



JOHANNA HEIKKA

Distributed Pedagogical Leadership  
in Early Childhood Education



ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE

JOHANNA HEIKKA

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January 2014

Johanna Heikka

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## List of abbreviations

ECE	Early Childhood Education	9
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	22
STAKES	Sosiaali- ja terveysalan tutkimus ja kehittämiskeskus (presently THL Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos)	23
THL	Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos	23
FINHEEC	Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council	88

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## Abstract of the dissertation

This study examined leadership in Early Childhood Education (ECE) enacted in municipalities in Finland. This study is a thesis by publication consisting of five articles. Two of the articles are literature reviews focusing on the theoretical underpinnings of this study and three articles are based on the data collected to address the specific research questions investigated in this dissertation. The four main aims of the dissertation were:

- To investigate how distributed pedagogical leadership can be conceptualised in the contexts of ECE.
- To examine how the enactment of ECE leadership responsibilities, especially pedagogical leadership, is perceived by different stakeholders involved in leadership roles in municipalities.
- To gain a holistic understanding of the perceptions of leadership enactment held by different ECE stakeholders.
- To analyse the leadership perceptions of different stakeholders in order to identify the main constructions of ECE leadership within the theoretical frame of distributed pedagogical leadership.

The theoretical underpinnings of the study that informed the analysis were aligned with two main perspectives of leadership: Distributed leadership and pedagogical leadership. These two theoretical perspectives were chosen for two key reasons. Firstly, distributed leadership has the capacity to assist one in understanding leadership as enacted by a dispersed set of ECE stakeholders in Finnish municipalities. Secondly, leadership enactment within ECE settings in Finland is directly aligned with pedagogical leadership and this reflects the core purpose of ECE in this country.

Leadership was investigated by analysing leadership discussions among ECE stakeholders working at different levels. The study is located within a social constructionist methodological approach. It aimed to ascertain the perspectives of a range of ECE stakeholders in relation to how leadership was enacted in the communities in which they were employed. The data was collected by a focus group method in 10 municipalities in Finland. In each municipality, focus groups

were organised for selected ECE stakeholder groups: ECE teachers, ECE centre directors, ECE leaders and/or members of municipal committees. The data was analysed in two phases using qualitative content analysis and distributed representations methods. The conclusions were written based on the synthesis of the study results.

The three most important findings of this study were that pedagogical leadership was perceived as the main leadership responsibility of all ECE stakeholders who participated in this research – namely, centre directors, teachers, and municipal ECE leaders and committee members. However, every stakeholder group reported that there was insufficient sharing of pedagogical leadership responsibilities. Centre directors and teachers reported that they experienced disconnected enactment of pedagogical leadership because macro level leaders were too remote from the daily practices for establishing efficient strategies for pedagogical improvement. In addition, centre directors faced difficulties in sharing responsibilities for pedagogical improvement with the teachers. Moreover, there were many signs of emerging constructions of leadership as being distributed, as evidenced in the participants' focus group discussions. The development of interdependence between the stakeholders was also perceived to be important.

# Tiivistelmä

Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tarkastella varhaiskasvatuksen johtajuuden toteutumista suomalaisissa kunnissa. Tutkimus on artikkeliväitöskirja, joka perustuu viiteen artikkeliin: artikkeleista kaksi tarkastelee tutkimuksen teoreettisia lähtökohtia ja kolme perustuu kerättyyn aineistoon. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on:

- Tutkia miten jaettu pedagoginen johtajuus voidaan käsitteellistää varhaiskasvatuksen konteksteissa.
- Tarkastella miten toimijat kuntien eri johtajuusrooleissa kokevat johtajuusvastuiden ja erityisesti pedagogisen johtajuuden toteutumisen.
- Luoda kokonaisvaltainen käsitys johtajuuden toteutumisesta eri toimijoiden näkemysten perusteella.
- Analysoida eri osapuolten näkemyksiä johtajuudesta ja löytää keskeiset tulkinnot varhaiskasvatuksen johtajuudesta jaetun pedagogisen johtajuuden viitekehyksessä.

Tutkimuksen teoreettiset lähtökohdat liittyvät kahteen johtajuusnäkökulmaan: jaettuun johtajuuteen ja pedagogiseen johtajuuteen. Näiden kahden teoreettisen näkökulman valintaan vaikutti kaksi keskeistä tekijää. Jaettu johtajuus auttaa ymmärtämään hajautuneiden kunnallisten toimijoiden toteuttamaa johtajuutta, ja pedagoginen johtajuus liittyy johtajuuden toteutumiseen varhaiskasvatuksen ympäristöissä, mikä puolestaan heijastaa varhaiskasvatuksen perustehtävää Suomessa.

Johtajuutta tutkittiin analysoimalla eri johtajuustasoilla toimivien varhaiskasvatuksen osapuolten keskusteluja johtajuudesta. Metodologisesti tutkimus sijoittuu sosiaaliseen konstruktionismiin, jonka avulla pyrittiin tavoittamaan varhaiskasvatuksen toimijoiden erilaiset näkemykset johtajuuden toteutumisesta heidän omissa työyhteisöissään. Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin 10 kunnasta. Kunnissa ryhmäkeskusteluihin osallistui valikoidut ryhmät: päiväkotien kasvatushenkilöstö, päiväkotien johtajat, varhaiskasvatuksen johtavat virkamiehet ja/tai varhaiskasvatuksesta vastaava lautakunta. Aineiston analyysi toteutettiin kaksivaiheisesti, ja siinä sovellettiin laadullisen sisällönanalyysin ja jaetun kuvaamisen (distributed representations) menetelmiä. Tutkimuksen johtopäätökset perustuvat synteesiin artikkelitutkimusten tuloksista.

Kolme keskeisintä tutkimustulosta oli, että kaikki tutkimukseen osallistuneet ryhmät – lautakunnat, johtavat viranhaltijat, päiväkotien johtajat sekä henkilöstö – pitivät pedagogista johtajuutta keskeisenä johtajuusvastuuna. Kaikki ryhmät kuitenkin kokivat, että vastuuta pedagogisesta johtajuudesta ei jaeta riittävästi. Päiväkotien johtajat ja henkilöstö kokivat, että makrotason johtajat ovat etäännyneet päivittäisistä käytännöistä, mikä heikentää heidän mukaansa makrotason johtajien mahdollisuuksia luoda tehokkaita pedagogisen kehittämisen strategioita. Lisäksi päiväkotien johtajat pitivät johtajuusvastuiden jakamista henkilöstön kanssa vaikeana. Osallistujien ryhmäkeskusteluissa kuitenkin ilmeni uudenlaisia tulkintoja johtajuudesta jaettuna toimintana: näissä keskusteluissa pidettiin tärkeänä, että eri tasojen johtajuustoiminta kytkeytyy tiiviisti toisiinsa.

## List of original publications

The dissertation is based on the following articles:

### *Literature Review articles:*

- Article 1: Heikka, J., Waniganayake, M., & Hujala, E. (2013). Contextualizing distributed leadership within early childhood education: Current understandings, research evidence and future challenges. *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership*, 41(1), 30–44.
- Article 2: Heikka, J., & Waniganayake, M. (2011). Pedagogical leadership from a distributed perspective within the context of early childhood education. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 14(4), 499–512.

### *Research Findings articles:*

- Article 3: Heikka, J., & Hujala, E. (2013). Early childhood leadership through the lens of distributed leadership. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21(4), 568–580.
- Article 4: Heikka, J. (2013). Enacting distributed pedagogical leadership in Finland: Perceptions of early childhood education stakeholders. In E. Hujala, M. Waniganayake, & J. Rodd (Eds.), *Researching leadership in early childhood education* (pp. 255–273). Tampere: Tampere University Press.
- Article 5: Heikka, J., & Hujala, E. (2012). Distribution of leadership among ECE leaders and members of municipal committees in Finland. *International Journal of Early Childhood Education and Care* 1, 15–30.

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## Certification by the candidate

The dissertation entitled *Distributed Pedagogical Leadership in Early Childhood Education* was prepared as a part of a cotutelle agreement between the University of Tampere, Finland, and Macquarie University, Australia. The dissertation is an original piece of research and it has been written by the candidate. Any help and assistance that have been received in research work and the preparation of the dissertation itself have been appropriately acknowledged. All data analysis was completed and all papers were written by the candidate. Articles 1, 2, 3, and 5 include one or both of the supervisors as co-authors. In these cases, the candidate had primary responsibility for all aspects of the reported work including the design, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript preparation and revision. Please note that all five papers are presented in the dissertation in their published format. Hence, some variation in formatting and referencing exists in accordance with the required style format of various publications.





# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The focus and rationale of the study

This study examined leadership in *Early Childhood Education* (ECE). ECE commonly encompasses education for children from birth to 8 years of age. In this study, the focus is on Finnish ECE services prior to school age, including early childhood and pre-school services. Early childhood services in Finland comprise children from birth to 6 years old, and pre-school comprises one year before compulsory education starting at 7 years of age.

Contemporary theorising and research of ECE aims to formulate the link between leadership and ECE pedagogy. This dissertation is positioned on the assumption that the ECE context determines the realisation of leadership. Therefore, this study analyses the enactment of *pedagogical leadership* through the perceptions of ECE stakeholders working in diverse professional positions in the contexts of ECE. This study interprets their leadership perceptions within a theoretical framework of *distributed pedagogical leadership*.

In Finland, municipalities have an obligation to plan and implement public services. All children and families are legitimated to receive equal, high-quality early childhood services irrespective of their residence or financial capabilities. The power of the municipalities in local government is significant for the administration of ECE in highly decentralised Finland. Self-government exercised by municipal residents is based on the Constitution of Finland (Suomen perustuslaki 731/1999). The functioning of municipalities and their responsibilities in relation to ECE services are stipulated mainly by the Finnish Local Government Act (Kuntalaki 365/1995) and the Finnish Child Care Act (Laki lasten päivähoidosta 36/1973).

In Finland, the provision and leadership of local ECE services is organised by municipalities. The Finnish municipality is a complex context for leadership of ECE, having a diverse set of ECE stakeholders who operate on different levels of municipal organisation. The key stakeholders involved in ECE leadership within municipalities are municipal committees, ECE leaders, centre directors, and teachers, each having their own responsibilities in the process of service provision. The dispersed set of ECE stakeholders who are operating in wide geographical distance from each other presents challenges for the stakeholders' work and for the functioning of the ECE leadership system as a whole. This study

was particularly interested in examining how the enactment of ECE leadership responsibilities, especially pedagogical leadership, was perceived by different key ECE stakeholders involved in leadership in municipalities. This study aimed at providing a holistic understanding of the perceptions of leadership enactment. That is, in analysing leadership perceptions, diverse perspectives were investigated side by side within the theoretical frame of distributed pedagogical leadership. This process led to identification of the main constructions of ECE leadership in selected Finnish municipalities.

Studying leadership enactment through study participants' perceptions differentiates this research from the studies that take on a general understanding of the concept. This decision was based on the argument that contextual factors of ECE leadership present challenges for leadership enactment in Finnish municipalities, especially for the functioning of the pedagogical leadership within the system as a whole. Taking an interest in what and how the participants perceived leadership, as well as how they understood and interpreted leadership enactment (activity, performance, and realisation) in their own living surroundings enabled this study to comment critically on the functioning of ECE leadership in the Finnish municipalities selected for the study.

However, the two perspectives in terms of the perceptions of leadership in general and the perceptions of leadership enactment in particular, were simultaneously present and intertwined in the results of this study. The relationship between them had an internal logic which was connected with the existence of distributed leadership in the participants' emerging ideas of leadership, and resulted from the realisation of their work. This point of view was explained further in the discussion of the results. The focus of this study is relatively new in the sense that the body of research in ECE leadership (Hujala, 2002; Rodd, 1997) did not state clearly whether the perceptions of the study participants were connected with the enactment of leadership.

The perceptions of ECE stakeholders were reflected in a theoretical frame of distributed pedagogical leadership that was formulated in this study. The goal was to capture the diverse perspectives of the participants; the theoretical frame presented the core understanding and the elements of distributed pedagogical leadership against which the perceptions of the participants of this study were reflected. The theoretical frame provided depth and focus for the analysis and assisted in formulating implications for policy and practice based on the study results.

The significance of this research is connected with the ability to provide implications for policy and practice, which assists in developing leadership functions in Finnish municipalities in leading and maintaining the quality of ECE pedagogy provision. According to Rodd (2006), leadership in early childhood education is fundamental to the creation of a high quality of service. Responding to quality issues requires participation in distributed leadership; in other words, it means

using the capabilities of personnel for educational development and quality improvement. Highly efficient leadership occurs in communities in which members' own experiences are worthwhile, as they are members of expert teams and can be part of decision-making (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Rodd, 2006). Despite the fact that participation of the wider community in leadership has been acknowledged among the scholars of ECE leadership, researchers have adopted a micro lens in focusing on the leadership phenomenon by investigating the actions and/or attributes of leaders themselves (for example, see Hayden, 1996; Hujala & Puroila, 1998; Jorde-Bloom, 1992, 1995; Rodd, 1996, 1997, 2006; Vander-Ven, 2000). The investigation of the functions and roles of educational leaders (for example Boardman, 1999; Nupponen, 2005) and the study of relationships between leaders and followers (see Aubrey, 2007; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Hard, 2004; Rodd, 2006) have also been a consistent theme of early childhood studies.

More recent research conducted in Finland is cognisant of the impact of socio-cultural contexts on leadership performance, such as Akselin (2013); Halttunen (2009); Hujala, Heikka, and Fonsén (2009); Soukainen (2008). Overall, although ECE leadership is distributed among a variety of stakeholders within Finnish municipalities, the adoption of a distributed leadership perspective in studying and developing leadership practices is still rare. Pioneering work in studying distributed ECE organisations in Finland has been done by Halttunen (2009). She focused on studying micro level leadership enactments between centre directors and staff in distributed ECE organisations. This study continues this work by investigating leadership as perceived by a broader set of stakeholders involving also macro level ECE decision makers within municipalities, such as ECE leaders and municipal committees.

The body of ECE leadership research in Finland purports its core understanding of leadership as a contextual phenomenon. These studies consistently indicate that contexts of leadership define leadership discourse and the leadership culture (Akselin, 2013; Hujala, 2002, 2004; Nivala, 1999). The contextual leadership model (Nivala, 1999, 2001) provides a framework for understanding leadership within contexts unique to ECE (Hujala, 2004; Nivala, 2001) and as a micro but also a macro level phenomenon, and it examines the interaction between these systems (Nivala, 1999). According to Hujala (2013), contextually-appropriate leadership is where the roles and responsibilities are based on the core purpose of ECE on all contextual levels. This study continues this tradition by emphasising the significance of understanding leadership as a contextual phenomenon and investigating leadership from diverse perspectives of macro and micro level stakeholders focused on the leadership of the core purposes of ECE.

The theoretical underpinnings of the study are aligned with two main perspectives of leadership: distributed leadership and pedagogical leadership. These two

were chosen for the study because of their expected capacity to assist in understanding leadership as enacted by a dispersed set of ECE stakeholders in Finnish municipalities and to address leadership enactment, which is focused on the core purpose of ECE. Leadership enactment within ECE settings in Finland is directly aligned with pedagogical leadership and this reflects the core purpose of ECE in this country.

Distributed leadership theorising and research is relatively young and has been developed mainly in educational leadership contexts. Currently, early childhood theorising about distributed leadership is evolving. In separating the roles and responsibilities of early childhood leaders from the workplace operational dimensions of administration, management, and leadership, it has become necessary to rethink how ECE leadership is researched and reconceptualised. According to Waniganayake (2000), distributed leadership provides one of the possibilities for achieving organisational cohesion through the integration of these three applied orientations under a single conceptual framework. It is suggested that there can be more than one person/actor involved in leading by learning, based on their knowledge-based expertise.

The relationship between these two concepts in this study was understood as pedagogical leadership being one of the core leadership responsibilities in ECE and distributed leadership as an efficient strategy enacting it within complex municipality structures. The connection could also be found in the contemporary theorising and research on distributed leadership that addresses educational aspects of leadership responsibilities. The characteristics and connections between these concepts have been investigated in the literature reviews completed for the study. The aim of this examination was to conceptualise distributed pedagogical leadership in the contexts of ECE, which provided a frame for the analysis of leadership discussions of the ECE stakeholders involved in the study. As a result of the conceptualisation, distributed pedagogical leadership was understood as interdependence between micro and macro level leadership enactments in pedagogical development.

Leadership in this study was understood according to the *social constructionist* methodology as an activity constructed by people in social interactions. This ontological standpoint is connected to the assumption that leadership practice and its meanings for people are generated in social interactions. People construct and negotiate common understandings of the events and contexts in which their daily life occurs. Adopting the social constructionist approach in this study meant that it focused on investigating leadership as constructed in social actions and discussions between people. It examined leadership discussions from a range of perspectives of ECE stakeholders of how leadership was enacted in the communities they were involved in.

This study made conclusions and practical implications of leadership enactment based on the perceptions of the study participants. In this way, the research object was connected also with the realisation of the work of the study participants. It distinguishes this study from the body of social constructionist research which focuses on the ways the meanings were developed in speech. This study directed its attention instead to the content of leadership discussions related to the research questions of particular articles. This way it gathered knowledge that could assist in the development of practices of ECE leadership.

The data was analysed in two phases of analysis process: Analysis of the substantive content of the discussions among stakeholder groups using qualitative content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009) in phase one, and cross-group examination of the substantive content of leadership discussions in phase two. The second phase applied the method introduced by Gergen and Gergen (2007) of distributed representations. This involved analysing the leadership discussions of different stakeholders side by side, aiming to reach a holistic understanding of perceptions of leadership enactment.

The data was collected by a focus group method in 10 municipalities in Finland. The collection of data was completed as part of a leadership research project called *Kasvatus- ja opetusalan johtajuus* administered by the University of Tampere in Finland between the years 2006–2008. The main aim of the research project was to investigate and compare the core purpose and leadership discussions between municipalities administered either by the municipal committees of Educational Affairs or by municipal committees of Social Affairs. The aims, scopes, and data collection of the project were wider than those of this particular dissertation.

For the purposes of reaching a holistic understanding of the perceptions of leadership enactment, this study included multi-voiced leadership by involving diverse stakeholders as participants in this study. It was anticipated that by including perceptions from the diverse perspectives of the stakeholders in the body of data, the picture of leadership constructed in this research would become more holistic, intact, and complete in relation to leadership realities in Finnish municipalities. For example, the results gained would have been different if one perspective among the selected participants was excluded from the study. Excluding, for example, staff's voices from the research would construct a biased understanding of the research object, as it would miss a significant aspect of leaders' work.

Distributed pedagogical leadership in this study was understood as interdependence between micro and macro level leadership enactment in pedagogical development. Even though this line of argument was crystallised only towards the end of the research process, the dominant idea of it was present throughout the study, from data collection to the final interpretations of the study results. Similarly, the core elements of distributed pedagogical leadership were formulated

during the research process, but they were influential in the analysis and conclusions of the study.

The focal findings of study were, firstly, that pedagogical leadership was perceived as the main leadership responsibility by the ECE stakeholders. Secondly, the common understanding of leadership among the study participants was connected to responsibility for influencing the goal-oriented work of others. Leadership enactment was perceived as similar among participants involved in certain stakeholder groups between municipalities. However, there were minor variations between the municipal committee groups as to how the core purpose of leadership and main leadership responsibilities were understood. All groups agreed that there was insufficiency in sharing pedagogical leadership responsibilities between the stakeholders. Macro level leaders were reported often by the centre directors and teachers to be too remote from the daily practices for establishing efficient strategies for pedagogical improvement. In addition, centre directors faced difficulties in sharing responsibilities for pedagogical improvement with the teachers. Along with the disconnected enactment of pedagogical leadership, emerging constructions of leadership as distributed were shown in the participants' discussions. The development of interdependence between the stakeholders was perceived to be important. These findings have implications for policy and practice of ECE in terms of suggesting that the efficiency of leadership enactment could be enhanced by creating practices that promote interdependencies between the ECE stakeholders operating in selected Finnish municipalities.

## 1.2 Finnish ECE as a research context

Finland has participated in the global reviews of early childhood undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that have been conducted since 1998 (OECD, 2006). In these reviews, Finland has consistently performed as one of the world's best providers of early childhood education. In the most recent global report card that was used to monitor and compare the performance of 29 OECD countries prepared by the Innocenti Research Centre (Adamson, 2008), Finland was ranked number three from the top. The 10 benchmarks used reflected minimum standards on access, quality, and support attributes of early childhood provision within a country (Adamson, 2008). However, according to OECD's national report (OECD, 2012), Finland faces challenges in leadership skills and competencies which were found essential for efficient curriculum development and provision of early education. This has resulted mainly from limited attention to leadership theorising and research, and a lack of awareness of the relevance of leadership for quality of professional development of ECE staff.



According to the universal entitlement prescribed by law (Laki lasten päivähoidosta 36/1973), all children before comprehensive school starting from the age of 7 years old are entitled to municipal ECE and one-year pre-school for 6-year-olds. In accessing ECE programs, moderate customer payments might be required. Nearly 60% of all Finnish children between years 1–6 benefit from public early childhood services. Only a small percentage of all families are customers of private ECE services. In addition to early childhood centres, early childhood services include family day care and various open activities. Almost 100% of all children participate in pre-schools (Säkkinen & Kuoppala, 2012).

Customership of ECE in Finland is twofold. Firstly, entitlement to services as a part of labour policy serves parents. Secondly, ECE supports children as users of services. According to the Finnish Child Care Act (Laki lasten päivähoidosta 36/1973), ECE is required to support the overall development of the child. When addressing the core purposes of ECE services from the perspective of a child as a customer, high quality pedagogy is emphasised. This study focuses on studying ECE leadership from the point of view of ECE pedagogy.

The practice of ECE pedagogy is guided by the *National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland* (STAKES, 2003) and the *Core Curriculum for Pre-School Education* (Opetushallitus, 2010). In this study, for ease of reference, henceforth the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland document will be referred to as the *Finnish National Curriculum* (STAKES, 2003). It should be noted that this policy document was revised in 2005. The 2003 document is referred to in this study as it is the only translated version available for international authors, readers, and evaluators of this study. Minor changes were undertaken in the revision of the document in 2005. The completion of the articles of this dissertation involved co-authors, so the translated document was the only artefact available for evaluation and critiquing by international author groups in the Articles 1 and 2.

STAKES has since been transferred in 2009 to THL (National Institute for Health and Welfare). THL functions as a research and development institute under the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Despite the fact that the drafting, administration and steering of legislation governing ECE were transferred from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture at the beginning of the year 2013, THL retains the steering role in the content of ECE.

Functioning of municipal self-government is based on maintaining of democratic practices in municipal decision-making. The dualistic management structure forms a foundational platform for democratic practices as interaction between political decision-makers (e.g., municipal committees) and civil servants (e.g., ECE leaders). Behind this dualistic management structure implemented in



Finnish municipalities is an ideal model of classical bureaucracy (Weber, 1922) which creates the hierarchical structures for decision-making. Co-operation between political decision-makers and civil servants realises, for example, when a political decision-maker uses the suggestions and information generated by civil servants as a basis for decision-making. Political decision-makers are dependent on the quality and usefulness of the information which civil servants produce and represent for them. However, the current contextual changes in Finnish municipalities have created pressures for development of the roles and interaction between political decision-makers in municipal decision-making. (Niiranen, Joensuu, & Martikainen, 2013.)

In Finnish municipalities, elected municipal councils decide on the principles for the organisation of municipal administration (Kuntalaki 365/1995). Due to the decentralisation of community services, the municipal organisation varies between municipalities. Even though the establishment of the committees is not obligatory, the implementation of ECE services is usually administrated by the municipal committees set up by municipal council. The municipality can decide on the committee which is responsible for enacting the Child Care Act (Laki lasten päivähoidosta 36/1973) in the municipality. Most of the municipalities (67%) organised the responsibilities of ECE services under the municipal committees of Educational Affairs in the year 2012 (Kuntaliitto, 2013). During the last decade there has been growing transference of ECE from municipal committees of Social Affairs to municipal committees of Educational Affairs. ECE was administered by the municipal committees of Educational Affairs in the municipalities selected for this study.

The organisational contexts of ECE, in terms of their structure and governance, incorporated a variety of programs and the personnel employed in these organisations. As such, the unit of analysis in studying leadership may vary to include leaders on vertical as well as horizontal dimensions of the organisation depending on the particular focus of the study. Early childhood settings are reflective of the diversity of organisational structures including schools, preschools, early childhood centres, and home-based arrangements. Accordingly, instead of focusing on one school or centre, the unit of leadership analysis within early childhood education could, for example, be one municipality or local government authority. These matters can also impact on the selection of participants, raise questions about compatibility and representativeness of samples included, and thereby inhibit growth of research on distributed leadership.

In this study, a vertical set of the key stakeholder groups that were involved in the leadership of pedagogical functions of ECE, those being municipal committees; ECE leaders; centre directors; and teachers, were selected to be the participants of the study. Understanding leadership from the perspective of the stakeholders is particularly important in ECE settings where decision-makers and

practitioners share a diversity of roles and responsibilities, either as employers and employees or as clients and professionals respectively. Moreover, the geographically and vertically dispersed set of stakeholders chosen as participants of this study raised methodological and theoretical challenges in the application of previously used research methods and theories of distributed leadership. Because of the complexity of the Finnish municipalities as a research context, this study had limited possibilities in choosing approaches used worldwide in investigations of leadership, those being for example observation or shadowing techniques. More detailed descriptions of the key stakeholders are presented in chapter 3.3. Participants of the study.

In Finnish national policy documents for ECE, leadership is rarely mentioned. Similarly, although distributed leadership approaches have been noted among Finnish scholars and practitioners, they have not received any attention in policy documents. However, the importance of shared understandings of ECE between stakeholders is emphasised. For example, the Finnish National Curriculum (STAKES, 2003) states the importance of increasing co-operation between stakeholders such as early childhood staff, parents, and multi-disciplinary professionals. How these partnerships are described is aligned with distributed leadership thinking because of the notion of a “shared understanding” between stakeholders (STAKES, 2003, p. 3). It was also noted that in Finland, launching of Finnish National Curriculum (STAKES, 2003) signalled the need to enhance leadership capacity within early childhood education organisations and explore effective leadership strategies to enable the enactment of complex policy changes.

### 1.3 The aims of the study and research questions of the articles

The four main aims of the dissertation were:

- To investigate how distributed pedagogical leadership can be conceptualised in the contexts of ECE.
- To examine how the enactment of ECE leadership responsibilities, especially pedagogical leadership, is perceived by different stakeholders involved in leadership roles in municipalities.
- To gain a holistic understanding of the perceptions of leadership enactment held by different ECE stakeholders.
- To analyse the leadership perceptions of different stakeholders in order to identify the main constructions of ECE leadership within the theoretical frame of distributed pedagogical leadership.

The research aims were addressed through the five articles completed for the study. Each article formed an independent study each having its own research questions. The research questions of the articles highlighted the main aims of the dissertation from different perspectives of ECE leadership (Table 1).

The connections between the research aims and article-related research questions are presented in Table 1. The first research aim was investigated through the literature review Articles 1 and 2. The three following research aims were investigated through the research findings Articles 3, 4, and 5. The articles and the synthesis of the results gained from the research articles in this dissertation provided answers for the following research aims.

The first research aim was to investigate how distributed pedagogical leadership can be conceptualised in the contexts of ECE. This involved writing two literature review articles which addressed the relevant studies of distributed leadership in the educational sector and examined its applications for leading ECE pedagogy. The theoretical underpinnings of the study conceptualised distributed pedagogical leadership based on the findings of the literature review articles. The three research articles were based on the data collected for the study in addressing the specific research aims and questions investigated in this dissertation.

The selection of the aims of the three research articles presented in Table 1 was guided by the research process and the theory of distributed pedagogical leadership examined in the literature review Articles 1 and 2. That is, the results gained from studies completed informed the focus of the research articles that followed. Similarly, the research questions presented in the articles were derived in the first place from the theory, but they evolved during the research process. They were modified according to the notions that arose during the completion of the analysis within a particular research study. Data from four to seven municipalities were selected for the research articles from the 10 municipalities involved in the study. The analysis procedures were similar between the research articles.

Much of the literature on distributed leadership to date focuses on school-based leadership. As research on distributed leadership is evolving in ECE but is as yet undeveloped, the literature review Article 1 sought applicable studies completed in educational settings. By examining this work, the paper explored the definition and meaning of distributed leadership as conceptualised by theorists and researchers interested in school education. This discussion was then extended to ECE leadership literature where the discussions on distributed leadership are now being affirmed. The aim here was to seek to understand the relevance and significance of distributed leadership within the contexts of ECE, and consider implementation challenges that flow on from applying theory into ECE practice and research.

