all, centre directors felt burdened by constant feeling of hurry and splintered nature of work. Adequate support and assistant staff, such as secretaries, could make it possible for directors to focus on the core purpose of leadership profession in ECEC: pedagogical management and human resource management. In order to be responsible for high quality ECEC, directors need both managerial authority as well as authority to create and implement vision. Hill (2003) states that without support from policymakers and local administrators as well as authority to make decisions directors are responsible for everything without any power to decide anything.

Finnish EC leadership is characterised by managerialism, which is reactive instead of being proactive. It takes resources from visionary leadership and development work. The challenge for Finnish leadership is to shift the focus from managerialism to strategic leadership (Akselin, 2013) in order to ensure the high quality provision of the core tasks of ECEC. Change of leadership requires training for directors and also for staff in order to clarify the significance of leadership work. Communication skills, peer support and continual training are key elements in achieving success in leadership positions (see also Rodd, 2013; Waniganayake, Cheeseman, Fenech, Hadley, & Shepherd, 2012).

In Finland, currently the changes in ECEC structures and steering system and challenges for developing ECEC practice require both high status for leadership profession as well as developing shared responsibility of leadership. It is important to understand in ECEC practice that shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003) and distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005) do not mean delegating or sharing the tasks but comprehending how the tasks are completed together. This means that when the staff members are aware of their role in ECEC institution they are able to act more according their self-initiated goals and responsibilities. All this means that leading team involvement and self-management as well as empowering the members of the organisation are key issues in distributing leadership. Updating the leadership discourse and concepts as well profiles and responsibilities in leadership work are challenging but essential in ensuring high quality leadership (see McDowall Clark & Murray, 2012; Aubrey et al., 2013). The EC director must understand the key functions of leadership and other

staff members need to know what kind of support they can expect from the leader. Both directors' and staff members' leadership responsibilities need to be clarified in order to improve the efficiency of leadership as well as to ensure the functioning and wellbeing of the whole organisation.

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