The literature review Article 2 aimed to emphasise the unique characteristics of ECE pedagogy, pedagogical leadership, and their connections with distrib-

Table 1: *Research aims and the research questions related to articles*

<i>Aims of the study</i>	<i>Articles</i>	<i>Research questions presented in the articles</i>
<p>To investigate how distributed pedagogical leadership can be conceptualised in the contexts of ECE.</p>	<p>Literature reviews: Articles 1 and 2</p> <p>(Please see the list of the articles at the beginning)</p>	<p><u>Article 1</u> To establish a new research agenda on distributed leadership by linking early childhood and school leadership research. Explore theoretical bases of distributed leadership by underpinning leadership research that has adopted a distributed leadership framework in general, and within early childhood organisations in particular.</p> <hr/> <p><u>Article 2</u> What are the theoretical applications of pedagogical leadership in early childhood education? What are the challenges of conceptualising pedagogy and pedagogical leadership? Can early childhood leaders implement pedagogical leadership in distributed ways?</p>
<p>To examine how the enactment of ECE leadership responsibilities, especially pedagogical leadership, is perceived by different stakeholders involved in leadership roles in municipalities.</p>	<p>Research findings: Articles 3, 4, and 5</p>	<p><u>Article 3</u> How do the administrative ECE leaders in municipalities, directors, and teachers in ECE centres perceive leadership responsibilities?</p>
<p>To gain a holistic understanding of the perceptions of leadership enactment held by different ECE stakeholders.</p>		<p><u>Article 4</u> How do ECE leaders, centre directors, and ECE teachers perceive the enactment of pedagogical leadership?</p>
<p>To analyse the leadership perceptions of different stakeholders in order to identify the main constructions of ECE leadership within the theoretical frame of distributed pedagogical leadership.</p>		<p><u>Article 5</u> How do the members of municipal committees and municipal ECE leaders perceive the core purpose of ECE as a base of leadership? How do the members of municipal committees and municipal ECE leaders perceive ECE leadership?</p>

uted leadership in early childhood education. The reasoning for writing Article 2 comes from the distributed leadership theory, which is focused on educational aspects of leadership, and from the research process. It was shown in the research findings study of Article 3 that distributed leadership was closely connected to the enactment of pedagogical leadership in the perceptions of the participants of the study. The literature review Article 2 was closely linked with the research findings Article 4 and assisted in framing and focusing the analysis in the research findings Article 4. The literature review Article 2 aimed at conceptualising pedagogical leadership within the contexts of ECE and examined its theoretical links with distributed leadership. The study was aimed at identifying the significance and challenges that lie ahead in undertaking future research on pedagogical leadership from the perspectives of distributed leadership in ECE. In addition, this paper sought to provide conceptual clarity to the meaning and relevance of pedagogy to leadership.

The core understanding of distributed pedagogical leadership and the core elements of it were formulated in the synthesis of the findings of the two literature review articles. The core understanding of leadership and the core elements were used as a theoretical frame in the analysis of the research findings articles. The relationship between the literature review articles and the research findings articles completed for the dissertation was two-fold. Firstly, the knowledge gained through conceptualisation of distributed pedagogical leadership in ECE in the literature reviews was used in formulating the key understanding of the studied phenomenon as a base for the planning and completion of the research findings articles. The prior theoretical understanding of the research object assisted in assimilating the focus of the analysis and directing the relevant aspects towards participants' discussions. In turn, the results of the research findings articles assisted in evaluating the literature reviewed in terms of adapting to the knowledge from previous theorising and research in the particular contexts of Finnish ECE. The theoretical underpinnings presented in the dissertation were thus partly the result of this bipolar adaptive process between theory and research.

The main aims related to the research findings Articles 3, 4, and 5 were firstly to examine how the enactment of ECE leadership responsibilities, especially pedagogical leadership, was perceived by different stakeholders involved in leadership roles in municipalities; secondly, to gain a holistic understanding of the perceptions of leadership enactment held by different ECE stakeholders; and finally, to analyse the leadership perceptions of different stakeholders in order to identify the main constructions of ECE leadership within the theoretical frame of distributed pedagogical leadership.

The research findings articles addressed these research aims from diverse perspectives. The research process started with the research findings Article 3, which was aimed at providing an understanding of the perceptions of leadership respon-

sibilities by ECE leaders, centre directors, and teachers. This article provided an overview of the perceptions of ECE stakeholders towards the enactment of leadership responsibilities. The research findings Article 4 provided a more focused understanding of the perceptions of enactment of pedagogical leadership. The research findings Article 5 provided the perspectives of municipal macro level leaders towards leadership thus allowing a holistic understanding of leadership enactment by multi-voiced leadership discussions undertaken by diverse stakeholders.

The research findings Article 3 was particularly interested in studying the enactment of leadership responsibilities as perceived by the stakeholders involved in ECE leadership in seven Finnish municipalities. In the research process of the dissertation, this particular research article was foundational as it constructed an understanding of leadership enactment in relation to a whole set of ECE leadership responsibilities. This perspective is congruent with the traditional and contemporary ECE leadership theorising and research (Hujala, 2002; Hujala & Eskelinen, 2013) in setting up the leadership responsibilities as a main focus of the analysis. This research article identified the key leadership responsibilities and the enactment of them as perceived by a selected set of ECE stakeholders, comprising ECE leaders, centre directors, and teachers. The municipalities were selected for the study according to their representativeness of a variety of locations and sizes within the municipalities of Finland.

The research findings Article 4 was aimed at deepening the analysis and the results that emerged from the research study of Article 3, focusing on studying the enactment of pedagogical leadership as perceived by the stakeholders. This study was considered to be significant because it was found in the research study of Article 3 that pedagogical leadership was perceived to be the most important leadership responsibility related to the distributed leadership by all studied groups, being the ECE leaders, centre directors, and teachers. The emphasis on pedagogical leadership as a focus of this study in particular and in the dissertation in general, was partly a result of the research process as described above and partly driven from the theory of ECE leadership and distributed leadership. The scope of contemporary theorising and research of ECE leadership and distributed leadership is focused on educational, pedagogical, and instructional aspects of leaders' work. Six municipalities were selected for the research findings Article 4 according to their representativeness of a variety of locations and sizes of the municipalities of Finland.

Research findings Article 5 examined the perceptions of the two groups of macro level ECE stakeholders located within Finnish municipalities, ECE leaders and the members of municipal committees, about ECE leadership operating within their local communities. The study investigated how the core purpose of ECE as a base for leadership was perceived by the two stakeholder groups in four municipalities. This research article was selected for the dissertation as a result of

the research findings Articles 3 and 4 which indicated the significance of macro level leaders in the functioning of ECE leadership.

The results of the completed research articles enabled this study to analyse and synthesise the leadership perceptions of different stakeholders to identify the main constructions of ECE leadership within the theoretical frame of distributed pedagogical leadership. This analysis enabled this study to comment critically on the functioning of ECE leadership in studied municipalities and to suggest developmental implications for policy and practice.

## 2 Theoretical underpinnings of the study

This chapter presents an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the study. This summary is based on the two literature review articles completed for the study (Articles 1 and 2). The aim of the two literature review articles was to capture the conceptualisation of distributed pedagogical leadership in the contexts of ECE. The conceptualisation made in this chapter was formulated by synthesising, revising, and extending the learnings from the two articles.

This chapter presents an understanding of the concept of distributed pedagogical leadership in this study. It aims at conceptualising distributed pedagogical leadership in ECE by examining the key concepts of distributed leadership and pedagogical leadership. It provides an overview of the contemporary theorising and research on distributed leadership and pedagogical leadership in the contexts of ECE and presents the complexities that lie ahead in the conceptualisation of these key concepts. Finally, it examines the core elements of distributed pedagogical leadership as formulated in the synthesis of the two key concepts.

### 2.1 Conceptualising distributed pedagogical leadership

The conceptualisation of distributed pedagogical leadership in the contexts of ECE was based on the findings of the literature review Articles 1 and 2. This chapter examines the key concepts of distributed leadership and pedagogical leadership as conceptualised in the literature reviews.

The selection of the studies in the literature review 1 included purely studies written under the concept of “distributed leadership” and completed solely in educational contexts. The occurrence in citations among scholars’ writing of distributed leadership was the main criteria for selection as well as their adaptiveness to ECE contexts. Selection criteria for the studies included in Article 2 consisted of articles which indicated the historical roots of early childhood pedagogy, as well as its contemporary developments and manifestations in early childhood contexts and policies. In addition, the articles which presented contemporary theorising of ECE leadership, pedagogical leadership, and its enactment in distributed ways were included.



Based on the synthesis of the literature review articles, the core understanding of the concept of distributed pedagogical leadership in the contexts of ECE was formulated for this study. Distributed pedagogical leadership in this study was understood as the interdependence between the micro and macro level leadership enactments in pedagogical development. This understanding evolved and crystallised during the research process.

### *Distributed leadership*

Discussions about distributed leadership began appearing in early childhood literature only recently (Aubrey, 2007; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Fasoli, Scrivens, & Woodrow, 2007; Halttunen, 2009; Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs, 2004; Rodd, 2006). However, perspectives on studying leadership beyond a single leader were introduced decades ago.

The short history of theoretical development of the concept of distributed leadership starts from the field of social psychology by Gibb (1954). This concept was then adopted in educational research by Gronn (1999, 2000). The reconceptualisation of individually oriented leadership research by Gronn (1999) was inspired by Kerr and Jermier's (1978) substitutes for leadership theory. It was a response to frustration towards previous trait and contingency theories and it put more emphasis on the situational factors of leadership. Gronn's (2000) conceptualisation of distributed leadership was also a response to the ongoing emphasis on transformational and managerial leadership. Further developments of distributed leadership in educational contexts anchored with theories of distributed cognition and activity theory (Article 1). The idea of enacting leadership by multiple persons in organisations was similarly adopted in general leadership theorising and its historical development has been interpreted for example under the relative concept of *shared leadership* by Pearce and Conger (2003). The general directions of leadership theorising have their roots in long dominated leader-centred theorising and its failure to answer for the leadership needs that have been raised from the changing operational environments. Through the 1980s there was a need for competitive, proactive management of change in organisations which fuelled, for example, transformational and visionary leadership thinking. However, at the same time there was a growing notion of the staff's role as a source and power of organisational capacity and change. This development opened ways for distributed leadership approaches, of which theorising and research started powerfully in the 2000s. The idea was presented also in strategic work in the public sectors in Finland when it became more important to listen to the multiple voices of the municipality residents and diverse stakeholders in decision-making (Ropo et al., 2005). This dissertation focuses solely on the theoretical developments and

research of the concept of distributed leadership developed mainly in educational contexts (Article 1).

Interest in studying early childhood leadership using a distributed conceptual framework began with Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) who introduced a conceptual framework and this work has been extended by Aubrey (2007); Hujala et al. (2009); and Scrivens (2006).

It was found in the literature review Article 1 that current distributed leadership theorising is dominated by the ideas of Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001, 2004); Spillane (2006); and of Harris (2009). Spillane et al. (2004, p. 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, p. 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 who hold 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, p. 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. Hutchins (1995, p. 20) also emphasises the meaning of “*interaction* of the people with each other and with physical structure in the environment.” Spillane et al. (2004) focus on interdependencies 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 persons.

As distributed leadership study is still evolving, conceptual confusion and misunderstandings are common among scholars and practitioners. Distributed leadership has many relative concepts which are often used as synonyms of distributed leadership.

In reviewing appropriate leadership literature in the literature review Article 1, it was clear that distributed leadership research is relatively young, emerging as a focus of research during the late 1990s. The conceptual confusion or ambiguity in defining distributed leadership has also given rise to a diverse nomenclature being used in the literature such as democratic leadership (Woods, 2004), and shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003). These terms are frequently used interchangeably and uncritically. For example, “distributed leadership” and “shared leadership” are often used in the same paper as if they were equal, with the authors providing no definition or explanation of what is meant by each concept (Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett, 2008; Lindahl, 2008). The use of these concepts interchangeably creates confusion in operationalising definitions in practice as

well as raising difficulties in interpretation when considering the implications of research findings. In defining distributed leadership and shared leadership there is also no consensus or common understanding about any associations or structural connectivities between these two concepts. For instance, Fletcher and Käufer (2003, p. 22) describe the nature of shared leadership processes as “distributed and interdependent”. This reflects the move away from conceptualising leadership as an individual attribute to conceptualising it as a collective achievement based on teamwork. Fletcher and Käufer (2003), however, do not clarify the difference between distributed leadership and shared leadership. This confusion is also reflected in Leithwood and Mascall’s (2008, p. 530) attempt to find clarity in discussing the functions and practices of “collective leadership” where they refer to distributed leadership as a general category to include terms such as “distributed”, “shared”, and “dispersed”. The rationale for this discussion is presented in terms of the benefits that can be achieved through collective action.

Furthermore, distinctions are made across distributed leadership and collaboration or teamwork. “Distributed leadership results from the activity, that it is a product of a conjoint activity such as network learning communities, study groups, inquiry partnerships, and not a simply another label for that activity” (Harris, 2004, p. 15). According to Spillane (2005, p. 149), however, “shared leadership”, “team leadership”, and “democratic leadership” are not synonymous with distributed leadership. In contrast, scholars who focus on distributed leadership tend to adopt a more macroscopic view of organisations where leadership functions are structurally more detached and therefore notions of interdependence are emphasised.

Clarity of the concept could be achieved when developing the concept and its applications with respect to the basic theories of distributed cognition. Likewise, Spillane et al. (2001, 2004) base their leadership thinking on theories of distributed cognition and activity theory based on the work of those such as Hutchins (1995), Rogoff (1990), Vygotsky (1978), and Leont’ev (1981). This approach emphasises the meaning of situations and contexts of leadership suggesting that leadership activity is distributed over various facets of the situation, including tools, language, and organisational structures. Distributed cognition sheds light on the contextual nature of cognitive processes. For example, Rogoff (1990) states that individual understanding is connected to interaction with the environment, where an individual’s thinking is shared and developed in collective communication.

Distributed leadership is not generally thought of as a normative concept or an ideal model. Instead of modelling leadership, distributed leadership scholars usually examine the different ways in which leadership is distributed, observing relations between actors and situations and how these relations can be investigated (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Harris, 2007; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane et al.,

2004; Timperley, 2005; Woods & Gronn, 2009). However, Mayrowetz, Murphy, Louis, and Smylie (2007) provide a theoretical framework that can be used in research for studying distributed leadership.

Several researchers also suggest that leadership in educational organisations is more likely to be distributed (Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, 2003; Spillane et al., 2004; Timperley, 2005). Usually persons with no formal leadership positions take responsibility for leadership. Teachers also take on leadership tasks (Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Camburn, & Pareja, 2007). The slippery nature of defining distributed leadership is acknowledged by Spillane (2006, p. 94) when he explains that the term distributed leadership is in itself “a set of diagnostic and design tools” that can be used to examine ways of experiencing or practising leadership. The phenomenon under study and how it is perceived will change with the focus or lens being used. As such, according to Spillane (2006, p. 6), a distributed leadership framework is merely another “analytical tool” for the study of leadership.

The practice of distributed leadership is a developmental process. Much of the current research on distributed leadership focuses on describing different degrees of distributed leadership. Developed forms seem to be connected with planning of leadership practices and dependent on the active development made by leaders (Harris, 2008; MacBeath, 2005; Mascall, Leithwood, Strauss, & Sacks, 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2007). For example, Ritchie and Woods (2007) identify three developmental degrees of distributed leadership as “emerging”, “developing”, and “embedded”. Embedded forms of distributed leadership were based on continued planning and development of leadership. They conclude that leadership development can take varying processes. Leaders function as developers and coordinators of distributed leadership (Harris, 2008). Similarly, MacBeath (2005) describes distributed leadership as a developing process that requires the efforts of leaders to make it work. He expands this discussion by looking at the roles of those in formal leadership positions involved in developing distributed leadership through different developmental phases.

### *Pedagogical leadership*

In the literature review Article 2 it was found out that pedagogical leadership is connected with not only children’s learning, but also with capacity-building of the early childhood profession, as well as values and beliefs about education held by the wider society or community. In early childhood settings, pedagogical leadership means taking responsibility for the shared understanding of the aims and methods of learning and teaching of young children. Pedagogical leadership itself constitutes these elements when addressing it through the key concepts of “pedagogy” and “leadership”. It focuses on responsibilities for pedagogy emphasising

future directed leading of staff. Similarly, according to Andrews (2009), interest in pedagogical leadership has arisen through the need to develop skills in leading organisational change in early childhood settings.

Pedagogical leadership also consists of strategic elements which involve a wider set of stakeholders in pedagogical improvement. In classical writing on pedagogical leadership, Sergiovanni (1998, p. 37) states that the inclusion of “visionary leadership” among bureaucratic functions and “entrepreneurial leadership” views are unsuccessful as strategies to gain change and better results in schools. He presents pedagogical leadership as an alternative concept of leadership that aims to develop the human capital of schools, involving both teachers and learners.

Pedagogical leadership is also a relatively young concept in the contexts of ECE. Kagan and Bowman (1997) did pioneering work by presenting a broad leadership framework consisting of five dimensions: administration, pedagogy, advocacy, community, and conceptual leadership. This framework marks a turning point in ECE leadership discourse as it “expands conventional notions of leadership as management or administration, suggesting that leadership in early care and education actually has many functions or parts” (Kagan & Bowman, 1997, p. xii). The inclusion of pedagogical leadership within this framework is significant as it signals engagement of focused scholarly publications on this topic within this sector of education.

Overall, however, there has been limited theoretical advancement in writing about pedagogical leadership in early childhood education. For instance, Karila (2001) noted that in Finland, the concept of pedagogical leadership is used as a general way to refer to responsibilities that are not considered management tasks. Early childhood policy documents can also be mute on leadership matters in the design, implementation, and evaluation aspects. The Finnish National Curriculum (STAKES, 2003) fails to suggest ways of implementing pedagogical leadership within ECE settings. The document has no mention of leadership or pedagogical leadership. There is urgent need to stimulate active engagement in critical discussion and analysis of pedagogical leadership in ECE.

There is also confusion about pedagogical leadership among scholars and practitioners, which can also be connected with origins of the concept and its relations to relative concepts of educational and instructional leadership. In the broader literature on educational leadership, a variety of relative concepts such as pedagogical or instructional leadership are used interchangeably, and the differences and connections between these concepts are rarely clarified or observed. In the ECE literature specifically, the lack of rigorous research on pedagogical leadership in this sector has inhibited the coherent development of the concept in a meaningful way. In addition, the theoretical roots of various disciplines, including education, sociology, and welfare construct parallel but varying meanings for the concept.

However, within ECE, pedagogy is influenced by national and local policies and guidelines, as well as the needs, interests, and abilities of individual children and their families. Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) felt that understanding learning is central to thinking about pedagogy in ECE. These matters highlight the importance of the cognitive underpinnings of pedagogical leadership and the capacity to do work as thinking practitioners.

From the perspective of ECE leaders, pedagogical leadership means taking responsibility to ensure that practices are appropriate for children. This view sits well within Sergiovanni's (1998) perspectives based on school settings. Heikka and Hujala (2008) show that there is confusion among leaders about the meaning of pedagogical leadership and its connections with quality practice. Fonsén (2013) and Nivala (1999) include in their definitions of pedagogical leadership the responsibilities that are traditionally seen as management and administration aspects of leading, if the aim of these tasks is to enhance pedagogical practice. For example, Nivala (2001) stated that pedagogical leadership could be seen as a role of administrative officials involved in ECE work in municipalities. According to Andrews (2009), pedagogical leadership is concerned with leading and informing pedagogical practice.

#### *Interconnections between the concepts*

It could be noted that there is an overlap in the focus and strategies between the concepts of distributed leadership and pedagogical leadership. In addition, current research on ECE leadership suggests the combination of these two approaches in leadership practice.

The perspective of distributed leadership extends and brings depth to the idea of pedagogical leadership by addressing it on a system level, as interaction between stakeholders, which brings efficiency into the enactment of pedagogical leadership. This perspective assists in understanding the meaning of information-sharing and learning for pedagogical leadership. Connecting the distributed leadership perspective with pedagogical leadership means developing leadership on the interactional and system levels, which focus on developing pedagogical practices through shared construction of knowledge.

It should be noted that distributed leadership has been observed in school-based studies from the perspectives of instructional or educational leadership. These perspectives have been connected with leadership effectiveness and school improvement (Mayrowetz, 2008), educational change (Camburn & Han, 2009; Firestone & Martinez, 2007), student achievement (Timperley, 2005), democracy (Woods, 2004; Woods & Gronn, 2009), and power (Maxcy & Ngyen, 2006). Drawing from these perspectives, the relevance of distributed pedagogical leader-



ship in ECE is connected with change implementation and the development of educational work.

Studies on pedagogical leadership in ECE suggest a firm connection between distributed and pedagogical leadership. Fonsén (2013) for example found that the structures of organisation can either inhibit or promote the enactment of pedagogical leadership. She also emphasised the meaning of support provided from the national level of government. Also, the culture of distributed leadership in ECE centres was shown to be important for success in pedagogical leadership. Lunn and Bishop (2002) found that shared understandings among teachers about pedagogical ideas contributed significantly in realising the functioning of pedagogical leadership. Similarly, Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007, p. 12) discuss how “leadership for learning” is connected with effective communication, collaboration, and development of children’s learning in ECE settings.

In summary, distributed pedagogical leadership is connected with the children’s learning, capacity-building of the early childhood profession, and values and beliefs about education held by the wider society or community. In early childhood settings, pedagogical leadership means taking responsibility for the shared understanding of the aims and methods of learning and teaching of young children from birth to 8 years of age. In these discussions, teachers have a significant role and responsibility to ensure that the educational pedagogy employed matches children’s interests, abilities, and needs. Leaders are responsible for creating a community that fosters learning and communication and where responsibilities are distributed among teachers, children, families, and the community.

Analysing pedagogical leadership through the lens of distributed leadership could provide useful perspectives when discussing the functioning and efficiency of pedagogical leadership as enacted by multiple stakeholders. As distributed leadership has now reached a momentum among practitioners of ECE, it is crucial to investigate its applications within ECE contexts and to provide research-based evidence and support for leadership development.

## 2.2 The core elements of distributed pedagogical leadership

Based on the revision of the literature reviewed in Articles 1 and 2, three core elements of distributed pedagogical leadership in ECE have been identified for this study. The core elements of distributed pedagogical leadership are: (a) multiple persons involved in leadership; (b) the enactment of pedagogical leadership through ECE contexts; (c) interdependence in leadership enactments. The core elements of distributed pedagogical leadership presented in this chapter provided the frame for analysis of the research articles.

Firstly, distributed pedagogical leadership involves multiple persons in the organisation. It was found in the literature review Article 1 that distributed leadership theorising emphasises leadership practice that involves persons with formal or informal leadership positions (Spillane et al., 2001, 2004). It was also suggested that the successful achievement of distributed leadership is determined by the interactive influences of multiple members in an organisation. Spillane et al. (2007) found that persons taking on leadership responsibilities change according to situational factors. In the literature review it was stated that responsibilities could be distributed by interactional influences depending on the task at hand and according to an individual's expertise. It was found in the literature review Article 2 that in classical writings about pedagogical leadership, the role of teachers and learning in educational communities is emphasised. Here, teachers are seen as essential decision-makers and builders of pedagogy for individual learners. Webster (2009) also contends that teachers should participate in decision-making about the educational goals and purposes.

Secondly, based on the synthesis of the findings of the literature review Articles 1 and 2, the enactment of pedagogical leadership through ECE contexts was identified as a core element of distributed pedagogical leadership in the contexts of ECE. A study informed by distributed leadership approaches is interested in the enactments of leadership rather than roles or character of leaders. The enactment of pedagogical leadership is distributed between the staff through organisational contexts and tools. It was found in the literature review Article 2 that despite the growing emphasis on teacher leadership, pedagogical leadership engages teachers in leadership within their own classrooms. Therefore it is suggested that the teachers' participation in decision-making in wider community contexts should be enhanced (Emira, 2010). Spillane et al. (2004) argued that understanding links between macro functions and micro tasks in leadership enactment is essential in distributed leadership study.

In distributed leadership studies, the leadership context is considered as a constitutive element of leadership enactment. Spillane et al. (2004) emphasise the meaning of organisational structure and language in distributed leadership. Spillane (2006) argues that distributed leadership study involves examining the elements of the leadership contexts which allows for the enactment of leadership responsibilities, and furthermore, how these elements have an influence on leadership. Spillane, Diamond, and Jita (2003, p. 537) and Spillane (2006, p. 60) state that leadership tools, like test results, curriculum materials, and observation documents are not only assisting leaders in their work, but are actually the "core element of leadership" as they guide the enactment of leadership. For example, evaluating forms contribute to the practice by defining and constituting the perceptions about it in the evaluation and teaching process. However, Mayrowetz



(2008) states that the broad set of contextual factors which have to be addressed to study leadership could be complicated. For example, Spillane (2006) lists tools and routines, structure, culture, language, and so on, as situational elements. It is clear that taking into account such a broad set of complex contextual factors in leadership study needs more consideration of the procedures for how situational factors and their impact on leadership practices could be addressed.

Finally, interdependence in leadership enactments was identified as a core element of distributed pedagogical leadership, as based mainly on the finding from literature review Article 1.

Interdependence between people and their enactments of leadership is a core element of distributed pedagogical leadership. Spillane et al. (2001, p. 25) refer to leaders who work towards a shared goal through “separate, but interdependent work”. Spillane et al. (2004) focus on interdependencies 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 persons. Based on Thompson’s (1967) examination of interdependencies, Spillane (2006, p. 60) identifies three types of distributed leadership: “collaborated distribution”, “collective distribution”, and “coordinated distribution”. All of these forms include interdependence between leaders in enacting leadership responsibilities. In “collaborated distribution”, persons share the time, place, tasks, and goals, whereas in collective and coordinated distribution, persons are working separately, but interdependently enabling each other’s work in achieving common goals. In coordinated distribution, the shared task (e.g., evaluation) is accomplished in following sequences of actions.

## 3 Methodological approach

All research is interpretive and is grounded on a set of beliefs about the world and how it should be understood and studied (Denzin & Ryan, 2007). Social constructionism is the philosophical cornerstone of the study. This study was positioned as a way to investigate the collective constructions of leadership from the diverse perspectives of the stakeholders involved in ECE leadership in local communities of Finland. The purpose of the study was to investigate leadership discussions of the key ECE stakeholders, being the municipal committees, ECE leaders, centre directors, and ECE teachers. The data was collected by a focus group method. Overall, 32 focus groups were organised in 10 municipalities for data collection. The data was analysed by a two-phase analysis procedure designed for the study.

### 3.1 The philosophical foundations of the study

This chapter attempts to make explicit the basic philosophical assumptions of the study, that is, the ontological and epistemological orientations, which form the foundation of the methodological approaches of the study. The discussion of the ontological assumptions of the study is based on reflections of the understanding of the studied phenomenon and of the basic assumptions of reality. Epistemological considerations were discussed in terms of what was understood by knowledge and how and what we can know about the world. These two were interrelated as the assumptions of reality already tell how the knowledge about it is constructed. Therefore the discussion does not strictly divide the reflections of these two philosophical assumptions in this chapter.

Ontological assumptions of the study are linked to the researcher's consideration of "whether social entities can and should be considered as objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered as social constructions build up from the perceptions and actions of social actors" (Bryman, 2008, p. 32). This study investigated leadership as constructed in social actions. This standpoint is connected to the assumption that meanings are generated in social interactions between people. People construct and negotiate common understandings of the events and contexts in which their daily life occurs.

Leadership offers various perspectives for researchers to examine. Firstly, a formal leadership situation constitutes designed organisations, structures, and positions. Secondly, leadership could be approached by examining leaders' properties or behaviours, and thirdly, leadership could be understood as an activity emerging in social interaction during daily practices. The two realist approaches introduced above have been dominant through the modern era. Recent directions in leadership research have turned their emphasis towards understanding people as active generators of their organisational realities (Juuti, 2001).

This study takes the ontological position that organisations are not considered as constraining structures, such that their objective realities determine the pre-requisites of the enactment of leadership. However, constructionism is not a firm view of reality as the approach allows for a variety of interpretations of how reality is understood in educational research. For example, there are levels of how relative the realities could be seen among constructionist researchers. Moderate post-modernism assumes that reality exists and that there are different ways of understanding it. (Schwandt, 2000.) This study did not deny the existence of external reality, but was not interested in addressing the entities in people's lives for example by observing or classifying the external organisational properties or specific behaviours of leaders. This study did not, however, take the radical constructionist position claiming that the external realities of leadership do not have any input on leadership. On the contrary, this study claims that there exists a complex web of social actions within the studied organisations, and people constantly co-construct the realities of leadership in social processes; they were not prearranged for them.

The nature of distributed leadership is constituted in practices of leadership when people are interacting with each other. The social constructionist perspective in this study set the perceptions of leadership enactments of those involved in ECE leadership as the key interest of the study. It was proposed that those perceptions could be reached by listening to the leadership discussions of people who were actively constructing the leadership practices within local contexts of ECE.

Social constructionism is commonly considered to have originated in Berger and Luckmann's (1966) pioneering work. In social constructionist thinking, knowledge is mediated and shaped in social processes (Aittola & Raiskila, 1994). The social aspect of meaning-making processes is what distinguishes social constructionism from other relative perspectives, like constructivist approaches (Gergen, 2009). According to Gergen and Gergen (2007), what is considered as realities has emerged in historically and culturally situated social processes. Traditional rules, practices, and language produce agreement on what is considered as truth within a community.

Social construction of leadership is related to its practices. According to Gergen (2009, p. 145), an organisation could be viewed as a "field of conversation"

where people are co-constructing meaning in their daily discussions. This view is opposite to the view that the structures of organisations determine the daily practices of people. The structures can also be interpreted as meanings that persons create, sustain, and change.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) emphasised analysing the knowledge of the dialectic relationship between a person and society in social research. Hacking (2009) describes the interaction between the ideas of human kinds as a process where socially constructed ideas of people evolve and change. These ideas of human kinds exist and evolve in institutions, practices, and material interactions between people. People are conscious of common constructions and acts based on those perceptions. This means that, for example, power is not used only from the top down, but all involved in the system maintain the power structures. This means that the ideas of “leaders” or “teachers” have an effect on people included in those categories.

Social construction of knowledge means that shared understandings are constructed through language (Burr, 2003). Knowledge is shaped by social circumstances, power relations (Burr, 2003; Gergen & Gergen, 2007; Hacking, 2009), and moral values (Gergen, 2009). The social constructions are relative as all knowledge is generated from some perspective and serves certain purposes.

What we perceive as reality is produced through communication (Gergen & Gergen, 2007; Juuti, 2001). The perception is an interpretation within certain social contexts. The historical circumstances and traditions of ECE as well as the data collection situation formulated the context within which leadership enactment was interpreted by people who participated in the study. Knowledge generated within these circumstances is also relative to the different perspectives of the participant groups. Therefore, it is essential to address the diverse perspectives of the ECE stakeholders in order to gain a complete picture of leadership.

Contextually-embedded knowledge is built over time within social practices. It is thus not easily recognisable or identifiable by the study participants themselves and not easily accessed by others. Therefore, the collected data should be considered as a discussion produced in certain situations (Alasuutari, 2001.) This study approached the leadership phenomenon by investigating the speech of the study participants, which is commonly considered as a straightforward approach in constructionist research. However, studying the enactment of leadership through participants’ perceptions encompasses not only the speech level but also the reality level within which the study participants are involved and within which the perceptions deemed to be of interest have yet to be constructed. When approaching the enactments of leadership through participants’ speech, it should be noted that even though the speech generated in the focus groups was focused on the real events and circumstances in the participants’ lives, it remained as participants’ constructions of those events. Rather than reporting reflections of real-

ity, this study shows how the leadership enactment appears and emerges in speech as the diversity of leadership constructions reflected in the discussions of the study participants. The varying constructions relate to each other and manifest the aspects of emerging and anticipated circumstances and practices or perceived realities of the study participants. However, the main aim of this dissertation was not to study the essence of leadership in speech, but to focus on the leadership phenomenon in the contexts of ECE. Raising the enactment of leadership as a key interest in participants' perceptions and analysing these perceptions based on the content, not on the constructionist process level, distinguishes this study from the mainstream of social constructionist research. Turning back to the epistemological stances of the study, it should be noted that not only did the participants construct the knowledge of leadership, but the researcher was also involved in the shared construction of knowledge through organising the data collection situation and the interpretation of the discussion of the participants within a particular framework and socio-cultural context.

## 3.2 Methods of the study

This section presents the data collection and data analysis methods and procedures applied in this study. The data collection method in all three research articles was based on focus groups. For the data analysis, the two phase analysis procedure was designed. Qualitative content analysis was used in phase one for investigating the substantive content of the leadership discussions. In the second phase, the distributed representations method was applied for cross-group examination of the substantive content.

### 3.2.1 *Focus groups as a data collection method*

The focus group method is commonly used by educational researchers (Hydén & Bülow, 2003). This method is well suited for research which seeks different perspectives of stakeholders, and for identifying barriers to change and finding new solutions for the topic (Morgan, 1997; Ryan & Lobman, 2007).

Focus groups consist of a small group of participants meeting to discuss a specific topic under the guidance of a moderator, who is an outsider to the research discussion (Bryman & Teevan, 2005; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Morgan, 1997; Wibeck, Dahlgren, & Öberg, 2007). The participants express opinions, form points of view, and discuss their perceptions about the phenomenon and its various dimensions (Wibeck et al., 2007).

Focus groups could be characterised by their purposes and abilities to produce collective voices and constructions of the studied topic (Kamberelis & Dimi-

triadis, 2013). The knowledge is co-constructed in the focus group interactions among the participants and the researcher (Denzin & Ryan, 2007). It allows for investigation of the ways in which the group argues and how it acts and thinks as a social community (Alasuutari, 2001). According to Bryman (2008), the focus group method allows for participants to bring up issues considered meaningful for discussion. Understanding is constructed in social interaction as the ideas emerge and are developed during shared reasoning and thinking. The ideas brought to the discussions are argued about, agreed upon, and continued during the discussions (Bryman, 2008; Bryman & Teevan, 2005). The focus group method provides an opportunity to understand the research topic from the participants' perspective. The discussion can lead to community knowledge-building, and gives researchers the opportunity to gather data about areas of development. The participants express different opinions, forming points of view whilst exchanging each other's views. In this way, the participants perceive the conceptualisation of a phenomenon and its various dimensions. A fruitful discussion requires careful preparation, as does the selection of participants, along with the provision of clear instructions for participants to stimulate discussion. (Wibeck et al., 2007.)

The reasoning for using the focus groups as a data collection method in this study was connected with its capabilities in bringing issues and meanings perceived to be significant by the participants into the data collection situation. The philosophical foundations of the study also had an impact on selecting focus groups as a data collection method as they could enlighten the research with a collective perspective on the issues being discussed.

A brief exploration of the methods used in studies on distributed leadership was made prior to this study. The examination showed that individual interviews, observation, and questionnaires were widely-used methods in these studies. When evaluating their appropriateness for the purposes and the context of this study, it was noted that their usage brought certain limits to this research. For example, an observation method negated the contexts in which the study participants were distributed over geographical distances. In addition, such naturalistic approaches were not congruent with the philosophical foundations of the study. Another reason for using the focus group method was its ability to produce a significant amount of data efficiently (Morgan, 1997).

Furthermore, an individual interview cannot be treated as an alternative for the focus group method in a study where the perspectives of social interaction in the process of data production is emphasised (Bryman & Teevan, 2005). According to Morgan (1997), compared to individual interviews, focus groups may have an advantage for investigating the topics that are either routinised or unconscious. Group discussions could assist people in better reflecting on issues than could individual interviews. The groups can also produce different kinds of data than can individual interview. However, these two different approaches of investigation

should be considered as aspects of social behaviour, not as one being more real or valid than the other. (Morgan, 1997; Pietilä, 2010.)

Segmented sampling (Morgan, 1997) was used as a sampling method for the study. Members of the same professional group participated in group discussions. These groups were the key informants of ECE leadership in Finnish municipalities. However, the groups differentiated significantly from each other, having varying responsibilities and interests in relation to the enactment of ECE leadership. The informant groups were referred to as “stakeholders” because not all participant groups were employed by municipalities.

Segmented sampling emphasises homogeneity in group composition. This sampling method is suitable when a study seeks to produce shared perspectives within groups and allow for free discussion among the group members. It is also suitable when the aim of the analysis is to bring up different perspectives between the groups. Morgan recommends the use of homogeneous group composition where the participants of the study have different status or positions with regard to authority. The presence of other group members has an influence on the expressions of the individual participants. (Morgan, 1997.)

The data collection was completed by the researcher of this study between the years 2006–2008. Two main themes were formulated for the discussion: “The core purpose of ECE” and “Leadership of ECE”. Under these themes, 10 guiding questions were formulated. These questions concerned, for example, the leadership responsibilities, challenges, and expectations. According to Bryman and Teevan (2005), guiding questions could be used in focus groups, however, the way questions are presented in the focus group sessions is relevant. In this study, the purpose of the guiding questions was to inspire and stimulate discussion on both themes. The questions were introduced to the participants on paper, which was provided for the participants at the beginning of the discussion. It was suggested by the moderator to discuss freely the two themes using the guiding questions only as inspiration for the discussion topics rather than through sequential following of the questions. This approach was employed because it is stated that less a structured interview is able to gather participants’ perspectives easier. However, it could make the analysis and the comparison between the groups more complicated. In addition, it increases the number of groups to be recruited (Morgan, 1997).

At the beginning of each focus group discussion, the researcher explained the aims and purposes of the study as well as the focus group method principles, and gave the instructions, discussion themes, and guiding questions to the participants. It was emphasised that each individual’s comments, views, and opinions were unique and important for this research, and there was no right or wrong answer to the questions being asked. The moderator involvement in the discussions was mainly to get irrelevant discussion back on to the topics of interest of the



study. Each focus group discussion was about 1 hour long and they were recorded using a digital voice recording machine.

### 3.2.2 *Analysing and interpreting the data*

This chapter explains the applications of strategies for exploring the research object in this study. There are no firm statements as to how focus group data should be analysed and researchers can apply a variety of approaches suitable for their study aims (Morgan, 1997; Ryan & Lobman, 2007). This study was interested in investigating how leadership enactment was perceived by the four stakeholder groups involved in the study; its purpose was to study the diverse perspectives of the stakeholders and to reach a holistic picture of leadership enactment. This standpoint resulted in designing the analysis procedure to include two main processes: the substantive inquiry of the content of the discussions among each stakeholder group and the cross-group examination of the substantive content of the discussions. Similar methods and processes were applied during the data analysis of the three research articles.

#### *Analysis of the substantive content of the discussions among stakeholder groups*

The inquiry of the substantive content of the discussions among each stakeholder group was performed through the application of qualitative content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). Qualitative content analysis was used to organise, condense, and categorise data to enable parallel investigations of the perspectives of the stakeholders.

In qualitative content analysis, the theoretical concepts and conclusions are generated through the process of interpretation and inference of participants' original expressions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). The analysis in this study was modified from the procedure which Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) identify as *inductive content analysis*. Tuomi and Sarajärvi's (2009) method is grounded in the approach of Miles and Huberman (1994). Miles and Huberman's (1994) method differs from the approach of Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009), who categorise qualitative content analysis as three forms: inductive (*aineistolähtöinen*), deductive (*teorialähtöinen*) and theory-guided (*teoriaohjaava*) content analysis. Data analysis in this study could be located in between of inductive and theory-guided, as the main categories formulated during the analysis process were inspired by the literature reviewed prior to analysis. However, as the participants were the professionals of the researched topic, the expressions were close to the concepts used in the literature. The results of the study were not categorised according to any



particular theoretical concepts driven from the theory that was reviewed prior to data analysis, as is the process in theory-guided approaches.

Tuomi and Sarajärvi's (2009) method differentiates from the body of qualitative content analysis developed elsewhere. The Finnish method is not methodologically guided in the sense that it does not set the method as a priority in evaluating the validity of the research.

The main processes in conducting the qualitative content analysis are reducing, clustering, and abstracting the data (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). In this study, each focus group was analysed separately in order to form the sub-categories that described leadership as discussed within each stakeholder group selected for the article; these groups being municipal committees and/or ECE leaders, centre directors, and teachers. Qualitative content analysis in each study began with the reduction of the data by identifying the initial codes for the analysis. Codes were identified by reading the transcribed data and selecting for the expressions connected to the research questions being affirmed for each of the research articles. This inductive approach was used because only limited knowledge existed in the interest area of the study. According to Bryman (2008, p. 26–27), inductive and deductive approaches should be understood as “tendencies” rather than as pure analytical procedures. The data analysis process involved deductive elements while the theoretical framework functioned as a “background” for the analysis. This involved interpreting the results within the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study. The theoretical framework of the study assisted in positioning the analysis according to the selected theoretical perspectives of the study. In addition, it assisted in generating the implications for leadership practice.

A broad coding scale was applied in the data analysis. That is, the unit of analysis in coding was a part of the group discussion data which had a factual connection. Formulation of the initial codes involved making distinctions between the subjects discussed, and was aimed at gaining an initial differentiation of the content of the discussions. After the initial codes were identified based on data of the two to three group transcripts, the codes were compared with each other according to their similarities and differences. This clustering process led to the formulation of the sub-categories, which were then used when approaching the remaining transcribed data within the stakeholder group. Because relevant differences between the municipalities among the same stakeholder groups did not exist, only minor adjustments were made when analysis progressed. The original expressions of the study participants connected to the codes were condensed and connected to the sub-categories. Similar processes were applied for the analysis of the data of each stakeholder group.

It should be noted that only minor variation existed between the municipalities in terms of how leadership enactment was perceived. The significant differences were shown between the municipal committees' group discussions, when

the content of the discussions varied according to the emphasis of ECE pedagogy in the perceptions on the core purpose of ECE. Another remarkable difference between the municipalities existed on the micro level enactment of pedagogical leadership, as the practices for leadership were significantly further developed in one municipality than those in other municipalities that participated in the study. Because of these similarities, the data in each stakeholder group was treated in its entirety. That is, the unit of analysis was the stakeholder group, not a municipality. Even though similar stakeholders participating in the study from different municipalities formulated a unit of analysis, the significant differences between the municipalities were reported when they occurred. The secondary unit of analysis was the Finnish ECE leadership system, as its functioning was analysed as a whole at the end of the research process.

In the second phase of the qualitative content analysis, the main categories of each stakeholder group were formulated based on the abstracting and combining of the sub-categories within each stakeholder group. As the sub-categories were already adjusted to fit the whole data within a particular stakeholders' group, significant changes for the categories did not usually occur at this state. Similar processes were applied within each stakeholder group. After this phase, the researcher organised the data into the main categories among each stakeholder group. Condensed expressions were transferred under the main categories. Too much abstraction was avoided at this stage of the analysis so as to retain the connection to the original content of the discussions.

It should be noted that the streamlining of the categorisation process is presented here in this chapter. The analysis process varied between the articles depending on the particular focus of the study. In addition, the process of categorisation was not always so linear, as some of the categories remained similar with the initial codes while others were changing significantly due to abstraction and combination of the codes and sub-categories during the analysis process. Dey (1993, p. 107) describes the different extent to which the categories could be formulated as "detailed" and "broad" categories. While detailed categories stay close to the original expressions of the informants, formulation of the broad categories include more abstraction of the ideas that the categories are presenting. In this study, although moderate abstraction was made during the categorisation process, the aim was to retain categories close enough to the data to remain connected with the original discussions between the informants.

The criteria according to which each set of discussion content was included in specific categories were extended and modified as the analysis progressed. As Dey (1993) states, this process involved decision-making and redefining when deciding which parts of the data were to be included in the categories. For example in research findings Article 3, when formulating the categories for leadership responsibilities, the naming of the categories (e.g., pedagogical leadership or daily

management) remained close to the original expressions of the study participants, but the final decisions of which sub-categories and content to include within these categories was informed by the conceptual frames of general ECE leadership literature. Dey (1993) discusses this as a conceptual and empirical challenge of the categorisation. Categories have to fit into the data and the conceptual contexts of the studied phenomenon.

### *Cross-group examination*

In this second phase of the analysis, after analysing the content of the discussions of respective stakeholder groups, a cross-group examination of the substantive content of the discussions of the stakeholders was made. This included identification of the interconnected content between the stakeholders' discussions. After identification of the interconnected content, the researcher set them side by side and made conclusions about the relationships between the stakeholders' perceptions. This phase of the analysis was reminiscent of the method introduced by Gergen and Gergen (2007) known as *distributed representations*. In distributed representations, researchers set up the organised data of differing perspectives in a dialogic relationship. This way the study aims to represent the perspectives of the study informants separately and in relation to each other. In this study, Gergen and Gergen's (2007) distributed representations method was found to be useful in the phase of the analysis in which the diverse perspectives of the stakeholders were investigated side by side in the analysis of the research articles.

In the cross-group examination of the substantive content of the leadership discussions, the interconnected content was separated from the analysed data of each stakeholder group. The interconnected content formulated units which represented diverse perspectives for the same topics being discussed in the respective stakeholder groups selected for the article. These were then examined simultaneously between the stakeholders groups. What was significant in this phase was the connective conclusion made from the basis of addressing the diverse perspectives of the studied stakeholders.

The representation of the content of stakeholders' leadership discussions was based on the condensed expressions organised under the categories in the previous phase of the analysis. The distributed representations method is not yet widely known in educational research. This method was previously used, for example, by Fox (1996). Different from this study, Fox set the original quotations from the participants' expressions side by side in formulating a dialogue between the participants' views. In this study, because of the large amount of data, the condensed expressions of the study participants were used in a similar way. In this phase, the researcher searched for relative content from different stakeholder groups and set

them side by side. This indicated the agreements, interconnectedness, and congruencies as well as the differences and contradictions between the stakeholders' perceptions. This approach was aimed at multi-voiced leadership, presenting its complexity and contradictions that are, according to Gergen and Gergen (2007), typical of the way we perceive social phenomena in current societies. In this way, the study was aimed at gaining a holistic understanding of the perceptions of leadership enactment and identifying the main co-existing and parallel constructions of ECE leadership.

### 3.3 The participants of the study

Overall 10 municipalities participated in the study. The four key participant groups in the study responsible for early childhood services in municipalities were employed as either members of municipal committees, ECE leaders, centre directors, or teachers. These stakeholders influence the policy and practices of ECE leadership in local communities. The range of group composition in each focus group discussion varied between 2–11 persons (Table 2).

Table 2: Number of participants involved in the study

<i>Participant group</i>	<i>Number of municipalities involved in the study</i>	<i>Number of individuals who participated in the study</i>	<i>Range of the participants between municipalities</i>
Members of municipal committees	4	37	8–10
The ECE leaders	10	57	2–9
Centre directors	9	75	3–11
Teachers	9	75	5–10

The members of the municipal committees were residents of the community, and were not necessarily involved in ECE services. They were selected to serve for four years. Municipal committees represent the residents of their municipality in local decision-making. Even though the member of the municipal committee is a representative of the municipal residents, it is expected that when making decisions the committee member has to take into account the municipality as a whole (Niiranen et al., 2013). The municipal committee members are mainly responsible for the funding of ECE services. They also determine the service charge,

child-care centre accommodation arrangements, and guidelines for local ECE curriculum in co-operation with the ECE leaders.

ECE leaders are responsible for the provision of ECE services, as well as leading, coordinating, and developing the functions of ECE services. ECE leaders are employed in the municipality as professionals eligible to be municipal civil servants. ECE leaders are mainly responsible for arranging the ECE services within the municipality and ensuring that ECE centres meet the requirements of the national ECE laws and local policies. These stakeholders were influential in ECE decision-making and administration of their local communities. In general, each ECE leader's group consisted of the employed municipal ECE managers, a sector leader, and the development, personnel, and financial managers selected for the study.

ECE centre directors are responsible for ECE centres, family day care units, and open ECE services. One director is often responsible for multiple centres and ECE programs. Teachers work with children in different age groups. The teachers were responsible for working with small groups of children in different age groups such as 0- to 2-year-olds, 3- to 5-year-olds, and 6- to 7-year-olds.

Early childhood staff consists of multi-professional teams with different kinds of qualifications. Early childhood teachers are required to have a degree of Bachelor of Education from a university, or a Bachelor of Social Services from a university of Applied Sciences. Additional staff members in a group are required to have a secondary-level degree as a practical or child care nurse. The composition of the team members varies between the municipalities. The teams can have one to two early childhood teachers (*lastentarhanopettaja*) and one to two or more practical or childcare nurses (*lastenhoitaja*). The adult-child ratio is 1:4 for children under the age of 3, and 1:7 for 3- to 7-year-olds (Asetus lasten päivähoidosta 239/1973). In this study, the teachers' group composition included varying qualifications. In Table 3, a summary of the participants and methods in each article is presented.

Selection of the municipalities that participated in the research articles was made according to their locations in Finland. Selecting a range of locations was important for providing a cross-section of municipalities located throughout Finland. Similarly, as the size of the municipality is an influential factor in the organisation of leadership, the representativeness of a variety of sizes was considered significant in the selection of the municipalities. The municipality sizes could vary from 10,000 to few hundred thousand residents. The organisation of ECE leadership varied between the municipalities mostly based on the composition of ECE leaders.

Each municipality selected the people who participated in the focus group discussions and coordinated their participation. The contact persons in the municipalities selected the appropriate individuals to participate in the study. These

Table 3: Summary of the participants, research questions, and methods of the research articles

	<i>Research findings Article 3</i>	<i>Research findings Article 4</i>	<i>Research findings Article 5</i>
<i>Name of the article</i>	Early childhood leadership through the lens of distributed leadership	Enacting distributed pedagogical leadership in Finland: Perceptions of early childhood education stakeholders	Distribution of leadership among ECE leaders and members of municipal committees in Finland
<i>Participants of the study</i>	ECE leaders, Centre directors and Teachers in seven municipalities	ECE leaders, Centre directors and Teachers in six municipalities	The members of municipal committees and ECE leaders in four municipalities
<i>Research questions</i>	How do the administrative ECE leaders in municipalities, directors, and teachers in ECE centres perceive leadership responsibilities?	How do ECE leaders, centre directors, and ECE teachers perceive the enactment of pedagogical leadership?	How do the members of municipal committees and municipal ECE leaders perceive the core purpose of ECE as a base of leadership? How do the members of municipal committees and municipal ECE leaders perceive ECE leadership?
<i>Methods</i>	Focus group method  Two phases of data analysis: Phase one: Analysis of the substantive content of the discussions among stakeholder groups by qualitative content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009) Phase two: Cross-group examination		

contact persons were used in the selection because municipal organisations vary in Finland, thus requiring a person to be familiar with the particular municipality for the selection. The goal was to convene a maximum of 10 people in each group. The number of participants remained low in the ECE leaders' and centre directors' groups in small municipalities. Overall, 32 focus groups were conducted for this study.

Municipalities were selected for this study from the original data according to their administrating of ECE in the sector of Educational Affairs and their representativeness of a variety of municipality sizes and locations in Finland. In addition, a high quality of data recording was an essential criterion for selection of the municipalities that participated in the study.

The selected municipalities varied between the research articles. There was some overlap between the research articles in terms of the municipalities that participated in the studies, that is, the data from some municipalities was used in several articles. However, all four stakeholder groups were not involved simultaneously in any of the articles.

## 4 Discussion of the results

This chapter presents the summaries of the focal findings of the five articles completed for this dissertation. Thereafter, it provides an overview of the results from the research aims.

### 4.1 Summaries of the findings of the articles

Summary of the findings of the literature review Article 1  
*Contextualizing distributed leadership within early childhood education:  
Current understandings, research evidence and future challenges*

The literature reviewed for this article suggested that distributed leadership has a positive impact on teachers, leaders, and on education itself. These conditions suggest that to be effective, distributed leadership has to be goal-oriented, planned, and developed continuously. Involvement of all organisational levels and support from different stakeholders is essential. The findings indicated that distributed leadership approaches can assist in the implementation of leadership responsibilities by bringing about better interconnection, consistency, and coherence in service delivery amongst diverse stakeholders. Distributed leadership was connected with the concept of “interdependence” in leadership enactments. The body of distributed leadership research is focused on leadership practice rather than leadership roles. In addition, distributed leadership was connected with educational aspects of leadership practice involving persons in formal and informal leadership positions.

In conclusion, it was highlighted that conceptual clarity must be respected in terms of applying distributed leadership models to early childhood education. Secondly, it is essential to consider the uniqueness of the organisational contexts of where the research is being carried out. Thirdly, the focus of distributed leadership research is not on a single actor but is influenced through the intersection of diverse stakeholders, situations, and organisational contexts.



## Summary of the findings of literature review Article 2

### *Pedagogical leadership from a distributed perspective within the context of early childhood education*

The literature reviewed for this article suggested that connections between pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership are necessary to consider because current research draws attention to the collaborative or co-operative functions of enacting pedagogical leadership. Implementing a distributed leadership approach in early childhood education could address contemporary challenges of early childhood workplaces seeking to provide excellent programmes that maximise children's learning potential. New ways of thinking about early childhood practice questions the roles, responsibilities, and tasks of pedagogical leadership, and how these could be distributed between early childhood leaders and other practitioners.

In the literature reviewed, pedagogical leadership was connected with not only children's learning, but also the capacity-building of the early childhood profession, and values and beliefs about education held by the wider community. Leaders are responsible for creating a community that fosters learning and communication and where responsibilities for pedagogical leadership are distributed.

## Summary of the findings of research findings Article 3

### *Early childhood leadership through the lens of distributed leadership*

This study aimed to investigate the distribution of responsibilities for leadership in the ECE context. It focused on the enactments of leadership by investigating how ECE stakeholders (e.g., teachers, ECE centre directors, and administrative ECE leaders in municipalities) perceive leadership responsibilities. Quality improvement and pedagogical leadership were seen as primary responsibilities in ECE leadership by all studied groups. The perceptions of the studied groups indicated that the majority of leadership responsibilities were loaded onto the centre director's position. The participants explained that centre directors and teachers did not have enough opportunities to participate in decisions about quality standards and proceedings within municipalities. In addition, centre directors were unable to focus on pedagogical issues because of the increasing amount of managerial duties. The study concluded that the development of leadership would include the development of interdependence which requires, firstly, quality assurance systems and tools to share information and decision-making between stakeholders. Secondly, it requires reforms of leadership practices from hierarchical forms of leading to building interaction between stakeholders and enhancing teachers' participation in leadership and decision-making.

Summary of the findings of research findings Article 4

*Enacting distributed pedagogical leadership in Finland: Perceptions of early childhood education stakeholders*

This study aimed to investigate distributed pedagogical leadership in the early childhood education context. It focused on the enactments of leadership by investigating how ECE stakeholders (e.g., teachers, ECE centre directors, and administrative ECE leaders in municipalities) perceive the enactment of pedagogical leadership in their municipalities. The enactment of pedagogical leadership was connected to organisational roles and responsibilities which were disconnected from each other. The tension between the goals in pedagogical improvement and disconnected leadership enactment fuelled the emergence of constructions of leadership among the study participants as a distributed and interdependent activity. Although informant groups perceived distribution to be significant for efficient pedagogical leadership, interdependence in leadership enactment was confined to the micro level, in the process of implementation of the national curriculum between the centre director and an assistant director. Although it was perceived that ECE leaders had a significant 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. Due to the lack of leadership guidelines, this resulted in difficulties in the further development of pedagogical work. This study concluded that interdependence between micro and macro level leadership enactment would be necessary for efficient pedagogical improvement.

Summary of the findings of research findings Article 5

*Distribution of leadership among ECE leaders and members of municipal committees in Finland*

This study aimed to investigate the perceptions of ECE leaders and municipal committees about the core purpose and leadership of ECE. The findings of this study showed that there were significant differences between the studied stakeholders of how the core purpose of ECE and leadership was perceived. The study also indicated a lack of trust between the municipal committee members and ECE leaders. This could be interpreted as an indication of deficiencies in the sharing of information and a lack of opportunity for regular open communication between these two groups of stakeholders. In addition, this research has also shown that major challenges in leadership concerned a two-way exertion of influence between municipal committees and practitioners in ECE centres. The municipal committee members seemed to be unfamiliar with the contexts of ECE where daily practice occurs. This study concluded that negotiating the core

values and purposes of ECE between the members of the municipal committees, municipal personnel, as well as centre-based personnel, children, and families on an equal basis could serve as a pathway to developing a better understanding of the core purpose of ECE and sharing of expertise prior to decision-making. All of this requires the development of a quality strategy, which can form the basis for distributed decision-making, communication, and the systematic development of ECE. The initiation and development of distributed leadership within Finnish municipalities needs to be clarified. Currently, the real power for decision-making appears to be held by municipal ECE leaders. After all, systematic, research-based, long-term evaluation and development is recommended for efficiency in making decisions concerned with ECE within municipalities.

## 4.2 An overview of the main findings of the study according to the research aims

This chapter aims at summarise the results of the study according to the research aims. The research aims were as follows: To investigate how distributed pedagogical leadership can be conceptualised in the contexts of ECE; to examine how the enactment of ECE leadership responsibilities, especially pedagogical leadership, was perceived by different stakeholders involved in leadership roles in municipalities; to gain a holistic understanding of the perceptions of leadership enactment held by different ECE stakeholders; and to analyse the leadership perceptions of different stakeholders in order to identify the main constructions of ECE leadership within the theoretical frame of distributed pedagogical leadership.

The research aims overlap and the results related to them were cumulative in the research process. Figure 1 displays the cumulative nature of the research aims. The research process started with the first research aim, the conceptualisation of distributed pedagogical leadership in the contexts of ECE, and was based on the literature review Articles 1 and 2. The synthesis of the results gained in the literature reviews anchored the understanding of the concept of distributed pedagogical leadership in ECE as interdependence between micro and macro leadership enactment in pedagogical development. This conceptualisation process led also to the identification of the core elements of distributed pedagogical leadership as multiple persons involved in leadership, the enactment of pedagogical leadership through ECE contexts, and interdependence in leadership enactments. The understanding of the key concepts and the core elements of distributed pedagogical leadership in this study were presented in the theoretical underpinnings of the study in Chapter 2. A theoretical frame was formulated within which the perceptions of leadership enactments of diverse stakeholders were analysed.

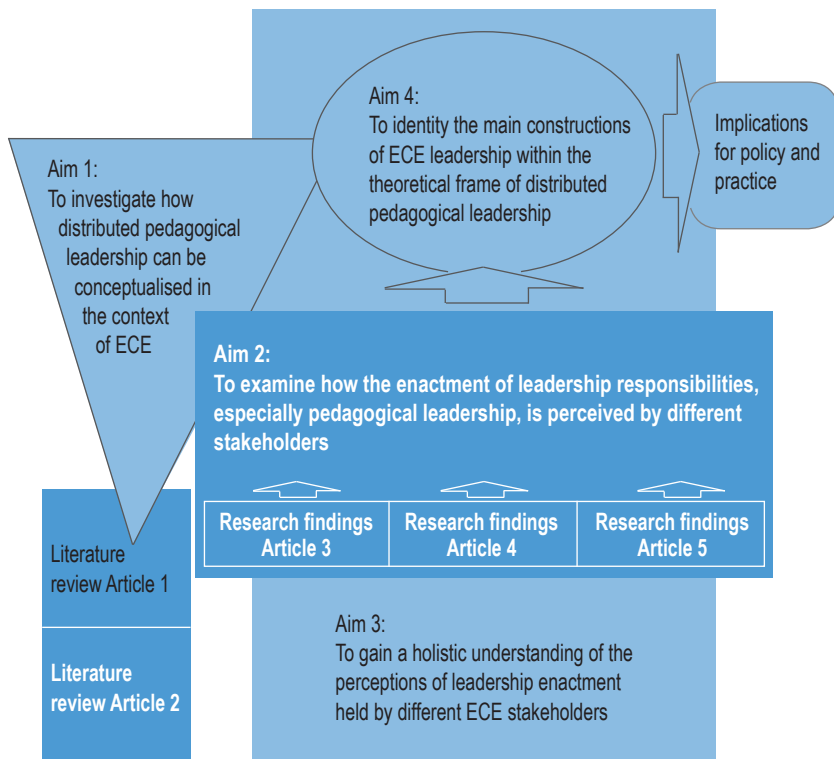


Figure 1: An overview of the research process

The last three research aims of the dissertation were connected with the research articles completed for the study. The second research aim was to examine how the enactment of ECE leadership responsibilities, especially pedagogical leadership, was perceived by different stakeholders involved in leadership roles in municipalities. This aim was investigated in the three research findings Articles 3–5. The investigation of this aim was divided between the articles, which focused on the aim from different perspectives. The findings from the research articles indicated that pedagogical leadership was understood as a main leadership responsibility by the stakeholders who participated in this research, namely members of the municipal committees, ECE leaders, centre directors, and teachers. The perceptions were similar between the stakeholders. However, there was some variation between the municipal committees of how the leadership responsibilities were understood,

the labour political aspects having a strong influence on the perceptions of the municipal committees.

The final research aim was to identify the main constructions of ECE leadership within the theoretical frame of distributed pedagogical leadership. This aim followed the previous aims in the research process. The main constructions of leadership enactment were initially developed as results of each research article, however, the final constructions were synthesised from the results of the articles and will be presented in the next chapter of the dissertation (Chapter 4.3). The main constructions of ECE leadership within the theoretical frame of distributed leadership were pedagogical leadership as the main leadership responsibility, leadership as taking responsibility for influencing the goal-oriented work of others, and the disconnected enactment of pedagogical leadership. That is, every stakeholder group reported that there was insufficient sharing of pedagogical leadership responsibilities. The disconnected enactment of pedagogical leadership was experienced as macro level leaders were reported by the centre directors and teachers to be too remote from the daily practices to establish efficient strategies for pedagogical improvement. In addition, centre directors in major parts of the municipalities involved in this study faced difficulties in participating in macro level decision-making about developmental proceedings within municipalities. Sharing responsibilities for pedagogical improvement with the teachers was also a difficult experience according to the centre directors.

Moreover, there were many signs of emerging constructions of leadership as distributed, as evidenced in the participants' focus group discussions. The development of interdependencies between the stakeholders was also perceived to be important. It seemed that the ideal of distributed pedagogical leadership was acknowledged among the ECE stakeholders within Finnish municipalities. That is, interdependencies between the stakeholders in leadership enactment was anticipated and sharing leadership responsibilities between the stakeholders was perceived as important for efficient pedagogical development. The perceptions of ECE stakeholders were similar to the theory of distributed leadership in the sense that its main focus was to improve pedagogical practices by distributing leadership responsibilities. However, the traditions of hierarchical municipal organisations still dominated the way leadership was enacted, as perceived by the participants involved in the study. The findings for the final research aim provided the implications for policy and practice in this study.

The third research aim was to gain a holistic understanding of the perceptions of leadership enactment held by different ECE stakeholders. This was an integrative aim of the dissertation. Because of this aim the perceptions of different stakeholders were presented separately only in the research articles, representing a phase of the analysis completed in the articles. The distributed representations

of different stakeholders were then used to note diverse perspectives of the stakeholders during the analysis and to provide a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied in the study results.

### 4.3 The main constructions of ECE leadership

The previous chapter presented the cumulative nature of the research process and provided an overview of the findings for the research aims. This chapter addresses the fourth research aim, that is, to analyse the leadership perceptions of different stakeholders in order to identify the main constructions of ECE leadership within the theoretical frame of distributed pedagogical leadership.

The significance of the final research aim is emphasised in this chapter as it gathers together all previous findings from the literature and research articles. It brings together the examination of the perceptions of diverse stakeholders that participated in the study and the aspects of leadership investigated in the research articles, and it interprets these in the conceptual frame of distributed pedagogical leadership.

The presentation of the results shows the diversity of leadership constructions that were reflected in the discussions of the study participants. The varying constructions relate to each other and were manifested simultaneously in group discussions. The four main constructions of leadership enactment were: (a) pedagogical leadership as the main leadership responsibility, (b) leadership as taking responsibility for influencing the goal-oriented work of others, (c) the disconnected enactment of pedagogical leadership between the ECE stakeholders, and (d) emerging constructions of leadership enactment as a distributed and interdependent activity. These main constructions of leadership were related to each other as there was tension between the goals set for pedagogical leadership and disconnected leadership enactment in participants' discussions. This tension fuelled emerging constructions of leadership as distributed in the group discussions. The varying constructions of leadership reflect the influence of the facets of the contexts of ECE on the perceptions of the stakeholders participating in this research, including national policies for ECE, and the functioning of the municipal organisation in Finland. Figure 2 illustrates the intertwined relations between the main constructions of leadership enactments.

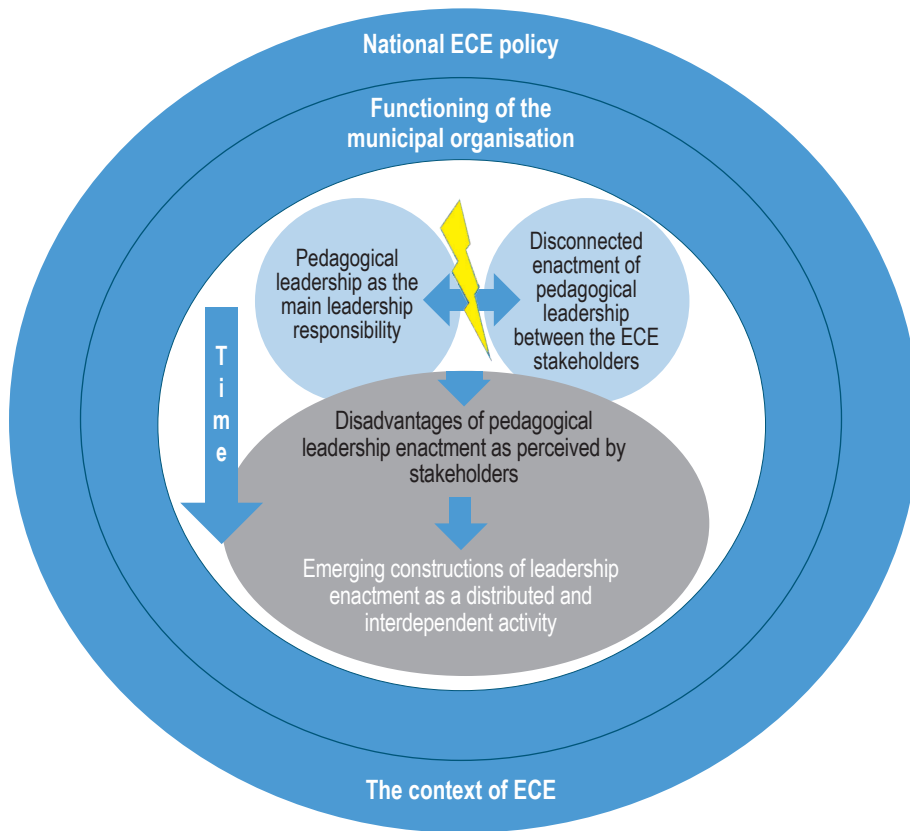


Figure 2: *The constructions of leadership within ECE contexts*

ECE stakeholders contested the efficiency of enacting pedagogical leadership. The emerging constructions reflected an understanding of the distribution of leadership and interdependence between the leadership enactments as a prerequisite for efficient pedagogical leadership. The contextual factors of ECE shaped the perceptions of leadership enactment. The national policies for ECE and the Finnish municipal organisation had a significant influence on perceptions of leadership. These relations are important to address as the core purpose of ECE is not a stable entity, but is constantly changing through societal, scientific, and political structures (Hujala, Heikka, & Halttunen, 2012). This has an impact on leadership as the core purpose of the organisation and leadership shape each other dynamically (Akselin, 2013).

### *4.3.1 Pedagogical leadership as the main leadership responsibility*

Research findings Article 3 identified a set of key leadership responsibilities that were discussed within the studied groups. The study indicated that pedagogical leadership was perceived to be the most important leadership responsibility by all informant groups selected for the study. The focal purpose of pedagogical leadership was perceived to be pedagogical improvement of early childhood practice through the implementation of the Finnish National Curriculum (STAKES, 2003).

However, the priority of pedagogical leadership was not realised in leaders' work. The findings of this study were similar to concerns raised in earlier studies, in particular, the debate about directors having too little impact on the educational development of young children because most of their time was spent on managerial tasks (Halttunen, 2009; Hujala et al., 2009; Nivala, 1999; Karila, 2004). The participants noted that the work of the centre directors involved the reconciliation of competing aspects of leadership work, and this was a major frustration for both centre directors and teachers. In addition, the study showed increasing expectations for centre directors to provide support for teachers in their work with children and parents. The lack of time for the actual practice of developing pedagogy within centres was perceived as inhibiting systematic assessment and discussions between the centre directors and teachers.

The findings from the research findings Article 4 indicated that providing care, upbringing, and teaching for children were topics that were repeatedly discussed, as was the content of the core purpose of ECE by the teachers, centre directors, and ECE leaders 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.

### *4.3.2 Leadership as taking responsibility for influencing the goal-oriented work of others*

The core understanding of leadership among the participants of the study could be synthesised as a responsibility for influencing the goal-oriented work of others. This understanding was generated on the basis of synthesising the findings of the research articles completed for the study. The understanding was mostly evident in the discussions connected to the roles of the teachers in pedagogical development in Article 4. Even though participants reported that there were shared practices in curriculum planning and development within the teams and between the teachers and the centre directors in the centres, this was not generally perceived as leadership among the study participants.



The common understanding reflected a leader-centred construction of leadership where responsibility for influencing the work of others was shown to be essential. Resulting from this understanding, it was not perceived as leadership by the participants of the study if, for example, daily decisions about pedagogy and curriculum planning were made by the teacher with the teams in the centre. Paradoxically, although the possibility of influencing others was perceived as one determinant for the activities understood as leadership, the decisions about pedagogy made by the teachers was not perceived as leadership by any of the stakeholder groups involved in this study.

The understanding of leadership is bound with contextual circumstances (Hujala, 2013). The understanding of leadership of the participants in this study is distinguished significantly from constructions made elsewhere (Ho, 2011; Sighn, Han, & Woodrow, 2012). This finding could be interpreted as having been influenced by socio-cultural experiences of authority and decision-making, as the Finnish ECE teachers have traditionally held authority for the pedagogical decisions in their own classrooms. These facts are important to note when making conclusions based on the findings of this study.

The common cultural understanding of leadership as a responsibility for influencing the work of others is compared with the conceptual understanding of distributed pedagogical leadership. This is conceptualised in the synthesis of the literature review Articles 1 and 2 as interdependence between the micro and macro level leadership enactment. One could note that the former remains as leader-oriented whereas the latter is a system-oriented understanding. These two understandings combined together complete the construction of ECE leadership in Finnish municipalities. By extending the prevailing cultural understanding of leadership with the core understanding of distributed pedagogical leadership, one could reach a holistic understanding of ECE leadership. Leadership could be understood as a taking on of responsibility for influencing the goal-oriented work of others and as being enacted interdependently within micro and macro level societal contexts.

This study argues that the prevailing constructions of leadership were not efficient when enacting pedagogical leadership. It requires revision with an understanding of leadership as an interdependent activity. This need had already been acknowledged in the Finnish municipalities. Along with the leader orientation, a system-oriented construction of leadership emerged among the study participants.

### *4.3.3 Disconnected enactment of pedagogical leadership*

By studying the different perspectives of the ECE stakeholders involved in the study, it was found out that although distributed approaches in leadership enactment were anticipated among the study participants, the enactment of pedagogical leadership was perceived to be connected to the employment positions of different professional groups which were not interdependently connected to each other. The notion of disconnection between leadership enactments was paralleled among all of the studied groups. The disconnection was interpreted to be due to the functioning of the multi-level municipal organisation, traditional ways of understanding and enacting leadership within municipal contexts, and the limited resources of ECE. The lack of connection was believed to inhibit efficiency in proceeding with the common vision. The system also failed to construct a common strategy for development work.

#### *Macro level leaders remote from the daily practices*

In investigating the perceptions of the teachers and centre directors in the research findings Articles 3 and 4, it was found that the municipal committees and ECE leaders were perceived to be too distanced from the field to create shared understanding with the staff about the goals and strategies for development work. It was argued that they were unaware of local inflections which provide meaning for the practices.

In addition, despite the fact that developmental teams were composed from across organisational levels, it seemed that the functioning of the teams was not sufficiently efficient for creating shared understandings of practice development between the stakeholders.

The research findings Article 5 indicated the general concern expressed by various stakeholder groups that the members of the municipal committees were relatively unfamiliar with the contexts of ECE where daily practice occurs. The discussions of the municipal committees also reflected a lack of familiarity with the national policies for ECE. Comparing the perceptions of the core purposes between the stakeholders involved in the studies of Articles 3, 4, and 5, it was also found that the core purpose of ECE was understood differently by the municipal committee members in comparison to the other stakeholders involved in this study. Pedagogical leadership was highly valued among the ECE leaders, centre directors, and teachers, and providing care, upbringing, and teaching for children was agreed to be the core purpose of ECE. Contrastively, the understanding of the core purpose of ECE varied between the committees in relation to the under-

standing of pedagogy as the core purpose of ECE. Municipal committee members emphasised mainly the labour policy as the core purpose of ECE.

The research study of Article 5 identified the concerns of the municipal committees about how to participate in ECE leadership with the other stakeholders involved in the study. The distance from the practitioners was widely acknowledged among the municipal committee members and solutions for making connections with the ECE staff were discussed. However, there was an indication of perceived deficiencies in sharing information and a lack of open communication between the municipal committee members and ECE leaders, as was identified in the research findings Article 5. According to Niiranen et al. (2013), functioning of interaction between the political decision-makers and civil servants is crucial for the usage of information in decision-making within municipalities. In Niiranen's et al. (2013) study it was found that the usage of information in decision-making is dependent on the circumstances, which allow for structures, systems, and tools for receiving, negotiating, and using the information as a basis for decisions. A new aspect of the information used in decision-making was also identified. It was found that participants sought a more negotiatory kind of decision-making.

The discussions in research findings Articles 3 and 4 also highlighted the perceived gap between ECE leaders and the centre directors. ECE leaders were perceived to have a significant role in creating visions and tools for pedagogical improvement, but it seemed that they failed to create shared visions and efficient strategies to implement these visions. Traditional hierarchies in decision-making and the localising of authority within municipalities were shown to be crucial impeding factors for leadership development between the ECE leaders and centre directors. Paradoxically, ECE leaders perceived the initiation of leadership development as being held by the centre directors' position. Centre directors were understood to be key informants between the stakeholders, however, because of their lack of authority, they did not have the means to develop sufficient structures and tools for leadership development. The distances between the stakeholders did not receive much attention among ECE leaders' discussions. The intentions of ECE leaders were rather directed towards constructing integrative leading in community services within municipalities. This responsibility included operating within municipalities by enhancing co-operation between administrative officials.

### *Insufficiency in sharing pedagogical leadership responsibilities*

The findings in Articles 3 and 4 indicated that responsibilities for pedagogical leadership were perceived by all of the studied groups to be held by the centre directors' position. The articles also indicated that centre directors were laden with responsibilities. Even though the centre directors were considered to be respon-

sible for quality improvement within centres, both centre directors and teachers often reported that they did not have enough time for pedagogical development nor opportunities to participate in decisions about quality standards and proceedings within municipalities.

Among the study participants, leadership was understood as a responsibility for influencing the goal-oriented work of others. This understanding of leadership was not associated with the teachers' professional roles by any of the participant groups. This could be interpreted as a major concern as multi-professional team members in Finland have imbalanced amounts of pedagogical expertise in relation to the university-qualified ECE teachers, who have a minimum of three years of education in the pedagogy of young children. According to Waniganayake (2000), distributed leadership relies on building relationships through the validation of professional expertise, the empowerment of people, and diversity, thereby creating a culture of learning. In practising distributed leadership, it is essential to understand the meaning of expertise and its relevance in the way that leadership tasks are defined and distributed.

Even though the teachers' professional roles were not directly connected to the core understanding of leadership, pedagogical improvement was perceived as a common construction of the aims and strategies for the practice development between the teachers and centre directors. Most of the centre directors considered the increase of the teachers' own capacities for practice development and the sharing of responsibilities for pedagogical leadership with the teachers to be important. It was found in the research findings Article 4 that the centre directors did, however, face challenges in sharing leadership responsibilities with teachers. Varying qualifications of the teachers, lack of support for pedagogical leadership from the macro level, and limited resources for discussion were mentioned as the main reasons for these difficulties. It was also shown that centre directors felt uncertain as to how and what leadership functions and tasks could be shared with the teachers.

The curriculum work within the centres was reported to have planning practices that were shared between centre directors and teachers. The curriculum work included shared negotiation and planning of pedagogical practices often initiated by the centre directors at the beginning of the year. However, because of the lack of sufficient structures and resources for systematic continuation of pedagogical development, centre directors were perceived as tending to provide information and solutions for the teachers instead of sharing systematic pedagogical development work with the teams during the year. This was reported to result from insufficient resources for guiding pedagogical development of the teams in the centres by the centre directors.

It should be noted, however, that the extent to which the early childhood sector has adopted an evidence-based approach to allocating everyday work in

early childhood settings is difficult to evaluate. It would be accurate to state that instead of achieving conceptual clarity, discussions about contemporary practice have raised new questions, particularly in relation to connections between leadership and pedagogy (Andrews, 2009). In this study, the perceptions of the staff and the centre directors about the lack of time for systematic shared pedagogical development in the teams in a centre was paralleled, which was documented in the research findings Articles 3 and 4.

Research findings Article 4 indicated that teachers were anticipating someone having a designated leader position to lead pedagogical improvement within centres. This was perceived to be important as self-appointed leaders were reported to exist commonly among teachers when the director was not permanently present at the centre. This was perceived to inhibit pedagogical development as it was not grounded in any long-term planning of development, and had a tendency to break the coherency of pedagogy within centres.

In addition, the delegation of managerial tasks by centre directors was commonly mentioned among teachers. This was perceived to be time- and resource-consuming among teachers as the delegated tasks were not connected with ECE pedagogy.

#### *4.3.4 Emerging constructions of leadership as distributed*

Along with the disconnected enactment of leadership, participants' perceptions reflected ideas of leadership enactment as distributed between multiple stakeholders, as was shown in particular in the research findings Article 4. Distributed leadership was often mentioned in the group discussions as an anticipated direction for leadership development within municipalities. In the municipalities involved in the study, the ideas of distributed leadership were evolving among the study participants, yet the ideas were perceived to be undeveloped in practice.

The disconnected enactment of pedagogical leadership was widely questioned by the study participants in terms of its efficiency for pedagogical improvement. Traditional practices of leadership were challenged by reconsidering the increased level of co-operation and sharing responsibilities between the stakeholders. The purpose of leadership was perceived as fuelling reflective practices and contributing to shared consciousness towards pedagogical proceedings. Leadership in these discussions was assessed according to how the system functioned as either enabling or inhibiting its success in taking care of quality of pedagogy. The emerging constructions of ECE leadership were close to the core elements of distributed pedagogical leadership that evolved in the synthesis of the findings of literature review Articles 1 and 2. In both understandings, leadership was viewed as an

activity focused on shared cognitive processes and on sharing responsibility in pedagogical improvement.

Bringing together the learnings from the conceptualisation of distributed pedagogical leadership and the perceptions of diverse stakeholders, it can be stated that there was a strong consciousness about the significance of distributed leadership among the ECE stakeholders that participated in this study. In addition, emerging constructions of leadership as an interdependent activity between the stakeholders was reported to be well developed in the some municipalities. Research findings Article 4 indicated that coordinated leadership functions in relation to pedagogy and curriculum work between the stakeholders was developed. However, how well developed these systems were between the municipalities varied.

This study confirmed earlier findings on ECE leadership (Hujala, 2013) indicating that the contextual factors of ECE have an effect on the constructions of quality leadership. Due to the contextual developments in ECE policy formulations (STAKES, 2003), leadership enactment was assessed in the participants' discussions in relation to its efficiency in improving pedagogical practices by implementing these pedagogical proceedings in practice. The constructions of the purpose and efficiency of leadership emerged through participants' thinking within scientific, institutional, and societal structures of ECE. The scientific development of ECE raised the need to enhance leadership capacity within early childhood education and explore effective leadership approaches.

In the research findings Articles 3 and 4, it was found that the Finnish National Curriculum (STAKES, 2003) created interdependence by functioning as an artefact which directed development work between the stakeholders. It assisted in curriculum work by aligning discussions of practice and goals for pedagogical improvement. In the emerging constructions of leadership enactment as a distributed and interdependent activity, leadership was connected to the participative processes in curriculum work between the stakeholders. Research findings Articles 3 and 4 indicated that distributed leadership approaches were believed by centre directors to enhance the professional learning of teachers, to contribute to expertise and shared approaches for practice, and to promote quality of ECE and the commitment to change.

In addition, interdependence in the leadership enactments existed in some municipalities between the centre director and an assistant director who worked in the centre as one of the teachers. Interdependence in the leadership enactment was apparent in the construction of a shared understanding of pedagogical proceedings between a centre director and an assistant director. The assistant director enacted pedagogical improvement independently, but according to the plans formulated jointly with the centre director. This, however, was a marginal part of the ways in which leadership was enacted in the municipalities that participated in

this study. Some other well developed procedures seemed to be common among ECE leaders and in some municipalities among centre directors, but such systems rarely existed between micro and macro level leadership enactments.

Recently, Aubrey, Godfrey, and Harris (2012) found that the ECE organisations were generally perceived as hierarchical and traditional, however, co-operative functions emerged in certain organisational forms through collaborative teamwork and decision-making between leaders and other teaching staff, nurses, and specialists. In this study, it was found that the development teams were established across micro and macro level stakeholders within municipalities, however, considering the experienced disconnection, the efficiency and functioning of the teams in presenting the voice of the teachers in municipal decision-making should be investigated more carefully in Finnish contexts.

## 5 Evaluation of the research and directions for future research

### 5.1 Evaluation of the research

In this chapter, the evaluation of the research reflects the choices being made during the research process. Justifications and arguments are presented in defending and critiquing the choices in terms of their impacts and contributions for the study.

For some decades, qualitative researchers have questioned the possibility of representing the world objectively and neutrally (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Our constructions reflect the traditional and cultural interpretations we live in. The relationship between the language and the world it describes is essential in these interpretations (Gergen & Gergen, 2007). Continuing the discussion of the crisis in evaluating qualitative research under the traditional concepts of validity, generalisability, and reliability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), Gergen and Gergen (2007, p. 467–468) suggest compensative concepts for discovering the truth. They suggest, for example, the use of the concepts of “reflexivity” and “multiple voicing” in evaluation and methodological innovations of qualitative research.

Firstly, it should be noted that the perspective within the articles reflects the research process. Distributed pedagogical leadership was crystallised as a research focus only towards the end of the process. The key findings that were reported in the Articles 3–5 guided the selection of a focus for examination between the research articles. The first article started with the analysis of the leadership responsibilities in ECE. The strong emphasis on pedagogical leadership connected with distributed leadership approaches directed focus towards investigating the distribution of responsibilities for pedagogical leadership. As a relevant research base for the key concepts of the study did not yet exist, the two literature review articles were completed for examining the concepts within ECE contexts.

The educational background and experience of the researcher of this study is grounded in educational disciplines and contexts. This fact directed the value base and the theoretical and conceptual repertoires of the researcher. The researcher’s own historicity and locality is both the strength and a challenge for interpretation of the findings of the study. Sharing the socio-cultural contexts with the participants of the study enables a shared understanding of the study participants and their perspectives, while efforts had to be made to maintain a distance from the



studied phenomenon so as not to take anything for granted. It was also a challenge to enable all of the voices of the study participants to be captured equally in the interpretations of the study findings.

The essential considerations in the evaluations of this study were connected with the theoretical and methodological challenges in applying previous theory and methods in examining distributed pedagogical leadership.

The theoretical challenges in this study included conceptual, contextual, and linguistic considerations. The most crucial theoretical challenge was to maintain conceptual clarity in applying distributed leadership models in ECE. That is, to ensure that the difficulties encountered by school leadership scholars in confusing the relative concepts were minimised or eliminated. Previously published reviews of distributed leadership have used a broader focus for gathering relevant publications for analysis. For example, Bennett, Wise, Woods, and Harvey (2003, p. 4) in their literature review used a variety of overlapping keywords which were closely associated with distributed leadership including “delegated leadership”, “democratic leadership”, and “dispersed leadership”. Leadership studies of non-educational settings were also included. In this dissertation, however, the conceptual clarity was respected by selecting distributed leadership studies based on educational organisations only.

In addition, the conceptual confusion or ambiguity in defining distributed leadership has also given rise to a diverse nomenclature being used in the literature such as *democratic leadership* (Woods, 2004), and *shared leadership* (Pearce & Conger, 2003). These terms are frequently used interchangeably and uncritically. This study, however, limited its focus to literature based purely on the concept of distributed leadership. This choice was made because of its conceptual development executed within educational contexts.

Furthermore, the literature at hand prompted application challenges in particular with the literature reviewed for Article 1. The uniqueness of the organisational contexts in which the research has been carried out, in particular the diversity of ECE organisations in this study, was taken into account when selecting the participants for the groups of informants. As such, the participants of the groups vary depending on the personnel of the municipalities. In addition, the whole set of informant groups included leaders on vertical dimensions of the organisation that were perceived to be relevant in studying leadership embedded in Finnish municipalities.

The most relevant contextual factor was the broader core purpose of ECE compared to the school-based studies which are focused mainly on instructional issues. Caring, upbringing, and teaching formed a united whole in daily pedagogy in Finnish ECE (STAKES, 2003). With respect to the uniqueness of the core purpose of ECE, this study anchored the analysis of leadership with pedagogical leadership approaches of ECE. Connecting the distributed leadership perspective

with pedagogical leadership approaches, interactional and system level leadership focused on developing pedagogical practices. Therefore, the perspectives of distributed leadership could increase the depth of understanding of pedagogical leadership, addressing it at a system level as interdependence between stakeholders.

Distributed cognition was presented as a background theory of distributed leadership (Spillane et al., 2001, 2004). However, this study did not bring it into the research focus, but used the idea of distributed cognition in the practical implications of the study. In this way it assisted in providing suggestions for leadership development. Although its significance is not large in this study, as a facet of interdependence, it assisted in understanding the strategies for constructing shared consciousness between the stakeholders as a basis for distributed pedagogical leadership.

Linguistic and cultural concerns also influenced the designing and critiquing this research. The meanings of words are fundamental in explaining key concepts operationalised within culturally diverse settings. Lack of linguistic clarity and equivalence of basic concepts between nations can in turn impede research. For example, according to Finnish authors Ropo et al. (2005), leadership means “shared understanding”, or “making things common”. Although these comments reflect notions of distribution, unless there is an officially sanctioned and agreed-upon national translation of scientific concepts such as distributed leadership that everyone can use, the task of analysing and adopting cross-cultural interpretations of the key concepts can be even more challenging. These circumstances can in turn influence the way scholars design research and explain the subtleties of distributed leadership practice by using theories and frameworks emerging from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

In evaluating the study from a methodological point of view, the challenges were connected with the selection of appropriate approaches and methods for studying distributed pedagogical leadership in Finnish ECE contexts. The benefits and limitations of the focus group method and the analysis procedures have been discussed. The guidelines and characters which framed the interpretation of the results were also presented for readers and evaluated in this chapter.

The undertaking of the previously used methods in distributed leadership studies and their suitability for the purposes and contexts of this study was an essential starting point when justifying the choices being made in this study. For example, the usage of observation, which is, along with the questionnaires and interviews, a common method in distributed leadership studies, was not considered to be suitable for this study because of the geographically dispersed set of key informants. As stated earlier, the focus groups method was chosen as a research method in the study because of the possibilities it allows for collecting data that manifests as collectively constructed leadership perceptions of people involved in

leadership in municipalities. Since the particular interest was to collect perceptions of different informant groups, it was justified to choose a method which provided information efficiently collected from a variety of informants. By using focus groups, it was anticipated that information could be gained that was specific to the stakeholders in local communities among the people represented in focus groups.

In this study, notes were taken on interactions between the group members during and after the focus group discussions. It was noted that new ideas emerged through group discussions and individual ideas were constructed further during the discussions. The topics and ideas brought to discussions by the study participants were rarely argued and they were interestingly similar within the segments across municipalities. The ideas brought into discussion were usually further developed by the group members. This was also noted by a few of the study participants who expressed the benefits of the discussions for constructing shared meanings for their future co-operation. Therefore, it could be noted that the interactional nature of the data collection had benefits for this research by providing a platform on which individual perceptions were further developed by the participant group. This study did not, however, set up the analysis of the interaction between individual participants during the group discussions as the aim of the research.

When assessing the limitations of the data collection method, it should be noted that the data was collected within a research project for which its aims and focuses were broader than those of this dissertation. Even though the research interests were overlapping, the researcher felt some uncertain moments during the focus group discussion when estimating the reasonable level of involvement in the discussion. In these cases there was a moderate inconsistency between the interests of the studies and the direction in which the discussion had been taken. The researcher interrupted the discussions that did not seem to produce any significant information from the point of view of the studies. In addition, the researcher intervened in the discussions when something highly interesting came up, but did not seem to lead any further comments by other participants of the group. In these cases, additional questions were asked, and then the group was asked to continue the discussion from where it ended before additional questions. The question of involvement in the discussion was also raised when the participants did not express themselves equally. This was particularly important to take into account in focus groups as it is widely known that the participants could be inclined to express opinions which are socially accepted within a community (Bryman & Teeman, 2005). However, as the silent participant was not compelled to be involved in the discussions, their silence was considered as indication of agreement to a common view constructed during the discussion. The study did,

however, engage the most common perception of the phenomenon in the community by the agreement of the main group.

Although the initiation for participating in the study came from the municipalities themselves, it was noted that the discussions among subordinates were experienced as a sensitive matter for their leaders. This also brought ethical issues into the consideration of the studied municipalities as leaders often asked for permission to come to hear the discussions of the subordinates. On one occasion, the researcher received a phone call from a staff member reporting that the leader was eavesdropping during the discussion of the staff and that they were suspicious of having been the brunt of the discussion. It was affirmed that the participants would remain anonymous.

Assessing the methodological choices being made in the study it could be noted that the focus group method fuelled critical discussions among the study participants. The study indicated differences between informant groups related to how satisfied they were amongst their leadership. ECE leaders within municipalities were most satisfied by their leadership whereas centre directors', teachers', and municipal committees' tendency toward negative perceptions occurred more often in discussions. Using individual interviews could have eliminated the tendency of the participants to take a negative position towards leading. Furthermore, comparing the focus group method to individual interviews, the more structured procedure could have produced more detailed information about the particular practices and proceedings implemented in the municipalities. However, this approach could have limited the possibilities of this study to gain collective constructions of leadership practice.

Pietilä (2010) noted in comparing individual interviews and focus groups that in focus groups the discussion tended to turn towards grievances and inequalities in society more easily than in individual interviews. This criticism could serve as a tool for community construction among the group members. The data illustrates the interpretations the group members have made about the changes in surrounding society and also the perspectives the group takes to topics being discussed. This reflects how the group is constructing "us" from their own perspective. The focus groups are more likely to be guided by the interaction between the group members than by the interviewer's answers.

Several organisational changes took place within the municipalities involved in the study at the time of the data collection. The most significant change which could have influenced the teachers' desire for centre directors' support and feeling of dissolution was the reorganisation of centre directors' work in which one director was made responsible for multiple centres and programs, rather than the previous setup with one centre director. This change decreased the centre directors' possibilities for being present within one particular centre as was the case previously. The launch of the Finnish National Curriculum (STAKES, 2003) occurred

just before the data collection, which could have accentuated the need for support of the teachers provided from centre directors in pedagogical improvement. At the same time, ECE sector reorganisation was also made as the municipal committees which had the authority to make decisions within an agenda of ECE changed from social to educational affairs within all the municipalities involved in the study. This new situation for both the municipal committees and the sector could have been the reason for the lack of awareness of issues in ECE among the members of municipal committees, as well as for the distancing experienced by all stakeholders involved in the study. The launch of the Finnish National Curriculum (STAKES, 2003) was majorly reflected in the leadership perceptions of participants involved in the study. It framed the discussions of pedagogical leadership and of determining its efficiency through the capability of centres to implement pedagogical proceedings. The organisational changes distancing stakeholders from each other thus reflected frustrations among the study participants.

When evaluating the data analysis procedure designed for the study it could be stated that the two-phase examination of the focus group data functioned well in gathering the relevant information in relation to the research questions. It investigated the perceptions of leadership enactment from the diverse perspectives of the stakeholders, thus providing a multi-voiced examination of relations and connections between them. Using a deductive approach would have assisted in making a more focused analysis of leadership practices. However, because the practices of distributed leadership were as yet undeveloped within Finnish municipalities, the amount of information provided in the collected data for predetermined scientific concepts could not be adequate for such an approach. Furthermore, applicable models of distributed pedagogical leadership for deductive analysis did not yet exist. In this respect, the methodological approach of the study reflects the main constructions of ECE leadership from the perspectives of the study participants. Therefore, in this study, the literature reviewed was used as a theoretical framework within which the perceptions of leadership enactment were investigated. The greatest challenge in the analysis was therefore in constructing a picture of leadership in relation to focal elements of distributed pedagogical leadership that were investigated in the literature reviews. This included focusing on the manifestations of interdependencies between the micro and macro level stakeholders. Interdependencies were interpreted by investigating the diverse perspectives in terms of how they reflected interconnections and disconnections in leadership enactment as perceived by the participants. The expressions reflecting collaboration and relations between the stakeholders as well as agencies in pedagogical leadership were considered crucial. From the perspectives of the framework offered here, this study could not, however, research the interactions between the stakeholders in a naturalistic sense. It should be noted that distribution does not necessarily mean interactions between the persons in situ, rather it could consist

of shared directions, strategies, and consciousness across stakeholders in enacting leadership. Interdependence could be mediated through the organisational contexts, artefacts, and structures of leadership (Spillane et al., 2001, 2004), such as the Finnish National Curriculum (STAKES, 2003) or through designed mediative positions and responsibilities.

By studying distributed pedagogical leadership through the perceptions of the stakeholders, this study was interested in the interpretations and understandings of leadership enactments of the stakeholders themselves. When addressing leadership from diverse perspectives, this study provided multiple voices of the perceptions of leadership practice. In this way, the interpretations of the results of the study did not provide what happened in the actual work of the stakeholders, but rather the picture gained is only a local and historical snapshot of constructions of leadership. Within this methodological framework, the study was aimed at understanding the local constructions of the informants within socio-cultural contexts.

The agency of the teachers in enacting leadership responsibilities was one example of the complexity of interpretations within the chosen methodological framework. Despite the fact that in Finland teachers are relatively free to plan pedagogical practices, the informants of the study perceived teachers' work only marginally as leadership. It could be suggested that there were influences by others, but shared knowledge generation between the teachers in daily interaction was being built over time, and is not an act that is conscious or easily explicated to others. This notion is essential when comparing the results between the studies completed in different cultural contexts. For example, Ho (2011) connects the concept of teacher leadership with curriculum decision-making made by the teachers. It was noted within these constructions that curriculum decision-making was previously centralised in the leaders in the Hong Kong context. This contextual factor could have an influence on the comprehension of the concept. Similarly, Sighn et al. (2012) suggested that distributed leadership may be enacted between teachers, parents, and children, as children also were capable of demonstrating leadership in their own learning. The concept of distributed pedagogical leadership was found to be useful for promoting pedagogical improvement by producing new knowledge among ECE staff, parents, and children within ECE centres. These notions shed light on the cultural constructions of leading, implicating that the concept emerges from varying comprehensions between cultural contexts and has not yet achieved momentum in constructions of teachers' professionalism in Finland.

Approaching the research object through the perceptions of the stakeholders directs attention to the meanings of language use among the focus group participants in the interpretation of the relations between the stakeholders. Although this study did not address manners of speaking in the sense of discursive analysis,



the language use in focus groups indicated the actual orientations, agencies, and relations between the various stakeholders involved in the study. A range of linguistic means were used in expressing the perceptions among the groups. A wide set of scientific concepts was used along with various utterances and metaphors to net together ideas that emerged in the discussions. A variety of local constructions for the artefacts and practices being implemented within the municipality was brought out in the discussions. This made it necessary for the interpreter to be familiar with the contemporary local contexts of ECE and to be an expert on the functioning and current developments of the municipal contexts.

Along with direct expressions of the state of affairs by the study participants, the relations and agencies between the groups became explicit through the concepts used in their discussions. Discussing pedagogical development for example, centre directors used figurative language like *bring* (*viedä*) and *spell it out* (*vääntää rautalangasta*) and loads of expressions of *discussing*, which indicated relatively different approaches in leadership. The way of talking expressed the position taken by centre directors in curriculum processes within centres. The talk of “discussion” was connected often to the talk of teachers’ when expressing what is it what they would anticipate, but did not have enough opportunities for. This study was particularly interested in these understandings, and the actual use of the verbs and their position in the discussions were significant in the interpretations of the data.

A focal point of the discussions was that the perceptions of leadership practice were often reflected through setting them up as opposite to the ideal circumstances of leadership. In these cases, the perceptions were embedded within informants’ conceptions of good leadership practice. The perceived state of leadership was often evaluated within moral or ideal perceptions of enacting leadership by the study participants. The centre directors who were using the expressions as *bring* or *spell it out* usually brought a moral justification for these expressions, stating how things ought to be instead. This duality of perceptions was noted in the representations of the study findings, as they were discussed within the emerging constructions of ECE leadership.

In addition, the practices of distributed leadership had not necessarily been connected directly with the concept of distributed leadership by the participants. Similarly, when using the concept of distributed leadership in their discussions, the participants sometimes connected it with the term *delegation*, which was manifested as being a disadvantage to the pedagogical work of the teachers and centre directors.

The professional conduct of research ethics was assured by the project management group which consisted of the municipality representatives who were usually ECE leaders or other administrative official staff from the municipalities that participated in the study; the project researcher at University of Tampere, Johanna Heikka, who was positioned as a secretary of the project management group; and

the leader of the project at University of Tampere, Professor Eeva Hujala. The project management group decided the principles of ethics, codes, and practices for informed consent and procedures for data collection. The informed consent in the project was obtained from the individuals who were participating in the focus groups prior to the data collection. This was made possible by the project management group by informing them about the purpose, benefits, and methods of the study as well as their right to refuse the consent.

The right to use the data collected in this dissertation was obtained from the project management group. The decision of the project management group was approval, however conditional; the anonymity of the municipalities should be respected when reporting the results of the dissertation. The anonymity of the municipalities and the privacy and confidentiality of the study participants was respected in terms of all identifiable information, e.g., the titles of the ECE leaders and all other information which was municipality-specific was deleted from the research report. Reasonable precautions have been taken to protect the original recording and the data transcripts. They have been stored in secured locations and have not made available for others than the research team.

To reflect on the aspects of the research frame in terms of the disciplinary orientation and professional interest of the study, it can be stated that the aim was to connect the study with the scientific discussion of ECE work, pedagogy, and leadership. What is crucial in considering the research ethics and the impact of the disciplinary lens selected for the study is to reflect on the capability of the research frame to reach the voices of the study participants. The focus of leadership discussions among study participants was on perspectives of ECE leadership and in this way it was sound with the professional interest of the study. However, the interdisciplinary frame of the study would have contributed to a broader understanding of the enactment of ECE leadership in municipal decision-making.

In this study, distributed pedagogical leadership was understood as interdependence between micro and macro level leadership enactments for the purpose of pedagogical development. Although constructions emerged of leadership as a distributed and interdependent activity, the simultaneous constructions of leading based upon institutionalised roles of ECE leaders and stable decision-making practices dominated the perceptions of leadership enactment of the study participants. However, the traditional way of enacting ECE leadership was perceived to be inherent in the realisations of the core purpose of ECE institutions, that is, in the provision of a high quality of care, upbringing, and teaching for young children. The capacity for pedagogical improvement to be enacted by the stakeholders within disconnected municipality contexts was highly contested among the study participants. Due to the tensions between the strategies and goals of ECE leadership, it was recognised among the ECE stakeholders that the shift from traditional to a more collective way of leading has to be rendered. As these ideas



and practices were evolving among the ECE stakeholders, but remain as yet undeveloped, this study suggests the focal strategies for leadership development which could assist in proceeding towards a greater level of distribution and interdependence in the leadership enactment between the ECE stakeholders. The conclusions made on the basis of the research findings are developed as implications for policy and practice in the following section. The five suggestions for policy and practice development were: enhancing shared consciousness of the visions and strategies between the stakeholders, distributing responsibilities for pedagogical leadership, distributing and clarifying power relationships between the stakeholders, distributing the enactment of pedagogical improvement within the centres, and developing strategy for distributed pedagogical leadership. These implications build on each other and could be understood as sequential and intertwined in proceeding toward leadership development.

## 5.2 Implications for policy and practice

The implications for policy and practice presented here are based on the study results presented in Chapter 4. The knowledge gained through this dissertation would help to understand leadership enactment as perceived by the key stakeholders involved in ECE leadership in Finnish municipalities. The results were used here for providing aspects for consideration to improve ECE leadership in Finnish municipalities. They were organised under the five key dimensions presented in the following subsections, each working towards developing the interdependent enactment of distributed pedagogical leadership. They could assist in the distribution of leadership responsibilities, functions, and tasks, as well as in implementing strategies which could create a zone of interdependence between the distributed leadership enactments. A zone of interdependence connects micro and macro level ECE leadership enactments within municipalities as presented in Figure 3.

### *Enhancing shared consciousness of visions and strategies between the stakeholders*

Focusing on the enhancement of shared consciousness between micro and macro level stakeholders about visions and strategies would promote participation in leadership, and it could eliminate the deficiencies in and lack of awareness about development work manifested in this study (Articles 3–5). Pedagogical improvement as a dynamic process which involves stakeholders in a shared construction of the understanding of the visions and strategies for development is conducive to enhancing interdependence, and this could be achieved by combining information from diverse perspectives.

A crucial starting point in enhancing shared consciousness about the goals and strategies for pedagogical development is the development of a quality strategy which can form the basis for shared discussions, decision-making, and the systematic development of ECE. This notion also sheds light on the study finding that municipalities were missing evaluation systems to assist in setting goals and directions for pedagogical improvement (Articles 3–5). Due to the insufficient evaluation the development work was perceived to be inconsistent (Articles 3 and 4).

Enhancing evaluation-based construction of visions and strategies through shared cognitive processes of all involved in ECE is essential for developing interdependence. 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 individuals' cognition. The relationship is reciprocal for an individual and the system. Applying this idea to the contexts of ECE, one could assume that active participation in the negotiation and planning processes of pedagogy can enhance participants' capacity to make informed decisions on pedagogy. Similarly, the involvement of different stakeholders in shared cognitive processes brings relevant information from diverse perspectives to the basis of developmental decisions. Therefore, it is essential to establish structures which enable discussion between the stakeholders. In addition, training and the provision of suitable ICT equipment could solve difficulties in information sharing between stakeholders and increase the clarity of organisational visions and goals.

Moreover, the inadequate possibilities for pedagogical discussion within centres presented in Article 4 could be dealt with by reorganising leaders' work by allocating needed resources for systematic development and curriculum work. One cannot assume that information and solutions transferred to teachers from centre directors would contribute to their professional development in the long term. 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). Development of tools and structures which allow for discussions between the centre directors and teachers would be crucial to foster shared developmental work within centres.

Shared consciousness forms a basis for all of the other dimensions of the zone of interdependence presented in this chapter. That is, the shared construction of goals and strategies for development work functions as a basis for the distribution of responsibilities for pedagogical leadership.

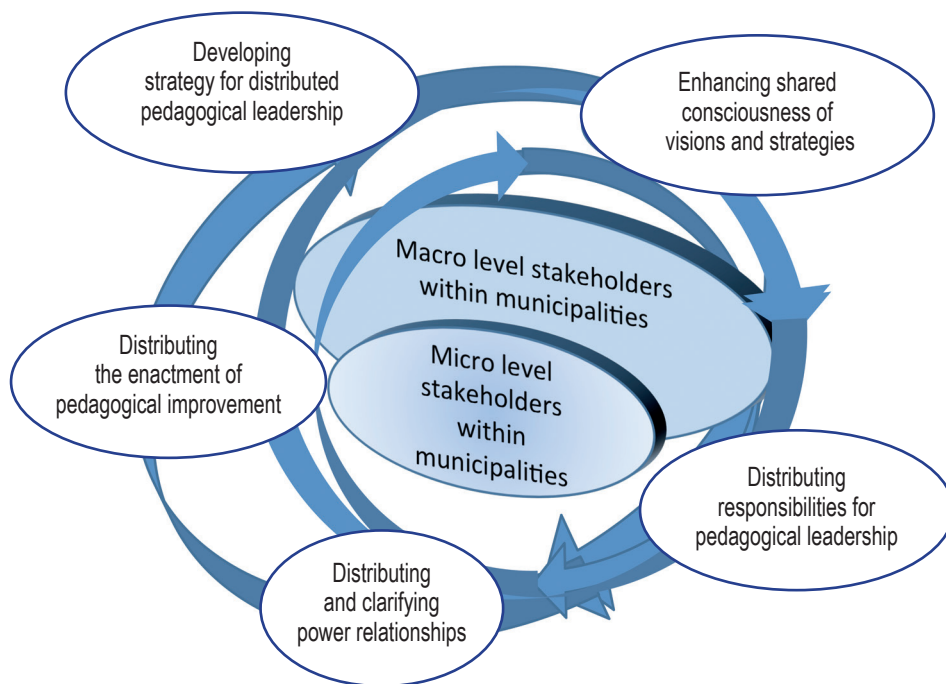


Figure 3: Interdependence in the enactment of distributed pedagogical leadership

### *Distributing responsibilities for pedagogical leadership*

This developmental implication of creating interdependence is connected with the finding of this study that responsibilities for pedagogical leadership were laid on the centre directors' position by all of the studied groups (Articles 3–5). This study argued that when the responsibility for pedagogical leadership rests solely on the centre director, it may not be conducive to systematic long-term pedagogical development within centres. Based on the results of this dissertation, the following points would be important to take into account.

The distribution of responsibilities for pedagogical leadership involves providing support for centre directors from macro level leaders of the municipality in order to reduce the lack of resources for enacting pedagogical leadership within centres. Furthermore, ECE leaders should create structures where efficient enactment of pedagogical improvement in centres would be realised. The support from the macro level also includes making pedagogical leadership visible and accountable by employing evaluation tools for pedagogical improvement. As the study

indicated, the efficiency of centre directors was perceived to be estimated through other aspects of their work. What is evaluated will be prioritised in leaders' work and vice versa.

It is essential to reconsider the delegation of managerial duties between the stakeholders. The findings of this study indicated that managerial duties were inclined to flow down through organisational levels inhibiting both centre directors' and teachers' capacities to focus on pedagogical development. Wright (2008, p. 22) found that distributed leadership is sometimes used "as a guise for the delegation of administrative responsibilities". To be effective, distributed leadership has to be assessed against different aspects of leading, including the separation of management and leadership functions. Distribution of responsibilities has to focus on pedagogical aspects of leading to be effective.

Pedagogical leadership at the team level within centres could be promoted by focusing on the roles and responsibilities of the university-qualified ECE teachers within pedagogical team processes, as can be seen in Australian ECE centres (Waniganayake et al., 2012). At the time of completion of this dissertation, there is a debate in Finland that ECE teachers do not have sufficient possibilities for using their pedagogical expertise within centres. The culture of teamwork has long been dominated by the idea that everybody does everything, emphasising equal responsibilities for pedagogy among the team members. However, in reality the pedagogical expertise rests mainly with the university-qualified teachers, as in general the multi-professional teams were composed of them along with the upper secondary vocational-qualified practical nurses that specialised in working with children.

Encouraging university-qualified teachers' participation in pedagogical leadership is crucial, as teachers work closest to pedagogy and have the essential knowledge of early childhood practice and experience with young children. However, centre directors were unaware of what tasks, functions, and responsibilities could be shared with teachers and how these could be shared. The leadership development strategies could also include support for centre directors to reduce this lack of awareness and means to share leadership responsibilities and authority with teachers.

### *Distributing and clarifying power relationships between the stakeholders*

This implication was raised from the finding that interdependence seemed to be located at the micro level, but rarely occurred in micro or macro level interactions, as centre directors and teachers were perceived to have limited possibilities to participate in decision-making about developmental proceedings in municipalities (Article 3). Similarly, municipal committees were perceived to have only a

nominal role in decision-making (Article 5). This section includes suggestions as to how authority and power could be distributed between the stakeholders.

Emerging constructions of ECE leadership enactment questioned the traditional roles, responsibilities, and tasks of teachers and leaders in enacting pedagogical leadership. Clarity of the roles and responsibilities is the foundational element in leadership in defining functions and tasks of the stakeholders. However, the top-down models of enacting organisational roles and responsibilities was perceived to be inefficient as teachers' and centre directors' control over the micro level decisions within centres was insufficient for sustainable quality improvement (Article 4). The efficiency of the process of decision-making about quality improvements was rather perceived as involving mutual interaction between micro and macro level perspectives within municipalities. What was considered crucial was a bottom-up channel of exerting influence so that the daily development challenges in the practice of ECE would regulate higher-level decision-making (Article 5). The development of cross-boundary teams, which bring the diverse perspectives of the stakeholders into the discussion of developmental proceedings, is essential in shared decision-making between the stakeholders. This notion is not new in ECE contexts. However, this study indicated that the functioning of the teams should be evaluated in terms of their ability to bring diverse perspectives to the basis of decision-making. Especially the extent to which a teacher's voice was represented in these cross-boundary discussions should receive more attention in developing the functioning of the teams.

The authority and power within the system appeared to be held by municipal ECE leaders (Article 5). The role of ECE leaders is fundamental for providing and creating organisational structures which enable the enactment of organisations' responsibilities. Paradoxically, the ECE leaders perceived centre directors as operating in the middle of micro and macro level stakeholders, and as being responsible for developing co-operation. However, because of the lack of authority, the centre directors felt excluded from making structural decisions and changes for enhancing collaboration between the stakeholders (Article 3). In addition, although the responsibility for pedagogical leadership was laid on the centre directors' position, they felt they did not have the needed authority to make changes for efficient leadership.

The relations between centre directors' responsibilities and authority should be balanced in order to achieve the efficient enactment of pedagogical leadership. In this way, this study discusses the earlier interpretations of distributed leadership as interplay between agential and structural dimensions of leadership (Crawford, 2012; Richie & Woods, 2007). The findings of this study strengthen the earlier findings suggesting that the interplay between the mutual lack of awareness of agency in leadership development resulted in a lack of initiation for structural developments.

Based on the study findings, it could be concluded that balancing power relations between the municipal committees and ECE leaders in municipal decision-making is important (Article 5). The functioning of democracy in municipal decision-making involves raising the agency of the members of the municipal committees in the decision-making by increasing their level of expertise in ECE and awareness of daily practices of ECE. In addition, developing co-operation between the ECE leaders and municipal committees in the process of decision-making is essential. The matters to be decided could be introduced by the ECE leaders for the members of the municipal committees long before the committee meeting in which the matter is to be decided. For the duration of the monthly meetings, if possible, the matter could for example be introduced in the first meeting and decided in the second meeting after a month.

Achieving efficiency in pedagogical leadership also demands distribution of authority between the centre directors and the teachers. The leaders could promote the teachers' role as pedagogical leaders by providing sufficient tools and commonly constructed strategies for practice development. The authority is shared as the teachers work independently but interdependently as pedagogical developers within their centres. The centre directors develop and coordinate the distributed leadership functions of the teachers in parallel with the goals and strategies within a municipality.

#### *Distributing the enactment of pedagogical improvement within centres*

The emphasis on this practical implication rose partly from the distanced features of leadership enactment between the stakeholders. Within the complex municipality structures, the key stakeholders were geographically dispersed from each other. As the study results showed, the disconnection was not perceived as working efficiently in achieving pedagogical improvements in the ECE centres (Article 4). Distributing the enactment of pedagogical improvement within centres involves designing and coordinating distributed leadership functions between centre directors and teachers. In distributed leadership enactment, centre directors and teachers have separate but interdependent responsibilities and tasks in pedagogical leadership. Coordination is crucial for parallel development. Based on the results of this dissertation, the following notions would be helpful in distributing the enactment of pedagogical improvement within centres.

The existence of designed leadership positions within a centre is an essential starting point in developing distributed leadership functions. The emergence of developed and coordinated leadership functions in this study was manifested between the centre director and an assistant director when working interdependently for pedagogical improvement. Interdependence was apparent between these

two because of developed and coordinated leadership operations. A deficiency of interdependence could, however, be seen when there was no designated assistant director in a centre. In these cases, some of the teachers were inclined to adopt leadership roles, however, this activity was not coordinated with macro level decisions and development programs implemented in the municipality (Article 4). This activity should be investigated to foster development and evaluation of appointment of teachers in taking leadership responsibilities within centres, and would in turn help to maintain consistency of practices in municipalities.

The interest of teachers in assuming leadership roles is an important starting point for the development of distributed leadership. Leaders should investigate the staff in their centres in terms of who are the persons having influence among staff members, and coordinate this informal activity in parallel with the guidelines employed in a shared way. MacBeath (2005) describes developmental phases through which teachers could be involved in leadership. The amount of responsibility could be increased through these phases according to individual teachers' skills and interest. The creation of a culture of teacher leadership based on shared knowledge and developed leadership practices has the potential to promote pedagogical leadership in those working directly with children in ECE centres. Several studies (Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Harris, 2008; Mascall et al., 2008; Muijs & Harris, 2007) indicate that the functioning of distributed leadership with teachers demands expertise, ongoing development of leadership, planning, trust, and cooperation. Structures, shared vision, and support from administrative staff were also shown to be crucial.

University-qualified teachers assess pedagogical practices within their teams according to the plans that are jointly formulated. Based on this assessment of practices, the teacher plans evaluation-based suggestions for the team about the practice development. In this way, the teacher leads pedagogical improvement within the teams. The centre director monitors and coordinates team-level development regularly with the teacher. Robinson's (2006, 2008) studies sought empirical evidence of the impact of distributed leadership on child outcomes. She divided her findings by direct and indirect effects of leadership. Direct ways in which leadership contributes to pedagogy and children's learning include face to face interaction between staff, whereas indirect effects of leadership on child outcomes consist of creating the situational conditions which enhance the teachers thinking and acting in improved ways. In distributed pedagogical leadership examined in this dissertation, ECE teachers share the direct ways of contributing to child outcomes; however, indirect ways of leadership such as monitoring, coordinating, and developing pedagogical improvement on the team level and provision of adequate tools, resources, and structures for development by the centre director can strengthen the conditions that enable effective ECE to take place. Similarly, these indirect ways of leadership could lessen the impact of the



distanced characteristics of Finnish municipalities that inhibit the effect of leadership on child outcomes.

### *Developing strategy for distributed pedagogical leadership*

According to Spillane et al. (2007), there is no need to minimise the leader's role in distributed leadership. In order for distributed leadership to succeed, it should be well-planned, goal-oriented, and continuously developed (Article 1). The involvement of all organisational levels and support from different stakeholders is also shown to be essential. Those holding leadership positions would have to learn how to create efficient practices of distributed leadership and foster participation of those in informal positions. This notion confirms the perspective that leadership and management are connected (Spillane et al., 2007). Managing cross-boundary leadership functions between the stakeholders is crucial for creating interdependence. The leaders' role should be discussed in terms of planning, aligning, evaluating, and developing the distributed leadership enactments.

Development of a strategy for leadership would be essential for efficient leadership development. The strategy for leadership makes the guidelines and procedures explicit for each of the stakeholder group and forms structures which describe the focal work processes on a system level. Descriptions of the procedures for the establishment of shared organisational visions and strategies are essential as well as the determination of functions, tools, and procedures for leadership evaluation and development.

The results of this dissertation also raised implications for the responsibilities for the organisation of ECE services in Finnish municipalities. At the time of completion of this dissertation, there is a variety of governance of ECE services in Finnish municipalities due to the transformation of the responsibilities of ECE services to the municipal committees of Educational Affairs from municipal committees of Social Affairs in most of the municipalities. Transferring the responsibilities for ECE to the Committee of Educational Affairs in parallel with municipalities would enhance the possibilities, contexts, and mechanisms of distributed pedagogical leadership at the political and operational levels of ECE leadership and administration. Similarly, the development of unified and integral national-level planning, administration, and steering of ECE policies and services under the Ministry of Education and Culture would produce a coherent, internationally comparative education system in Finland. By formulating a sound continuum for administration and steering of educational services in terms of its content, function, and administration could open new perspectives and possibilities for distributed pedagogical leadership.



### 5.3 Implications for education and training of ECE

The results of this dissertation raised issues for education and training of ECE through the notions of requirements to increase the level of leadership skills and teacher involvement in the processes of pedagogical improvement. These have recently been acknowledged also in the *Training in Early Childhood Education in Finland – evaluation of current situation and development needs* (Karila et al., 2013), launched by The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC). The document suggested that ECE education and training should produce stronger competencies for leadership, familiarity of the operation of the ECE setting, and functioning and development of the work community. The insufficiency of leadership skills and competencies was also marked one year earlier in OECD's national report on Finland (OECD, 2012), by the notion of developmental challenges of leadership skills especially in relation to the professional development of ECE staff.

In ECE education and training, the content of the training could be the abilities and skills needed to enhance the processes of pedagogical improvement in the contexts of ECE. These co-operative skills would enable ECE teacher, directors, and leaders to analyse and develop the system level structures, processes, and tools and refresh their roles in pedagogical improvement in all levels of ECE leadership.

### 5.4 Significance of the study and future research

This study forms a pioneering work, as it examined ECE leadership from a distributed perspective, which is a relatively new approach in early childhood contexts. By understanding the interdependence between stakeholders, this study provided information which can enhance the enactment of pedagogical leadership in the contexts of ECE. It can allow for the restructuring of leadership work, bring coherency, and enhance the capacity for change and implementation of the national policies of ECE. This study critiqued the relevance and significance of school-based distributed leadership within early childhood contexts, including an analysis of implementation challenges that flow on from applying theory into practice. Furthermore, connections between pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership were investigated as a pathway to applying previous distributed leadership study in ECE.

The practical contribution of this study is also connected with the significance of the distributed leadership framework in informing the development of ECE leadership. This study was connected to Finnish systems of organising municipal services. The study indicated that such a hierarchical system does not function efficiently in taking care of dynamic leadership tasks as perceived by the

key stakeholders of ECE. Furthermore, based on the conclusions made from the study findings, the main inhibiting factors of leadership development in Finnish municipalities were presented, which were connected to the study participants' perceptions of disconnected leadership enactment, and it was suggested how leadership could be enacted more efficiently. The implications for policy and practice could assist ECE leaders and practitioners in analysing their work and in developing efficient strategies for interdependent enactment of distributed pedagogical leadership.

The significance of this study is also connected to changes in the operational contexts of Finnish ECE which have an impact on the focus and design of ECE leadership research and theorising. That is, for example, generation changes in Finnish working life, ongoing municipal and national reforms in planning, administration, steering and organising of ECE policies, service provision, and leadership structures. These open and extend the ways for international discussion and development of the classical leadership theorising in Finnish ECE contexts.

Based on the study findings, four types of questions can be identified in designing future research in ECE leadership. Firstly, there are questions concerning the functioning of the prevailing development teams in municipalities that presents the voices of micro level stakeholders in decision-making, which should be investigated more carefully. Secondly, whilst the currency of distributed leadership within early childhood education is continuing to gather momentum, finding ways to distribute and evaluate early childhood leadership remains a significant challenge. Deeper investigation of those interdependent forms of leadership distribution identified in this study would contribute to the development of applicable practical approaches. Continuing the analysis of evidence gathered in this study can strengthen knowledge advancement of the actual impact of efficient forms. This may in turn require reconceptualisation of leadership theorising to find better ways of understanding leadership effectiveness and its impact on learning. Thirdly, there are questions that focus on leadership outcomes, such as what impact leadership distribution had on the organisation and its stakeholders and how the overall leadership performance and effectiveness of distribution could be assessed. Finally, the role of the ECE teachers as pedagogical leaders in their own centres should be investigated with developmental approaches. Answers to these questions may significantly influence the organisation of early childhood practice and leadership theorising.

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## Original publications

# Contextualizing Distributed Leadership Within Early Childhood Education: Current Understandings, Research Evidence and future Challenges

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## Abstract

This article seeks to establish a new research agenda on distributed leadership by linking early childhood and school leadership research. It begins with a discussion of how distributed leadership is conceptualized, including a discussion of the main features and meanings of distributed leadership as defined by key scholars who have maintained a sustained interest in this topic. It explores theoretical bases underpinning leadership research that have adopted a distributed leadership framework in general and within early childhood education organizations in particular. By critiquing the application of learning derived from school-based research within early childhood settings, this article aims to engage readers across different education sectors to collaborate in reconceptualizing distributed leadership in the future.

## Keywords

distributed leadership, early childhood education, leadership, literature review

## Introduction

Much of the literature on distributed leadership to date focuses on school-based leadership (see for example, Camburn et al., 2003; Firestone and Martinez, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2007; MacBeath, 2005; Spillane et al., 2007). In contemporary theorizing, distributed leadership can be traced to the work of those such as Gronn (2002a, 2002b), Harris (2009), Leithwood et al. (2009), Mayrowetz (2008) and Spillane (2006). By examining the broader context of school-based leadership, the definition and meaning of distributed leadership is explored from a conceptual perspective. This

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discussion is then extended to early childhood leadership literature where discussions on distributed leadership are currently being affirmed (Fasoli et al., 2007; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2007).

By analysing the application of previous research, this article aims to establish the groundwork to develop a new distributed leadership research agenda that can bring together scholars from diverse education sectors. As such, this article critiques the relevance and significance of school-based distributed leadership within early childhood contexts, including an analysis of implementation challenges that flow on from applying theory into practice. This discussion draws on relevant research undertaken in a range of countries, especially Canada, the UK and USA, involving the work of key scholars such as Keith Leithwood, Alma Harris and James Spillane, respectively. Specific papers by these scholars and others, selected for analysis are presented in Table 1. This analysis is important because a discussion incorporating early childhood and school education leadership literature has not been published previously. By stimulating discussions between scholars interested in exploring distributed leadership across different education sectors, it will be possible to assess the veracity of applying distributed leadership in similar but different educational organizations.

## **Ways of Defining Distributed Leadership**

In reviewing appropriate leadership literature it was clear that distributed leadership research is relatively young, emerging as a focus of research during the late 1990s, and is primarily concerned with the study of school-based leaders. Likewise, although Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003) introduced the concept of distributive leadership, and others such as Aubrey (2007) and Scrivens (2006) have endorsed its exploration within early childhood settings, published papers in this sector of education are sparse and difficult to locate. Nonetheless, the burgeoning literature on distributed leadership being operationalized within schools in Canada, Europe and the USA in particular (see Table 1) warrants independent analysis, so that its relevance in early childhood settings may be critiqued in meaningful ways.

The literature review on distributed leadership undertaken in preparing this article affirms the assessment of those such as Harris (2007), Hartley (2007), Lakomski (2008) and Mayrowetz (2008) about the absence of clarity and consistency in defining leadership through a distributed lens. These authors refer to a range of leadership models built by using a variety of variables, but are concerned about the limited opportunities to debate and discuss findings, which in turn may have stunted advancements in promoting understanding and clarity necessary to implement distributed leadership effectively.

The conceptual confusion or ambiguity in defining distributed leadership has also given rise to a diverse nomenclature being used in the literature, such as democratic leadership (Woods, 2004) and shared leadership (Pearce and Conger, 2003). These terms are frequently used interchangeably and uncritically. Hartley (2007: 202) describes this situation as ‘conceptual elasticity’ reflective of what Lakomski (2008: 160) describes as a case of ‘horses for courses’. Such criticism from esteemed leadership scholars can in turn thwart theorizing, especially if the goal is to seek consistency or advancements based on commonalities or similarities. For example, ‘distributed leadership’ and ‘shared leadership’ are often used in the same paper as if they were equal, with the authors providing no definition or explanation on what is meant by each concept (Hammersley-Fletcher and Brundrett, 2008; Lindahl, 2008). The use of these concepts interchangeably creates confusion in operationalizing definitions in practice and raises difficulties in interpretation when considering implications of findings based on research studies.

**Table 1.** Key characteristics of distributed leadership research within various countries.

Project summary	Key findings
<p>Studies from New Zealand and Australia</p> <p>Scrivens (2006) An action research study on the development of a community of practice in an early childhood centre over three years and its influence on children's disposition to learn through inquiry.</p>	<p>In this New Zealand study, an increase in understanding in the teachers' ongoing reflections, pedagogical knowledge and professional dialogue were noted. Teachers initiated more complex co-construction of inquiry with the children. Collaboration was strengthened: the staff were able to reflect more directly on the ways in which they interacted and link these to their work with children and families.</p>
<p>Timperley (2005) This study in New Zealand explored concepts connected with distributed leadership in relation to school improvement.</p>	<p>This study showed that the impact of distributed leadership on school improvement varied according to the style of distribution. It was also stated that leadership is desirable to achieve improvements in teaching whereby teachers were supported to provide effective instructions to students.</p>
<p>Gronn and Hamilton (2004) The aim of this Australian study was to investigate co-principalship from a distributed perspective. It examined how the roles and responsibilities were shared between two people and how different school actors viewed this leadership.</p>	<p>It was found that co-principalship intensified the work of school principals both cognitively and emotionally through the shared role space. In turn, this can reduce the burdens and risks of this office. The reality of this type of distributed leadership is to make organizational practice more democratic than it might otherwise be possible.</p>
<p>Studies from the UK</p> <p>Harris and Allen (2009) The aim of this study was to investigate leadership in relation to the implementation of the ECM, Every Child Matters, models.</p>	<p>The attitudes of the leaders had a significant impact on the implementation of ECM. In schools where ECM implementation was elevated there was 'extended or distributed' leadership with the involvement of different stakeholders.</p>
<p>MacBeath (2005) This study examined the perceptions and culture of leadership practice and the processes of distributed leadership in school contexts and situations.</p>	<p>The study found six types of leadership models that varied from 'formal' to 'cultural' distribution. Each school was located along a developmental sequence based on the context and the evolving stage of school development.</p>
<p>Muijs and Harris (2007) The aim of this study was to illustrate different ways with which teacher leadership was present at schools.</p>	<p>This study showed that functioning of teacher leadership demand ongoing development of leadership, trust and cooperation. Also structures and shared vision were shown to be crucial.</p>
<p>Ritchie and Woods (2007) This research investigated the development of leadership and the degree of leadership distribution in schools and its meaning in succession planning.</p>	<p>Develop a typology based on three degrees of distributed leadership: 'emerging', 'developing' and 'embedded'. Findings affirmed difficulties of separating different forms or degrees of distributed leadership. There were many ways of proceeding towards an embedded degree of distributed leadership where planning and progression were wide-ranging and continuous.</p>

*(continued)*

**Table 1.** (continued)

Project summary	Key findings
<b>Studies from the USA</b>	
<p>Camburn et al. (2003) This study examined distributed leadership in the context of adopting, Comprehensive School Reforms. It focused on the roles of school principals implementing the model.</p>	<p>Teams of individuals rather than a single person provide elementary school leadership. The responsibility for leadership and management functions was typically distributed across three to seven formally designated leadership positions at each elementary school.</p>
<p>Firestone and Martinez (2007) This study investigated how leadership was distributed within school districts and how districts and teacher leaders impact instructional practice.</p>	<p>This study found that teacher leaders and districts can share tasks including material generation and distribution, development enforcement and staff development; teacher leadership needs time and expertise; support from administrative staff was significant in teacher capacity to coordinate their performance.</p>
<p>Goldstein (2003) This study investigated the functioning of consulting teachers in teacher evaluations which was previously seen as a school principal's responsibility.</p>	<p>The study showed that teachers can evaluate each other. Despite positive sentiments about policy across stakeholder groups, those involved wanted principals to remain a central figure in the evaluation. Hierarchical norms, the difficulty of conducting evaluations, district leadership and program ambiguity were identified as challenges to distributing leadership.</p>
<p>Spillane et al. (2007) An investigation of the distribution of curriculum, instruction and administrative tasks within schools and sharing of management and leadership responsibilities.</p>	<p>Leadership and management were distributed within schools. Administrative, curriculum and instruction aspects of principals' work were conducted together with school staff. The way in which responsibilities were shared differs between different contexts and situations.</p>
<p>Spillane et al. (2008) This research focused on epistemological and methodological challenges in distributed leadership.</p>	<p>The importance of methodological and epistemological considerations in the study of distributed leadership was emphasized. It recommends different ways of implementing leadership especially the use of non-formal interactional strategies.</p>
<b>Studies from Canada</b>	
<p>Leithwood et al. (2007) An investigation of patterns of leadership distribution, actors of leadership and factors that influenced distributed leadership.</p>	<p>This study identified efficient patterns of distributed leadership. Schools and district leaders had significant roles in enforcing and progressing the functioning of teams.</p>
<p>Mascall et al. (2008) This study looked at the connections between leadership, distributive control, trust, and behaviour.</p>	<p>Findings showed that academic optimism was connected with patterns of planned leadership distribution. Unplanned patterns were aligned with low academic optimism among teachers.</p>

In defining distributed leadership and shared leadership there is also no consensus or common understanding about any associations or structural connectivities between these two concepts. For instance, Fletcher and Käufer (2003) describe the nature of shared leadership processes as



'distributed and interdependent' (p. 22). This reflects the move away from conceptualizing leadership as an individual attribute to a collective achievement based on teamwork. Fletcher and Käufer (2003), however, do not clarify the difference between distributive leadership and shared leadership. This confusion is also reflected in Leithwood and Mascall's (2008) attempt to find clarity in discussing the functions and practices of 'collective leadership' (p. 530) where they refer to distributed leadership as a general category to include terms such as 'distributed', 'shared' and 'dispersed'. The rationale for this discussion is presented in terms of the benefits that can be achieved through collective action.

Some scholars, such as Harris (2009), connect the two properties, 'interdependence' and 'emergence' with distributed leadership. However, it has been difficult to establish a strong connection between these two elements in the practice of leadership in school contexts. Much of the research reviewed for this article suggests that the successful achievement of distributed leadership is determined by the interactive influences of multiple members within an organization. Distributed leadership is however, not just about the sharing of tasks in an organization, but is also used to explain deeper levels of interaction between members working through shared goals. Recognition of this complexity is not unique to distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002b; Harris, 2009) and is found in the work of scholars who write about shared leadership (Cox et al., 2003; Fletcher and Käufer, 2003).

Furthermore, distinctions are made across distributed leadership and collaboration or teamwork. 'Distributed leadership results from the activity, that it is a product of a conjoint activity such as network learning communities, study groups, inquiry partnerships, and not a simply another label for that activity' (Harris, 2004: 15). According to Spillane (2005: 149) however, 'shared leadership', 'team leadership' and 'democratic leadership' are not synonyms for distributed leadership. The slippery nature of defining distributed leadership is acknowledged by Spillane (2006: 94) when he explains that the term distributed leadership is in itself 'a set of diagnostic and design tools' that can be used to examine ways of experiencing or practicing leadership. The phenomenon under study and how it is perceived will change with the focus or lens being used. As such, according to Spillane (2006) a distributed leadership framework is merely another 'analytical tool' for the study of leadership (p. 6).

Moreover, teams do not necessarily have authority or leadership and teamwork does not necessarily involve distributed leadership perspectives because teams can function hierarchically and be directed in non-democratic ways. According to Spillane et al. (2004: 11) leadership is best understood as a practice 'distributed over leaders, followers, and the school's situation or contexts'. On the other hand, according to Cox et al. (2003: 53) shared leadership is seen as 'the condition in which teams collectively exert influence'. Accordingly, they emphasize the centrality of teams as a strong indicator of shared leadership, where 'collaborative, emergent process of group interaction in which members engage in peer leadership while working together' (pp. 52–53). In contrast, scholars who focus on distributed leadership, tend to adopt a more macroscopic view of organizations where leadership functions are structurally more detached and therefore notions of interdependence are emphasized.

Within distributed leadership literature, the emphasis is on leadership practice rather than on leadership roles and 'it is the nature and quality of leadership practice that matters' (Harris and Spillane, 2008: 33). According to Woods (2004: 6), 'although leadership may be distributed, it does not necessarily imply an absence of hierarchy. This is evident from the fact that distributed leadership may comprise teams, informal work groups, committees and so on, operating within a hierarchical organization.' Leithwood and Mascall (2008) define distributed leadership as illustrating everyday ways of sharing tasks in organizations and thereby minimizing the possibility of

mistakes made through leadership decisions being made by individuals acting alone. Instead of task partition for actors in different positions it means interactions between members of the organization (Timperley, 2005). As such, Spillane et al. (2001: 25) refer to leaders who work towards a shared goal through 'separate, but interdependent work'.

Spillane et al. (2004: 9) discuss distributed leadership practice as being 'stretched over' the whole school social and community contexts. Leadership for instruction involves multiple personnel, consisting of those who held either formal leadership positions and/or informal leadership responsibilities. Spillane et al. (2001), Spillane et al. (2004) and Harris and Spillane (2008) base their leadership thinking on activity theory and theories of distributed cognition based on the work of those such as Hutchins (1995), Leont'ev (1981), Rogoff (1990) and Vygotsky (1978) where material and cultural artefacts form identifiable elements of the socio-cultural context. This approach emphasizes the meaning of situations and contexts of leadership suggesting that leadership activity is distributed over various facets of the situation, including tools, language and organizational structures. Gronn (2000: 318) also associates his view of distributed leadership with activity theory (see Engeström, 1999), conceptualizing it 'as a part of a model of jointly performed and tool-mediated activity'. Interestingly, although the majority of papers included in this literature review cite the work of Gronn and Spillane and colleagues, few others have embraced activity theory (Mayrowetz, 2008).

Distributed leadership approaches are often described as being in opposition or competing with leadership perspectives that focus on person-based leadership and with static organizational positions being 'leaders' and 'followers' based on individualistic leadership models (Gronn, 2000, 2002a; Mayrowetz, 2008; Timperley, 2005; Woods and Gronn, 2009). Several researchers also suggest that leadership in schools is more likely to be distributed (Gronn, 1999; Spillane et al., 2004; Timperley, 2005). Distributed leadership does not demand a change in prevailing leadership structures. Persons holding leadership positions become as monitors of distributed leadership (Harris, 2008). In addition, school leaders' role can vary between different contexts. Distributed leadership does not mean that every staff person has leadership roles (Spillane, 2007).

Distributed leadership is significant when considering leading educational organizations (Timperley, 2005). In theoretical reviews of distributed leadership, concepts of effectiveness and school improvement are aligned with instructional leadership (Mayrowetz, 2008). Furthermore, in dealing with the conceptual underpinning of distributive leadership, Woods and Gronn (2009) connect organizational capacity with initiative and sustainable change. Moreover, Woods et al. (2004: 444) emphasized that 'the degree of control and autonomy is a major variable in distributed leadership'. Gronn (2008) and Hartley (2009) both also stated that the meaning of power is not considered enough in distributed leadership studies. Likewise, Maxcy and Nguyen (2006) raised the question of whose power to influence is enhanced through the distribution of leadership.

However, distributed leadership is not generally thought of as a normative concept or an ideal model. Instead of modelling leadership, distributed leadership scholars usually examine the different ways in which leadership is distributed observing relations between actors and situations and how these relations can be investigated. It lacks advocacy or normative goals (Firestone and Martinez, 2007; Harris, 2007; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane et al., 2004, Timperley, 2005; Woods and Gronn, 2009). However, Mayrowetz et al. (2007) provide a theoretical framework that can be used in research for studying distributed leadership.

Robinson (2008: 251) also suggests that 'if distributed leadership research is to make stronger links with student outcomes, it needs to be informed by a normative theory that is grounded in our knowledge of the conditions that teachers require to improve teaching and learning'. Following

this perspective one can continue that in early childhood education, leadership distribution has to be focused and organized in ways which support pedagogical functions and processes. This is based on the belief that within early childhood settings, knowledge and learning should guide leadership practice and distribution of organizational roles (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003).

## **Key Adaptations of Distributed Leadership in Research**

Although empirical research on distributed leadership is increasing, this knowledge base is relatively young and narrow in scope. Further research is necessary especially about the functioning of distributed leadership and its effectiveness within education (see Harris, 2007; Hartley, 2007; Leithwood and Mascall, 2008; Woods and Gronn, 2009).

Table 1 highlights some of the key distributed leadership research within school leadership and early childhood literature. Similar to Woods et al. (2004) these publications were selected for inclusion here by visual scanning and evaluation of published research. This selection was based on four main principles. First, the publication had a clear focus on distributed leadership in practice. Previously published reviews of distributed leadership have used a broader focus for gathering relevant publications for analysis. For example, Bennett et al. (2003) and Woods et al. (2004), in their literature reviews used a variety of overlapping keywords which were closely associated with distributed leadership including delegated leadership, democratic leadership and dispersed leadership. Leadership studies of non-educational settings such as 'a pygmy community in the Cameroon rainforest' (Bennett et al., 2003: 24) were also included in these reviews. Table 1 however, contains distributed leadership studies based on educational organizations only.

Second, scholars interested in distributed leadership have consistently cited the publications included in Table 1 and were therefore considered as important for inclusion in this analysis. Third, only publications that explained the research methods used and provided information about the analysis of research findings were selected for inclusion in Table 1. In contrast to publications such as the report by Bennett et al. (2003), Table 1 contains only peer-reviewed journal articles reporting on primary research. The only publication that does not fit these selection criteria but has been included in Table 1 is Scrivens (2006). This article was presented at an international research conference and has been included in this analysis because of its uniqueness as the only publicly documented distributed leadership study undertaken in an early childhood setting.

The 14 articles included in Table 1 are categorized under the country where the studies were undertaken and provides a project summary and key findings. The overall analysis of these publications was directed in terms of their relevance for early childhood education.

Overall, the publications included in Table 1 reflect key characteristics of distributed leadership research. First, distributed leadership research is relatively young with most research being published during the current decade as reflected in the examples included in Table 1. Australia and New Zealand, who were pioneers in researching early childhood leadership, have been slow to publish papers based on distributed leadership research. As reflected in Table 1, this research is located mainly in the United Kingdom and the United States, although there is an increasing interest in Canada as well as Australia and New Zealand. Common questions investigated in these studies included the degree, patterns or forms of distributed leadership; the actors or stakeholders of distributed leadership; factors that influenced distribution and the impacts of distributed leadership. Most studies used a mixed methodology consisting of some combination of interviews, observations, document analysis, journals, case studies and questionnaires. Scrivens (2006) was unique in that she used video recordings and digital still images of staff-child interactions in her case

study. Participants included in these studies were variable, consisting of a mix of stakeholders, who may or may not occupy leadership positions, including office staff, district administrators, consultants, parents as well as students.

Findings across the studies included in Table 1 suggest that distributed leadership has positive impacts on teachers, leaders and on education itself. These conditions suggest that to be effective, distributed leadership has to be well managed, goal oriented, planned and developed continuously. In linking distributed leadership with the core purposes of learning and teaching, these studies also suggest that the involvement of all organizational levels and support from different stakeholders is essential. Based on these findings, two types of questions can be identified in designing distributed leadership research in early childhood education. First, questions concerned with stakeholders of distributed leadership such as who is responsible for planning and implementing the distribution of leadership functions, and what processes are used in selecting leaders. Second, questions that focus on leadership outcomes such as what impact did leadership distribution have on the organization and its stakeholders and how is overall leadership performance and effectiveness of distribution assessed. To date within early childhood education organizations, exactly who performs what leadership tasks is unclear. Answers to these questions may significantly influence the organization of early childhood practice and leadership theorizing.

Absence of research focusing on the specialization of organizational tasks and functions could be one reason for the lack of clarity in the discussions on distributed leadership research. For some time now, early childhood researchers have focused on the separation of responsibilities according to administration, management and leadership functions (see Aubrey, 2007; Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Rodd, 2006). These discussions can be helpful in organizing the dimensions of leaders' work in terms of task distribution and responsibility sharing. However, the extent to which the early childhood sector has adopted an evidence-based approach to allocating everyday work in early childhood settings is difficult to evaluate. It would be accurate to state that instead of achieving conceptual clarity, discussions about contemporary practice have raised new questions, particularly in relation to connections between leadership and pedagogy (Andrews, 2009).

Within school leadership literature it is also difficult to ascertain clarity between administration, management and leadership functions through available research evidence. Writing under the banner of shared leadership, Lindahl (2008) for example, supports the need to retain the focus on leadership work instead of administration. By alerting to the need to be cautious against defaults that 'being a manager does not automatically entail being a leader' (Gronn and Hamilton, 2004: 4) or that only managers lead, Gronn (2000: 318) has also suggested that 'a distributed view of tasks and activities implies the existence of a new form of the division of labor at the heart of organizational work'. Likewise, too often within early childhood settings, accidental leaders are appointed to management positions simply by virtue of allocating the top job of being the childcare centre director to the most highly qualified person employed, regardless of their leadership attributes, experience and capacity to lead (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Hayden, 1996; Rodd, 2006).

Systematic collation and evaluation of research on distributed leadership is also stifled by information presented through public access. For example, Spillane and associates have published findings from a longitudinal study of distributed leadership in numerous publications (for example, Spillane, 2005, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001). Spillane's study was aimed at making the 'black box' of leadership practice more transparent through in-depth analysis of everyday practice. In the Distributed Leadership Study website (<http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/dls>, Spillane, n.d.), it is described as 'a collection of projects' aimed at examining 'leadership practice in urban k-12 schools', and more than 40 papers including journal articles, books and dissertations are listed.

Much of this literature however, fell outside the scope of the brief to find primary research on distributed leadership based on the selection criteria described earlier, and two specific studies linked with Spillane and associates were identified for inclusion in Table 1.

As the work of Spillane et al. (2008) has shown, the settings and methods used to collect data are fundamental when designing distributed leadership research. This issue was first raised by the Australian psychologist, C.A. Gibb (1954), who introduced leadership as a distributed phenomenon. According to Gronn (2002a: 423) in leadership research the leader has long been the 'unit of analysis'. However, most distributed leadership research focuses on leadership in teacher-teacher or teacher-middle leader aspects. Woods et al. (2004) criticizes the narrow focus of distributed leadership studies based mainly on teachers. As Table 1 shows however, those such as Leithwood et al. (2007) have investigated the role of administrative leaders who are employed within schools as well as district offices. Inclusion of parents by those such as Gronn and Hamilton (2004) also demonstrate the expanding stakeholder perspectives in distributive leadership research.

## **Challenges of Applying Distributed Leadership within Early Childhood Contexts**

Within early childhood education, leadership research has been dominated by a focus on the study of relationships between leaders and followers (see Aubrey, 2007; Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Hard, 2004; Rodd, 2006). By adopting a micro-lens on leadership phenomenon, early childhood researchers have investigated the actions and/or attributes of leaders themselves (for example, see Hayden, 1996; Hujala and Puroila, 1998; Jorde-Bloom, 1992, 1995; Rodd, 1996, 1997, 2006; Vander Ven, 2000). The investigation of the functions and roles of educational leaders has also been a consistent theme of early childhood dissertations in Australia (for example, Boardman, 1999; Nupponen, 2005; Stamopoulos, 1995, 2001).

Cognizant of the impact of social-cultural contexts on leadership performance, in more recent research conducted in Finland by those such as Hujala and Heikka (2009) as well as Nivala and Hujala (2002), early childhood leadership is studied in more holistic ways. Originating in the United Kingdom, there is now an increasing interest in exploring leadership within integrated child and family services that involve collaborative work between professionals from multidisciplinary heritages including early childhood education, health and welfare (see Aubrey, 2007; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2007; Whalley, 2006). This research also highlights the importance of taking into account stakeholder diversity within the early childhood sector when exploring leadership matters. Negotiating the relevance and priority accorded to the specific professional heritages can be challenging when implementing distributed leadership and requires urgent investigation as early childhood organizations embrace integrated service delivery models as seen in Australia (Colmer, 2008) and in the UK (Aubrey, 2007; Whalley, 2006).

Currently, early childhood theorizing about distributed leadership is evolving. In separating the roles and responsibilities of early childhood leaders against the workplace operational dimensions of administration, management and leadership, it has become necessary to rethink how early childhood leadership is researched and reconceptualized. According to Waniganayake (2000), distributed leadership provides one of the possibilities of achieving organizational cohesion through the integration of these three applied orientations under a single conceptual framework. It is suggested that there can be more than one person/actor involved in leading by learning, based on their knowledge-based expertise. Distributed leadership relies on building relationships through the validation of professional expertise and empowerment of people and diversity, and thereby

creating a culture of learning. In practising distributed leadership, it is essential to understand the meaning of expertise and its relevance in the way that leadership tasks are defined and distributed. Overall, although leadership theory in early childhood education draws on the meaning of collaboration for quality provision, the use of distributed leadership theory and research applications in everyday practice is rare.

As indicated earlier, discussions about distributed leadership began appearing in early childhood literature only recently (Aubrey, 2007; Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Fasoli et al., 2007; Muijs et al., 2004; Rodd, 2006). The aim of this article is to review distributed leadership literature to find ways of using this knowledge within early childhood contexts because of the growing interests of early childhood scholars and practitioners in exploring innovative ways of addressing leadership challenges in this sector.

Identification of the key actors or stakeholders of distributed leadership emerged through the analysis of previous studies as one of the main challenges for future research. Determination of the main actors or stakeholders of leadership is fundamental in establishing distributed leadership. In Finland, the national early childhood curriculum states the importance of co-operation with other services (STAKES, 2003). In Australia, likewise, partnerships are defined as broad ranging and often include parents and support professionals working with children with disabilities (Australian Government, 2009). In the Finnish national curriculum, key actors are considered as conditional, 'depending on the child's needs, early childhood may also include other support services, such as rehabilitation guidance, therapy and/or special education for children. . . and attention is paid to the co-ordination of the services' (STAKES, 2003: 32). This 'conditionality' challenges early childhood educators to organize leadership work by allocating key people to perform leadership functions and co-ordinate this work according to changing demands in everyday practice.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we set out to generate a new research agenda on distributed leadership by linking early childhood and school leadership research. As early childhood scholars, we are keen to assess the benefits of enacting distributed leadership within early childhood education so as to increase the capacity for organizational change and enhance learning for all involved in these settings. The literature reviewed indicated 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. It was also noted that in Finland and in Australia, there are significant policy changes impacting on the curriculum and pedagogy of early childhood education due to the launching of national curriculum frameworks in each country (see STAKES, 2003 and Australian Government, 2009, respectively). These policy reformulations have signalled the need to enhance leadership capacity within early childhood education organizations and explore effective leadership strategies to enable the enactment of complex policy changes.

In conclusion, three key lessons learnt from this analysis are highlighted. First, conceptual clarity must be respected in terms of applying distributed leadership models to early childhood education to ensure that the difficulties encountered by school leadership scholars are minimized or eliminated. This process can be enhanced through collaboration between scholars involved in leadership research within early childhood and school contexts.

Second, it is essential to consider the uniqueness of the organizational contexts of where the research is being carried out. As such we note the diversity of early childhood organizations, in their

structure and governance, incorporating a variety of programs such as preschools/kindergartens, childcare centres, before and after school programs, playgroups and home-based programs. This diversity is also reflected in the personnel employed in these organizations, with a mix of qualifications including education, health and welfare backgrounds. As such, when undertaking research, the unit of analysis may vary, including leaders on vertical as well as horizontal dimensions of the organization and depending on the leadership tasks at hand or the particular focus of the study.

Third, the focus of distributed leadership research is not on a single actor but is influenced through the intersection of diverse stakeholders, situations and structures. The importance of developing closer connections with families and communities highlighted in early childhood organizations reflect the necessity to explore collaborative ways of enacting leadership within contemporary educational settings. Accordingly, the theoretical roots of distributed leadership based on cognitive science, could inform future leadership studies undertaken within both school and early childhood education organizations.

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## COMMENTARY

# Pedagogical leadership from a distributed perspective within the context of early childhood education

JOHANNA HEIKKA and MANJULA WANIGANAYAKE

In practice, pedagogical leadership cannot be considered on its own. If early childhood leaders attempt to practise pedagogical leadership by itself, and as a traditional leader working alone, it will not be effective (Heikka *et al.* 2010). It has to be considered within the full extent of leadership roles and responsibilities expected of today's early childhood leaders. This is not possible without an adequate understanding and theorizing of the foundational concepts of leadership and pedagogy.

Here, we explore the meaning and significance of 'pedagogical leadership' within early childhood education. In the broader literature on educational leadership, a variety of relative concepts such as pedagogical or instructional leadership are used interchangeably, and the differences and connections between these concepts are rarely clarified or observed. In the early childhood literature specifically, the lack of rigorous research on pedagogical leadership in this sector has inhibited the coherent development of the concept in a meaningful way.

Given the increasing interest in understanding distributed ways of practising early childhood leadership (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni 2007, Waniganayake 2010a, 2010b), we are interested in exploring the possibilities of enacting pedagogical leadership within contemporary early childhood settings. According to Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2004: 35), distributed leadership is based on valuing knowledge or expertise as reflected in leadership roles in diverse spheres of activity including curriculum, advocacy, personnel and community development. In this article, we examine how the study of pedagogical leadership within early childhood education could be informed by distributed approaches. Overall,

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this article addresses three key questions: first, what are the main theoretical applications of pedagogical leadership in early childhood education? Second, what are the challenges of conceptualizing ‘pedagogy’ and ‘pedagogical leadership’? Third, can early childhood leaders implement pedagogical leadership in distributed ways? Our discussion will take the form of an examination of possibilities and challenges of leadership matters facing early childhood practitioners in Finland and Australia.

### **Contextualizing pedagogical leadership in early childhood education**

The key scholars of pedagogical leadership in early childhood are Lilian Katz from the US and Iram Siraj-Blatchford from the UK. In their seminal book, *Leadership in Early Care and Education*, editors Kagan and Bowman (1997) present a broad leadership framework consisting of five dimensions: administration, pedagogy, advocacy, community and conceptual leadership. This framework marks a turning point in early childhood leadership discourse as it ‘expands conventional notions of leadership as management or administration, suggesting that leadership in early care and education actually has many functions or parts’ (Kagan and Bowman 1997: xii). The inclusion of pedagogical leadership within this framework is significant as it signals engagement of focused scholarly publications on this topic within this sector of education. In this chapter on pedagogical leadership, Katz (1997: 17) wrote how pedagogy can be formulated as a leadership concept influenced by pedagogical theories and methods as well as ideological views about childhood, learning and goals of learning.

Around about the same time, Siraj-Blatchford (1999: 40, 41) identified three key factors of pedagogy in early childhood that are relevant for learning: instructional techniques, encouraging involvement and fostering engagement. In her observation of early childhood pedagogical approaches, Siraj-Blatchford noted play as the grounding element connecting these approaches. She also stated that social constructivist theories and Vygotsky’s ideas of learning in particular have widely influenced the development of guiding early childhood education practice. In discussing the interconnections between pedagogy and curriculum, Siraj-Blatchford (2008) has also observed that there is a lack of clarity or confusion in unpacking and analysing various early childhood foundational conceptualizations. Whereas, the term curriculum is used to ‘define the content or products of teaching, the word “pedagogy” is used by educationalists to describe the form that teaching takes or the processes that are involved’. (Siraj-Blatchford 2009: 2).

Often, the concept of pedagogy—when used in the early childhood literature, is quite broad and includes interactions between children and parents, and informal learning that takes place outside early childhood organizations (see, for example, Clarke and French 2008). Within early childhood education, the focus on pedagogical practice usually refers to the quality of relationships between children, parents and teachers.

Drawing on the work of Gage (1978), Siraj-Blatchford (2009: 2) refers to the connections among teachers and artists in her definition of pedagogy as ‘the science of the art of teaching’, and teachers as ‘practicing artists’. Similarly, Robins and Callan (2009: 149) referred to pedagogy as ‘the science and principles of teaching children based on the characteristics of children as learners’. Overall however, there has been limited theoretical advancement in writing about pedagogical leadership in early childhood education.

According to Andrews (2009), interest in pedagogical leadership has arisen through the need to develop skills in leading organizational change in early childhood settings. For instance, Karila (2001: 31) noted that in Finland, the concept of pedagogical leadership is used as a general way to refer to responsibilities that are not considered management tasks. Instead of using the unclear concept of pedagogical leadership, Karila (2001: 34) divided the responsibilities of early childhood leaders into five areas: leading care, upbringing and teaching (in Finnish: *‘hoidon, kasvatuksen ja opetuksen kokonaisuuden johtaminen’*); leading service organization; leading work organization; leading expertise and being an expert of early childhood education. As Finnish early childhood leaders are expected to deliver on these five fundamental responsibilities in an integrated manner, deriving an analysis that attempts to segregate or separate out these areas is problematical.

The absence of an agreed upon definition of leadership or pedagogy exacerbates the debate on clarifying the meaning of pedagogical leadership in early childhood education. For example, in Australia, conversations about pedagogical leadership have been raised in relation to the national curriculum document, the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR 2009). Sumsion *et al.* (2009), the key authors of this framework, explained their struggle to find an appropriate way to use the concept of pedagogy in this national policy document. This difficulty was explained in terms of the challenges encountered in reconciling the diverse background characteristics of early childhood practitioners responsible for putting this policy into practice. Among the questions Sumsion *et al.* (2009: 8) examined were:

How should differences in understanding, nature and depth of professional knowledge be approached? Who should take leadership in making curriculum decisions and where does that leave often traditionally marginalised groups like family day carers?

These concerns also reflect the lack of sufficient research-based evidence to guide policy and practice in Australia. Cheeseman (2007: 251), lamenting about the ‘deafening’ silences and ‘the absences of early childhood pedagogical voices’ in key national policy initiatives, called ‘for pedagogical leadership to influence and shape early childhood policy agendas’ (p. 244).

Overall, notions of pedagogical leadership can engender vociferous dialogue by both the informed and the uninformed. This is partly a reflection of the lack of conceptual clarity and consensus about the foundational concepts of pedagogy and leadership. It may also be that in countries such as Australia and Finland, while the vocabulary of pedagogy

is being used extensively within the education academy, pedagogy is a relatively new concept for many early childhood educators. The increasing interest in implementing pedagogical leadership in every day practice demands more clarity and analysis by all concerned.

### **Challenges of conceptualizing ‘pedagogy’ and ‘pedagogical leadership’**

#### *Pedagogy*

Discussions about the concept of pedagogy are often driven by its Grecian origins. However, tracing the conceptual origins of pedagogy through its Hellenistic roots or Greek mythology is problematic. In this history, relationships between children and adults are highly gendered along male lines. That is, pedagogy is perceived as being concerned with men bringing up boys. Scholars have not contested the validity or significance of this approach, and the existence of a caring ethos in Ancient Greece is assumed simply because of the involvement of children and adults. Overall, the Hellenistic origins of pedagogy are difficult to penetrate because this writing has not been well translated across discipline boundaries; nor is it sufficiently sensitive to taking into account the subtleties of cultural and linguistic nuances in writing and analysing complex concepts derived from ancient times and reflecting on these against contemporary contexts.

Theorizing about pedagogical leadership has also been weakened by inadequate translations made by English language writers that have added confusion and/or diluted the meaning and significance of certain literature. For example, the limitations of translations are eloquently illustrated by Hamilton (2009), who referred to the English translations of the original publication of Immanuel Kant’s *Uber Pedagogik* (originally written in German in 1803) and Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (first written in Portuguese in 1968). While the US publishers revised the title of Kant’s book to *Education* in 1899, Freire’s title referring to pedagogy was retained as is in the English translation. There is also a strong focus on Kant’s work in Hamilton’s historical analysis of the use of pedagogy in public education. However, this discussion may be faulty, given that, as Hamilton (2009: 5) himself declared, ‘throughout, both pedagogy and education have been blurred in translation’. This example reflects that the analysis of complex concepts may be limited by a variety of factors, including the epoch and context of writing; selective interpretation driven by commercial publishing decisions; and personal and professional considerations such as disciplinary status, cultural heritage and the political orientations of translators, publishers and researchers.

When adopting particular theoretical frameworks, we believe that it is important to examine the contextual space and time within which ideas emerge and are applied to early childhood practice and policy. For example, Freire’s philosophy was developed in an effort to democratize education in Brazil and pedagogy was perceived as a means for political

liberation and revolution (Elias 1994). In Freire's writings, pedagogy has specific or emancipatory purposes not necessarily directly concerned with child development and education in early childhood. Therefore, when tracing conceptual roots, care must be taken in commenting on the meaning and significance of how concepts are researched, analysed and applied in contemporary work, far away from the original locations of its initiators.

### *Pedagogy and social pedagogy*

Confusion about pedagogical leadership can also be connected with the theoretical roots of various disciplines, including education, sociology and welfare. Today, social pedagogy is highly influential in social work practice having begun with the work of German educationalists in the mid-1900s, and was heavily influenced by the ideas of Plato, Kant and Pestalozzi. According to Hämäläinen (2003: 71), 'social pedagogy started with efforts to confront social distress pedagogically in theory and practice'. This work was further enhanced and took up the concept of 'social help'. The relationship between social pedagogy and pedagogy can also be examined across countries in relation to social policy concerning children and youth. For example, Cameron (2004: 135) described the differences between the UK and Germany in this way: 'While in England pedagogy refers to how subjects are taught within formal education systems, in Germany the definition of pedagogy, and its close relation social pedagogy, has evolved and widened over time'.

Likewise, British scholars interested in child and youth studies such as Petrie *et al.* (2009) advocate the use of social pedagogues in day care and in residential care and foster care for young children. In an era of significant global national curriculum reform in early childhood education, it is difficult to know what impact broadening the role of early childhood practitioners will have on implementing educationally sound early years learning and teaching programmes.

According to Moss (2006: 32), 'pedagogy is a relational and holistic approach to working with people' and within pedagogy, 'learning, care and upbringing' are interwoven and connected. The notion of considering the whole child is often used as a justification for the emphasis on social pedagogy. Kyriacou *et al.* (2009: 75), for instance, emphasized the importance of 'going beyond subject learning' found in traditional school curriculum to ensure that the professional is 'meeting the needs of the "whole child"' within the context of a family and society. Petrie (2005: 293) claimed a need for 'a wider definition of "pedagogy", closer to continental European than English usage', and the notion of 'pedagogues' as practitioners.

The whole-child approach is not new to early childhood education. This approach also cannot be used to justify the emphasis on social pedagogy as the guiding framework in early childhood education. According to Yates (2009: 19), pedagogy 'suggest(s) there is something bigger and more complex to be considered than terms like "teaching and learning"



or “effectiveness”. Current tensions within the early childhood sector are aptly described in the report on early childhood education and care prepared by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2006: 167), which stated: ‘the choice between the educator and the pedagogue for the lead role in early childhood services is a complex one, but it may not be an either/or choice in which one profile is preferred and the other is rejected’.

The extent to which countries either reject or retain one or both of these early childhood practitioner profiles is difficult to predict, but requires a careful examination of current work practises of early childhood educators. The removal of the educational orientation in favour of a social or broader holistic approach has the potential of diluting the status of early childhood teacher practitioners and their appointment as pedagogical leaders.

### *Education and pedagogy*

Highlighting differences between the concepts of ‘instruction’ and ‘pedagogy’, Biesta and Miedema (2002) suggested that no distinction between these two concepts should be made. According to these authors, instruction means transforming skills and knowledge, while pedagogy incorporates moral and value-related perspectives. They added that the pedagogical tasks of education take into account the whole person by not separating pedagogy and instruction. However, in early childhood education, these aspects are interwoven.

National curriculum development in school education in Australia has sparked discussions about the meaning and use of the concepts of pedagogy and education. For example, in assessing the differences between pedagogy and education, Webster (2009: 42) noticed that pedagogy has been connected with the ‘*means* or process of instructing and is totally neglectful of the *end* purposes which are intrinsic to education’ (original emphasis). Webster criticized the confusing use of the terms pedagogy and professional in government policy publications; he suggested these documents manifest inadequate theorizing in clarifying content and meaning. This inhibits critical dialogue, particularly among teachers who are required to demonstrate effectiveness in relation to sound pedagogical practice in school classrooms.

Focusing on the differences between pedagogy and education within the context of schools, it can be seen that teachers are responsible for pedagogical aspects of schoolwork. However, typically, it is those who hold managerial positions at the upper levels of the school system, and do not work as classroom teachers, who have the responsibility for setting targets and visions for school education. This understanding of leadership responsibilities based on a hierarchical system is often connected with ‘the command-and-follow approach to leadership’ (Ebbeck and Waniganayake 2004: 24). Accordingly, when explaining pedagogical functions within schools, separating pedagogy from education reinforces conventional leadership thinking of the roles of leaders as creators of a

vision and of teachers as being the followers, responsible for implementing it.

Sergiovanni (1998: 37) stated that visionary leadership among bureaucratic functions and entrepreneurial leadership views are unsuccessful as strategies to gain change and better results in schools. He presented pedagogical leadership as an alternative that aims to develop the human capital of schools, involving both teachers and students. Webster (2009) contended that teachers should participate in decision-making about the educational goals and purposes of pedagogy.

Vygotsky (1997: 1) stated that 'Pedagogics is the study of the education of the child'. In developing his views on education, Vygotsky (1997: 1) drew on the work of Pavel Petrovich Blonskii in stating that 'education consists of a deliberate, organised and prolonged effort to influence the development of an individual'. Vygotsky (1997: 1) emphasized the intentionality and planned nature of education by saying:

In, pedagogics, as in the study of education, there is a need to establish clearly and precisely how this effort may be organized, what different forms it may take, what techniques it may utilize, and what direction it may assume. A further goal is to understand what the laws are that govern the very development of the individual we intend to influence.

Within early childhood education, pedagogy is influenced by national and local policies and guidelines, as well as the needs, interests and abilities of individual children and their families. Similarly, Mortimore (1999: 8) presented pedagogy as a model that

draws attention to the creation of learning communities in which learning is actively co-constructed, and in which the focus of learning is sometimes learning itself. This model of pedagogy would also be increasingly differentiated by details of context, content, age and stage of the learner, purposes and so on.

These comments suggest that pedagogical advancement must be considered as a purposeful and planned process, much like intentional leadership.

Siraj-Blatchford (1999) felt that understanding learning is central to thinking about pedagogy. When considering the pedagogical goals of education, Bruner (1996: 64) emphasized the adult's role of supporting a child's meta-cognition by referring to the importance of 'equipping her with a good theory of mind—or a theory of mental functioning'. Mortimore (1999: 7) affirmed that 'our understanding of cognition and meta-cognition have influenced the conceptualization of pedagogy'. These matters highlight the importance of cognitive underpinnings of pedagogical leadership and the capacity to do work as thinking practitioners.

Within schools, knowledge of pedagogy can be conceptualized as a triangle based on 'critical friendships' forged among practitioners, researchers and policy-makers by communicating and understanding each others' views (Watkins and Mortimore 1999: 14). In early childhood education, national and local policies, teaching practice and curriculum theory form the three points of the pedagogy triangle. Leadership is necessary to make functional connections between the various points of interaction in the triangle.

In providing early childhood services for children and families, a variety of pedagogical approaches, including educational pedagogy and social pedagogy can be used. Social pedagogue, according to the OECD (2006: 163), 'has a wider remit than the early childhood specialist' inclusive of providing 'social support to families'. The early childhood specialist, on the other hand, may emphasize curriculum content and education practises involving children. These pedagogies can be brought together through distributed models of leadership. System-level coordination and structures are crucial for interacting through organizational borders and assuring the functioning of distributed leadership responsibilities. There are different knowledge and responsibility areas. To be effective, these areas have to be connected and used together. In demonstrating pedagogical leadership within distributed contexts, which pedagogical approach is emphasized within an organization will vary according to situational factors and child and family demands.

### *Pedagogical leadership*

In classical writings about pedagogical leadership, the role of learning in educational communities is emphasized. Teachers are seen as essential decision-makers and designers of pedagogy for individual learners. Pedagogical leadership is also seen as building the capacities of teachers and students. According to Sergiovanni (1998: 38) for instance, pedagogical leadership

invests in capacity building by developing social and academic capital for students and intellectual and professional capital for teachers. Support this leadership by making capital available to enhance student learning and development, teacher learning and classroom effectiveness.

The meaning of pedagogical leadership in early childhood education is highly political (Katz 1997). It raises questions about teachers' professional roles in relation to community authorities. As Dewey (1916: 116) stated, 'the intelligence of the teacher is not free; it is confined to receiving the aims laid down from above'. This hinders the capability of teachers to make connections between children's thoughts and the content to be taught. Dewey (1916: 116) emphasized the aims of students and teachers and the confusion that arises in students because of conflicts between given purposes and an individual's personal purposes. Dewey (1916: 114) considered it to be the teacher's responsibility to adjust education according to individual students: 'An educational aim must be founded upon the intrinsic activities and needs (including original instincts and acquired habits) of the given individual to be educated'.

Sergiovanni (1996) considered pedagogical leadership to be teachers' pedagogical work with children. He wrote about 'leadership as pedagogy' (p. 92) by drawing on van Manen (1991: 38), who connected the original etymology of the term pedagogy with leading. According to Sergiovanni (1996: 93) 'teachers practice a form of pedagogical leadership directly since in schools they stand first and closest in a caring relationship to

children'. He added that leadership as pedagogy includes: 'guiding children academically, socially and spiritually through the world of childhood to adulthood' and that 'Principals practice leadership as a form of pedagogy by facilitating this process, and by ensuring that the interest of children are served well' (Sergiovanni 1996: 93). From the perspective of early childhood leaders, pedagogical leadership means taking responsibility to ensure that practises are appropriate for children. This view sits well within Sergiovanni's perspectives based on school settings.

Currently, early childhood teachers' roles in Finland are changing due to organizational reforms which have taken place in early childhood organizations run by various municipalities. Teachers' engagement in these changes is essential because reorganization of leadership roles and responsibilities require increased autonomy of teachers when responding to children and families. The emphasis on demonstrating leadership in daily work has increased. However, how are teachers' own aims and objectives taken into account within broader organizational reforms? In other words, are teachers actors in pedagogical leadership and decision-making or just implementers of external aims?

According to Emira (2010), despite the growing emphasis on teacher leadership, exactly how teachers are engaged in decision-making in school contexts is rarely observed within these studies. Teacher leadership, typically engages teachers in pedagogical decision-making only within their own classrooms, and ignores teacher capacity to participate in school decision-making involving the wider community. Harris (2009) considered interdependence as a key concept of distributed leadership. This is relevant for the purposes of implementing pedagogical leadership in distributed ways in early childhood organizations. Leaders and teachers have their own responsibility areas in pedagogy, but these areas are not always understood as being connected. Early childhood practitioners, either as centre directors or as teachers, are however, well placed to advocate on behalf of children and families and can take the lead in connecting home and school learning. This is pedagogical leadership in practice.

### **Application of pedagogical leadership in distributed ways**

In Australia, the national curriculum framework defines pedagogy as, 'Early childhood educators' professional practice, especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships, curriculum decision making, teaching and learning' (DEEWR 2009: 9). This definition embraces both curriculum practice as well as building collaborations with parents and the wider community. Curriculum-based decisions made by teachers can reflect their pedagogical leadership capabilities. Leadership research has consistently shown that early childhood practitioners are by and large reluctant leaders (Ebbeck and Waniganayake 2004, Rodd 2006, Halttunen 2009). However, in Lunn and Bishop's (2002) research, some teachers' success in practice gave them the power to influence the practises of other teachers and this was reflected in their informal appointment as pedagogical leaders within early childhood settings. In this way, the creation

of a 'participatory culture of peer learning' (Oberhuemer 2005: 13) based on knowledge and understanding mirrors distributive practice (Ebbeck and Waniganayake 2004), and in turn, has the potential to promote the pedagogical leadership of teachers responsible for children's learning.

In the early childhood literature analysed for this article, we found that pedagogical leadership is used in diverse contexts. In Finland for instance, it is traditionally associated with a person who has been selected to lead as the director of a child care centre. Furthermore, even though the concept is not new, Finnish leadership research by Nivala (2001) as well as Hujala and Heikka (2008) shows that there is confusion among leaders about the meaning of pedagogical leadership and its connections with quality practice. Hujala and Heikka (2008) described pedagogical leadership as the core responsibility of early childhood teachers. Nivala (1999) and Fonsen (2008) included in their definitions of pedagogical leadership the responsibilities that are traditionally seen as the management and administration aspects of leading if the aim of these tasks is to enhance pedagogical practice. According to Andrews (2009), pedagogical leadership is concerned with leading and informing pedagogical practice. Pedagogical leadership is also used as a style of leadership when leading an organization (Their 1994). Nivala (2001) stated that pedagogical leadership could be seen as a role of administrative officials involved in early childhood work in municipalities.

The connections between pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership are also necessary to consider because current research draws attention to the collaborative or co-operative functions of enacting pedagogical leadership. Although connections between pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership have not yet been explored fully in early childhood contexts, there is research to support connections between shared thinking of teachers' roles and responsibilities and success in pedagogical leadership. For example, in their study, Lunn and Bishop (2002) found that shared understandings among teachers about pedagogical ideas contributed significantly to realizing the functioning of pedagogical leadership. Similarly, Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007: 12), in their study of 'effective leadership practice', discussed how 'leadership for learning' is connected with effective communication, collaboration and the development of children's learning in early childhood settings.

Analysing the style and characteristics of contemporary early childhood leadership could facilitate the identification and clarification of the conceptual connections between pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership. Blackmore and Sachs (2007), for instance, identified five epistemologically and theoretically differing forms of leadership in higher education institutions. Each form has its own aims and characters reflecting interpretive, culturalist, cognitive, poststructural and feminist approaches. Traditional traits-based approaches to leadership describe leaders as heroic individuals, whereas new cognitive approaches see leadership in organizational learning, embracing a collective or distributed perspective.

New cognitive models of leadership are suitable for the purposes of discussing cognition in distribution and learning, and where organizational changes are emphasized. For example, according to Bell and Winn (2000:

140), 'distributed cognition requires the sharing of cognitive activity among the components of the system'. Leadership that is informed by cognition reflects the distributed practice of leadership involving numerous parts of the organization: 'system components might include other people as well as physical or digital artefacts' (Bell and Winn 2000: 140). In this way, highlighting the communication of aims and the sharing of responsibilities can demonstrate distributed cognition.

Early childhood policy documents can also be mute on leadership matters in the design, implementation and evaluation aspects. In Australia and Finland, national curriculum documents for instance, do not provide sufficient clarity or guidance on pedagogical notions. Both frameworks fail to suggest ways of implementing pedagogical leadership in teaching and learning. Although the word pedagogy is strongly embedded in each policy framework, there is no mention of leadership or pedagogical leadership in either document. Such examples reflect the urgent need to stimulate active engagement in critical discussion and analysis of pedagogical leadership in early childhood education. This includes negotiating the separation of educational and social pedagogical functions.

Implementing a distributed leadership approach in early childhood education could address contemporary challenges of early childhood workplaces seeking to provide excellent programmes that maximize children's learning potential. According to Hujala and Heikka (2007), pedagogical leadership is a priority responsibility of early childhood centre directors. However, often because of too many competing demands and expectations, time to consider and allocate resources in leading educational pedagogy are minimized. New ways of thinking about early childhood practice questions the roles, responsibilities and tasks of pedagogical leadership, and how these could be distributed between early childhood leaders and other practitioners.

Neumann *et al.* (2007: 234) present a model 'that can assist teachers and teacher educators to re-envision traditional boundaries of professional identity'. Teaching leadership skills to teachers is essential for teachers' professional development and to gain an understanding of the functioning of the whole organization. Wright (2008: 22) found that distributed leadership is sometimes used 'as a guise for the delegation of administrative responsibilities'. To be effective, distribution of pedagogical leadership has to be assessed against different aspects of leadership, including the separation of management and leadership functions.

In adopting a distributed perspective, one must also consider leading pedagogy in relation to the functions of diverse professionals involved in an early childhood setting—not only teachers, but also health and welfare professionals who work with the same children and families in a given setting. In these situations, case management conversations are critical in achieving the effective coordination necessary to deliver quality services for both children and their families. According to Jones and Pound (2008: 52), leaders are responsible for building distributed leadership by allocating leadership roles. This approach acknowledges that early childhood teachers have a sound knowledge base or expertise in child development, curriculum, early learning and educational pedagogy.



In summary, pedagogical leadership is connected with not only children's learning, but also the capacity building of the early childhood profession, and values and beliefs about education held by the wider society or community. In early childhood settings, pedagogical leadership means taking responsibility for the shared understanding of the aims and methods of learning and teaching of young children from birth to 8 years. In these discussions, teachers have a significant role and responsibility to ensure that the educational pedagogy employed matches children's interests, abilities and needs. The question of how to practise pedagogical leadership in a way that acknowledges early childhood education incorporating child and family voices however requires in-depth investigation. Leaders are responsible for creating a community that fosters learning and communication and where responsibilities are distributed among teachers, children, families and the community. We believe that the time has come for early childhood teachers to demonstrate their capacity to step up to the role of leading pedagogical conversations, within classrooms and beyond.

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## Early childhood leadership through the lens of distributed leadership

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aims to investigate distribution of responsibilities for leadership in early childhood education (ECE) context. It focuses on the enactments of leadership by investigating how ECE stakeholders, e.g. teachers, ECE centre directors and administrative ECE leaders in municipalities perceive the leadership responsibilities. Using focus groups, the data was collected in seven municipalities in Finland. The study was based on contextual and distributed view of leadership. Quality improvement and pedagogical leadership was seen as primary responsibilities in ECE leadership by all studied groups. The study indicated different practices of distribution of responsibilities for leadership. However, it indicated that developed forms of leadership distribution were rarely used. In developing ECE leadership, focusing on interdependencies of leadership enactments between teachers, centre directors and municipal ECE leaders and building structures for interaction between stakeholders, increase the quality of distributed leadership.

**RÉSUMÉ:** L'étude présentée porte sur la répartition des responsabilités au niveau de la direction dans le contexte de l'éducation de la petite enfance. Centrée sur la représentation de la direction, elle cherche à préciser la manière dont les parties prenantes de l'éducation de la petite enfance, par exemple, les enseignants, les responsables des institutions préscolaires et les responsables administratifs municipaux perçoivent ces responsabilités. Les données collectées à l'aide d'entretiens collectifs proviennent de sept municipalités finlandaises. L'étude repose sur une vision contextuelle et distribuée de la direction. L'amélioration de la qualité et la direction pédagogique ont été considérées par tous les groupes comme des premières responsabilités. Cette étude indique différentes pratiques de répartition des responsabilités dans la direction. Toutefois, elle montre que les formes avancées de répartition sont rarement utilisées. Développer la direction dans l'éducation de la petite enfance, se centrer sur les interdépendances des représentations de la direction chez les enseignants, les responsables des institutions préscolaires et les responsables municipaux de l'éducation de la petite enfance et penser des dispositifs pour l'interaction entre les parties prenantes améliore la qualité d'une direction distribuée.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG:** Im Rahmen dieser Forschungsarbeit wird die Verteilung von Führungsverantwortung im Kontext der frühkindlichen Erziehung untersucht. Dabei steht im besonderen Interesse, wie die an der frühkindlichen Erziehung beteiligten Akteure, u.a. pädagogische Fachkräfte, Kita-Leitungen und kommunale Trägerverantwortliche, Führungsverantwortung wahrnehmen. Die Daten wurden durch Focus-Gruppendiskussionen in sieben Kommunen in

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Finnland erhoben. Die Untersuchung basiert auf einem Verständnis von kontextualisierter und geteilter Führung. In allen Gruppen wurde Führungsverantwortung im Kontext frühkindlicher Erziehung in erster Linie als Instrument der Qualitätsverbesserung und der pädagogischen Führung gesehen. Im Rahmen der Untersuchung wurden verschiedene Praktiken geteilter Führungsverantwortung nachgewiesen. Entwickeltere Formen geteilter Führung waren jedoch selten anzutreffen. Eine Entwicklung von Führungskompetenzen, die wechselseitige Abhängigkeiten (interdependence) zwischen pädagogischen Fachkräften, Leitungen und kommunalen Verantwortungsträgern berücksichtigt, sowie eine strukturelle Weiterentwicklung der Kommunikation zwischen diesen Personalgruppen würde die Qualität der geteilten Führung verbessern.

**RESUMEN:** En el presente estudio se investiga el reparto de responsabilidades directivas en el ámbito de la educación infantil pre-escolar. Se trata de establecer cómo la gestión de dirección es concebida y realizada en cuanto a las diferentes responsabilidades por todos los implicados en la educación infantil pre-escolar de los municipios, tales como maestros de pre-escolar, directores de centros pre-escolares y de guarderías. El corpus fue recabado en siete municipios a través de debates en grupos de tipo Focus group. El estudio se basa en un planteamiento contextual y de reparto de responsabilidades en la dirección. Todos los grupos analizados consideraron como responsabilidad principal en la dirección de la educación infantil pre-escolar la mejora de la calidad y la dirección pedagógica. El estudio constató que existen prácticas diferentes en el reparto de responsabilidades. Sin embargo, son escasas las prácticas en el reparto implementado de responsabilidades directivas. El fomento de la interdependencia de responsabilidades entre maestros de pre-escolar, directores de los centros (guarderías) y gestores municipales de educación infantil pre-escolar, así como la creación y desarrollo de estructuras que impulsen la interrelación entre los profesionales implicados incrementarían la calidad de la responsabilidad compartida.

**Keywords:** early childhood education; leadership; distributed leadership; leadership responsibilities; focus group

## **Introduction**

This article is based on a study conducted in Finland, involving seven municipalities providing early childhood services. In Finland, municipalities have an obligation to plan and implement community services, including Early Childhood Education (ECE) services. ECE staff are municipal employees. The purpose of this study was to explore the distribution of early childhood leadership responsibilities within the context of municipalities. This research focused on studying how people involved in leading early childhood policy and programmes within local communities allocated leadership responsibilities. This article presents findings on distributed leadership based on the perspectives of municipal ECE leaders, ECE centre directors and ECE teachers.

The theoretical underpinnings of this research were connected with the contextual theory of early childhood leadership (Nivala 1999) and informed by distributed leadership approaches of scholars such as Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004) and Harris (2009). Data was collected by focus group method and analysed by qualitative content analysis. Looking through the lens of distributed leadership in analysing the data brings a new perspective in studying early childhood leadership. Understanding the interdependences between stakeholders, the study provides information which can enhance organisational efficiency within ECE contexts in municipalities in

Finland. It allows for the restructuration of ECE leadership work by bringing coherency and enhancing the capacity for change and quality improvement.

### **Distributed leadership in ECE context**

In clarifying the responsibilities of early childhood leaders, previous leadership studies have investigated leadership mainly as a micro phenomenon and these researchers have investigated the functions and characteristics of the leaders themselves (Hayden 1996; Jorde-Bloom 1992, 1995; Morgan 2000; Rodd 1996, 1997, 2006; VanderVen 2000).

The analysis of leadership responsibilities is usually combined with roles and positions of leaders. Rodd (2006, 54), for example, defined roles and responsibilities under the 'key skills for effective leaders.' Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003, 32) refer to roles and responsibilities as 'expected behaviours of a particular job or position.' When leadership responsibilities are analysed separately from the leaders' roles, leadership responsibilities are usually approached through concepts of leadership, management and administration. Although these concepts are sometimes understood as conflicting, most scholars (Andrews 2009; Murray 2009) consider them different aspects of a leader's work. Andrews (2009) states that in early childhood leadership these aspects are connected, as management of changes requires pedagogical leadership to be effective. According to Waniganayake (2000), distributed leadership provides a possibility to achieve organisational cohesion by integrating the operational dimensions of administration, management and leadership under a single conceptual framework. This study focuses on studying leadership responsibilities as enacted within the lived contexts of ECE in Finnish municipalities.

There is an increasing awareness of the importance of taking into account the meaning and connection between societal contexts and leadership as reflected in early childhood leadership research being conducted by Finnish researchers such as Hujala (2002, 2004); Nivala (1999); Karila (2004); and Puroila (2004). Discussions about distributed leadership began appearing in early childhood literature only recently (Aubrey 2007; Ebbeck and Waniganayake 2003; Fasoli, Scrivens, and Woodrow 2007; Halttunen 2009; Hujala, Heikka, and Fonsén 2009; Muijs et al. 2004; Rodd 2006; Scrivens 2006). Perspectives on studying leadership beyond a single leader was introduced decades ago by Gibb (1954), who was the first one to address leadership as a distributed phenomenon.

In this study, distributed leadership is based on the work of school leadership scholars, Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004); Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001); Harris (2009); as well as Harris and Spillane (2008). The core element of distributed leadership is firstly multiple persons involved in leadership; secondly, it focuses on leadership enactment rather than leadership roles; thirdly, interdependence of the leadership enactments by multiple persons, fourthly the importance of proceeding development of distributed leadership and finally, the significance of leadership is connected to educational work.

The theoretical underpinnings of the study emphasise leadership practice which involves multiple persons with formal or informal leadership positions (Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond 2004); Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001). In their literature review on distributed leadership Heikka, Waniganayake, and Hujala (2013) suggest that the successful achievement of distributed leadership is determined by the interactive influences of multiple members in an organisation. Basing on leadership thinking explained within distributed cognition (see Hutchins 1995a, 1995b), Spillane,

Halverson, and Diamond (2004, 11) state that leadership is best understood as a practice ‘distributed over leaders, followers, and the school’s situation or contexts.’ Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (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 who hold either formal leadership positions and/or informal leadership responsibilities. Furthermore, Spillane, Camburn, and Pareja (2007, 3) found that persons taking on leadership responsibilities changes according to situational factors. Responsibilities will be distributed by interactional influences depending on the task at hand and according to an individual’s expertise (Heikka, Waniganayake and Hujala 2013).

*Interdependence* between people and their enactments of leadership is a core element of implementing distributed leadership. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (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. Hutchins (1995a, 20) also emphasises the meaning of ‘*interaction* of the people with each other and with physical structure in the environment.’ Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004), focus on interdependencies 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 persons.

MacBeath (2005) describes distributed leadership as a developing process that requires the efforts of leaders to make it work. He expands this discussion by looking at the roles of those in formal leadership positions involved in developing distributed leadership through different developmental phases. At the early stages of development, the significance of planning and active monitoring of leadership is emphasised. The relevance of distributed leadership is gained through change implementation and the development of educational work. Distributed leadership is created by enhancing one’s capacity to cope with changes (Woods and Gronn 2009). According to Camburn and Han (2009), investigating the connections between distributed leadership and leadership responsibilities could benefit development and change of instruction.

When applying distributed leadership perspectives to early childhood education, it is essential to remember the unique characteristics of this sector. The organisational contexts including the structure and governance requirements, incorporate a variety of programmes and the personnel. As such, the unit of analysis may vary, including leaders on vertical as well as horizontal dimensions of the organisation, and the leadership tasks at hand or the particular focus of the study (Heikka, Waniganayake, and Hujala 2013). The purpose of ECE is twofold. Firstly, entitlement for services as a part of government policy on supporting parents to participate in paid work. Secondly, ECE programmes underpin children’s rights under the Finnish Child Care Act (Laki lasten päivähoidosta 19.1.1973/36), by supporting children’s overall development. From the point of view of a child customer, high quality pedagogy is emphasised when studying responsibilities of ECE leadership.

Based on Bronfenner’s ecological theory, Nivala (1999, 2001) has developed a contextual leadership theory, which provides a framework for examining leadership within contexts unique to ECE. Contextual leadership theory is based on the core purposes of ECE and addresses interactive influences of micro- and macro-systems (Hujala 2004; Nivala 2001). Distributed cognition supplements contextual perspectives by enabling

a deeper level of investigation of the interdependencies between stakeholders with responsibilities for implementing ECE within Finnish municipalities.

### Research task

The aim of this research was to study leadership in ECE. In particular, this study investigated how leadership was enacted in ECE settings in Finland by exploring the perceptions of leaders, centre directors and teachers. The principle research question that was addressed in this study was: *How do the administrative ECE leaders in municipalities, directors and teachers in ECE centres perceive leadership responsibilities?*

In Finland, ECE leadership is interwoven and distributed in municipal structures involving a variety of stakeholders. Traditional approaches focusing on the leader's role are insufficient for studying leadership in municipal multilevel organisations. These contextual factors influenced the selection of a distributed perspective in this research. In this study leadership is understood as a contextual phenomenon influenced by micro and macro interactions in local communities and as a part of the wider society.

In this study, public ECE services formulate the context of leadership. Therefore, the responsibilities for leadership were investigated in relation to the core purposes of ECE services in Finland. These responsibilities were connected with educational work with children and thus exist in the actions of a wider set of stakeholders. The perceptions investigated represented a collectively formulated picture of lived working situations and leadership enactment in local municipal communities.

### Research methods

The data was collected through focus groups methods, commonly used by educational researchers (Hydén and Bülow 2003). That is, these focus groups consisted of a small group of participants meeting to discuss a specific topic under the guidance of a moderator, who was an outsider to the research discussion (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2005; Wibeck, Dahlgren, and Öberg 2007). The participants expressed opinions, forming points of view, and discussing their perceptions about the phenomenon and its various dimensions (Wibeck, Dahlgren, and Öberg 2007).

In this study, focus groups were chosen as a research method because of the possibilities of combing the knowledge of distributing leadership responsibilities from various stakeholders' perspectives. The task of the study and the research context set certain limits and requirements for data collection methods, especially as stakeholders were dispersed throughout the municipalities. The aim was to gain a locally constructed picture of how leadership is enacted within Finnish municipalities. Group discussion generated local views on day to day leadership practise, with an identification of priorities of each stakeholder group. By analysing the different perspectives of stakeholders, it was possible to investigate interdependencies between stakeholders in the way leadership was enacted in Finnish ECE contexts.

The three key stakeholder groups responsible for early childhood services were employed as either ECE leaders, centre directors or teachers. These stakeholders influence policy and practice of early childhood leadership within local communities. ECE leaders are mainly responsible for arranging ECE programmes within the municipality ensuring that childcare centres meet the requirements of the national ECE laws and local policies. ECE centre directors are responsible for ECE services within specific municipality area which usually include ECE centres, family day care units and part



time ECE services for families taking care of their children at home. One director is often responsible for multiple centres and ECE programmes. Teachers work with children in different age groups.

The data reported on this article was collected as a part of a larger research study. In this research data was collected in 14 municipalities in different parts of Finland. Research partners from municipalities selected the participants in the focus group discussions and coordinated their participation. The goal was to assemble a maximum of 10 people in each stakeholder category of leaders, directors and teachers. Two main themes were formulated for the discussion: Core purpose of ECE and leadership of ECE. This type of focus group discussions were conducted in all 14 municipalities, but for this article, data from seven of these municipalities were analysed. The number of municipalities included in the study was shown to be enough for providing answers to the research questions. Overall a total of 21 focus groups were conducted across the seven municipalities. Together, there were 46 ECE leaders, 61 centre directors and 57 teachers in these focus groups, making a total of 164 participants.

The data analysis method was qualitative content analysis (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009). In qualitative content analysis, theoretical concepts and conclusions are generated through the process of interpretation and inference of participants' original expressions (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009, 111). Each focus group was analysed separately in order to form categories which described responsibilities for leadership discussed within each stakeholder category. Qualitative content analysis began with identifying sub-categories for leadership responsibilities of each focus group. Categories were identified by reading the transcribed data and selecting for expressions which manifest leadership responsibilities. In the second phase of analysis the main categories of each stakeholder group were formulated by combining sub-categories of the focus groups. Final conceptualisations were generated through parallel investigation and comparison of the main categories of stakeholder groups. The responsibilities for leadership as expressed by the stakeholders were compared with each other in order to find out similarities and differences between them. The comparison process led to the identification of conclusions about ECE leadership enactment in Finnish municipalities.

By examining the perceptions of leadership between these stakeholders, the study discusses the enactment of early childhood leadership from a contextual and distributed perspective. This analysis reflects the interdependencies and distribution of responsibilities for leadership between ECE stakeholders in Finnish municipalities.

### **Key findings**

Focus group discussions reflected participants' perceptions about the experiences and expectations of leadership. Discussions of leadership responsibilities were concerned with quality improvement, pedagogical leadership, daily management, human resources management, external relations and advocating for ECE within the municipality. Leadership responsibilities could be divided into primary and secondary responsibilities. Primary responsibilities were considered to be the most essential and the secondary ones enabled the enactment of these responsibilities. Two primary responsibilities for quality improvement and pedagogical leadership were emphasised quite similarly by all stakeholder groups. Primary responsibilities usually reflected the values and expectations of stakeholders. Responsibilities were layered and discussions

included controversies and inconsistencies. However, primary responsibilities did not necessarily realise as priorities in leaders' work.

### **Quality and pedagogy as primary leadership responsibilities**

Responsibilities for quality improvement and pedagogical leadership were the two most emphasised topics during the focus group discussions. These leadership responsibilities were connected with each other when the discussion tended to focus on pedagogical aspects of ECE. Additionally, responsibilities of quality were discussed in relation to management and administration.

ECE leaders and centre directors considered themselves responsible for the provision of a variety of early education programmes. There was a shared commitment among stakeholders to take responsibility for achieving quality programmes. ECE leaders found that in terms of quality, their responsibility was to define goals and directions for ECE, create structures for co-operation, ensure security within centres, and together with municipal committees, provide sufficient resources for ECE. ECE leaders were expected to ensure accessibility and to support the implementation of pedagogical leadership.

Beyond the main responsibilities, there was more variety in how secondary leadership responsibilities such as daily management, human resources management, external relations and advocating for ECE within the municipality, were emphasised between stakeholder groups. ECE leaders emphasised strongly the development of external relationships outside ECE sector. The teachers and centre directors expressed that a big part of the centre directors' time went into an increasing amount of daily management work. Centre directors were busy taking care of access and placement of children in ECE programmes, finding substitute teachers, managing financial resources, centre buildings and security and, at the same time, dealing with the challenges related to pedagogical leadership responsibilities at their centres. These examples illustrate clearly the connection between primary and secondary leadership responsibilities performed by centre directors.

### **The enactment of responsibilities for leadership**

The study identified different practices of leadership distribution. The developed forms of leadership distribution manifested usually within centres between centre director and leading teacher as well as among ECE leaders within municipalities. However, disconnected enactment of leadership responsibilities was most common way of practising ECE leadership between stakeholders within municipalities. Overall, all stakeholders expected more interaction between stakeholders working in different roles as leaders, directors and teachers etc. ECE leaders highlighted the importance of co-operation in constructing the vision and sharing professional knowledge with ECE staff. They also considered the importance of engaging staff in planning and providing them with opportunities to influence their work. ECE leaders viewed the centre directors as responsible for the realisation of quality standards within centres.

Disconnected enactment of leadership responsibilities manifested mainly between stakeholders in development of ECE. Centre directors and teachers felt that they were ignored in decision-making concerning developmental changes and improvements within the municipalities. Centre directors wanted better distribution of leadership with ECE leaders, especially concerning municipal level decision-making,



development, changes and long distance planning. They also wanted more interaction with Municipal committees. Centre directors and teachers highlighted the importance of interaction between stakeholders in securing continuity of development of quality provision. They wanted to participate in shared discussion about values and ECE issues prior to making decisions in municipal committees. They also continuously drew attention to the tools for knowledge sharing necessary between different stakeholder groups. Much criticism arose among centre directors and teachers due to the increasing amount of organisational changes and because development was experienced as too fragmented and disconnected from the realities of every day practice and evaluation of ECE.

The study identified some forms of leadership distribution between centre directors and teachers, however these forms seemed to be yet undeveloped. Centre directors highlighted the importance of sharing and developing partnerships with teachers. They emphasised their own role in creating leadership where knowledge was shared. Teachers expected centre directors to be responsible for curriculum implementation, development and co-operation with families and expected centre directors to dedicate more time to teacher support. On the other hand, teachers expressed their interest in sharing leadership responsibilities. They expressed their interest in taking responsibility for acquainting new teachers with the pedagogical approaches of the centre. They conceived that leaders' trust, valuation and their own space to be essential. However, teachers and centre directors reported difficulties in leadership distribution. According to centre directors, shared information processing, planning and discussion needed more time than was currently available. In some cases, centre directors did not trust the teachers' leadership abilities because of their lack of appropriate qualifications. Teachers discussed performing leadership tasks 'delegated' by a leader, but pointed out that the final responsibility still remains with the centre director.

Developed forms of leadership distribution were rare within the municipalities included in this article. Distributed leadership was developed when leadership was distributed in centres between the centre director and the leading teacher when they discussed the broader frameworks and strategies for curriculum implementation together. The responsibility for the implementation of the curriculum processes within a centre was distributed to leading teachers. However, centre directors thought that leadership responsibilities should be redefined and the director and the leading teacher should clarify the distribution of responsibilities together. In addition, some municipalities had established centre director teams to organise different forms of services and to guide families across districts. Leader teams functioned as a forum for interaction between the directors to reflect on how to create learning communities for teachers, have discussions about values and make guidelines together. In some municipalities, however, the teams were poorly organised or the focus of the discussion in the leaders' meetings was on other areas of managing services. Centre directors however, were hoping to reassert the focus on responsibilities related to education.

It was viewed that interaction among ECE leaders in these municipalities was efficient. They viewed that a director or a leader was not a single person, but a team of leaders in the sector. All stakeholders repeatedly mentioned the importance of interaction between ECE leaders and people in primary schools and welfare sector services in creating education and welfare services within municipalities. Interaction with schools, in particular, was considered essential for negotiating common goals and visions and for creating structures that ensure educational continuity for children.

## Discussion

The focus of this study was to explore how leadership was enacted in every day work within ECE settings. The emphasis was on understanding how leadership practice was distributed rather than on how leadership roles were performed: ‘it is the nature and quality of leadership practice that matters’ (Harris and Spillane 2008, 33). The findings show that participants perceived the *interdependence* between people and their enactments of leadership as a core element of implementing distributed leadership. The anticipation of interdependence between stakeholders was manifested by emphasising the meaning of participation of all stakeholders in decision-making about development proceedings, shared understanding of the core purpose of ECE and awareness of the importance of sharing responsibilities for quality improvement.

### *Developed forms of distributed leadership were rare*

The findings indicated that interdependent forms of leadership enactment were rare. The form of leadership distribution is relevant as only some forms of distribution contribute to organisational improvement (Leithwood et al. 2007). Efficient patterns of leadership distribution include interdependence between stakeholders as opposite to the forms where multiple persons are working as leaders without relevant interaction between them. As such, Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001, 25) refer to leaders who work towards a shared goal through ‘separate, but interdependent work.’ According to Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004), interdependence emerges when enactment of leadership tasks involves interplay between multiple persons.

In the discussions, leadership enactment was pictured in hierarchical ways. Although there was a lot of co-operation between stakeholders, the responsibilities were not shared and there was not enough interaction between stakeholders to achieve quality improvement in efficient ways. In addition, the majority of leadership responsibilities were loaded onto the centre director’s position and centre directors were considered responsible for quality improvement within centres. However, the participants explained that centre directors and teachers did not have any opportunities to participate in decisions about quality standards and proceedings within municipalities. There is a disconnection between the views of the people working directly with the children and the decisions made about ECE at the municipal level. In addition, decisions, made by the ECE leaders, often seem to have been done without appropriate evaluation tools. Likewise, in Halttunen’s (2009) study, it was found that centre directors were not necessarily aware of how quality standards were achieved in centres. Similarly, in Harris’s (2009) view of distributed leadership it is not just about the sharing of tasks in an organisation, but is also used to explain deeper levels of interaction between members working through shared goals. In early childhood organisations, greater level of interdependence between stakeholders could function as a basis of efficient decision-making.

According to Gronn (2002, 446–447), in ‘spontaneous collaboration,’ persons with varying expertise or from different organisational levels, combine their expertise to complete a specific task. In ‘intuitive working relations,’ persons share their roles in trustful relationships while, in ‘institutionalised practices,’ structures that enable distributed leadership are well-established. In ECE, institutionalised structures for co-operation seemed to be common for ECE leaders’ level, and in some municipalities at the centre directors’ level, but such systems rarely exist between different

stakeholders whereas, intuitive working relations were reported between centre directors and between teachers. However, inefficient forms of leadership could be understood in this study as being hierarchically disconnected relationships which were reported to exist between all stakeholders.

### ***Development of interdependence***

Gronn (2002, 671) emphasises the importance of coordinating leadership processes. For development of interdependence of leadership enactments, it is reliant on building appropriate structures which can enable coordination of interactions between stakeholders aimed at increasing the capacity for change and quality improvement.

According to Leithwood et al. (2007, 47) effective forms of distributed leadership 'reflect unconstrained forms of distribution, especially in the performance of complex leadership tasks.' It means that distributed leadership aims to develop the expertise of those involved and emphasises the potentials to build the 'organisation's collective cognitions on the achievement of complex tasks and organisational goals' (46). In this study, this 'collective cognition' between stakeholders about the developmental challenges seems to be missing. This was because the quality improvements had not been addressed as a system-wide issue within each municipality. It seems that the connection between stakeholders was based on mutual lack of awareness of what the developmental challenges in quality improvement were. Contextual changes identified in this study included the requirements to develop pedagogical work by implementing the national ECE curriculum (STAKES 2003), which increased the participants' emphasis on the implementation of distribution of leadership. Several studies conducted in Finnish early childhood organisations (Halttunen 2009; Hujala 2004; Hujala and Puroila 1998; Nivala and Hujala 2002) have shown that the context of leadership defines leadership discourse and influences the priorities of leading services as well as defining the social and cultural practices of leadership.

In addition, given that centre directors were unable to focus on quality issues because of the increasing amount of managerial duties and difficulties in sharing these responsibilities with teachers, it seems that the responsibilities for quality improvement need to be addressed more carefully within municipalities. Diverse administrative and professional responsibilities of various stakeholders seem to result in a lack of shared understanding of how to improve quality. This means, there is a need to develop tools that can identify the weaknesses and ascertain two way exertion of influence between stakeholders to gain a shared knowledge base of the challenges and strategies to enhance quality of ECE programmes.

Harris (2009, 7) sees that leadership which is built up with interactional influences between stakeholders could work as an 'organisational resource' for improvement. This study has clearly indicated that teachers and centre directors were reacting at decisions given from above than being agents of development. Furthermore, the teachers' and centre directors' control over the micro level decisions within centres was insufficient in achieving sustainable quality improvement. These findings suggest that decision-making about quality improvement requires mutual interaction between micro- and macro-level perspectives within municipalities.

The main concerns about leadership as identified by participants in this study were the responsibility for initiating and developing distributed leadership within the municipalities. According to MacBeath (2005), distributed leadership is a gradually developing process and needs input from leaders to develop. Centre directors were

expected to be responsible for constructing co-operation between themselves, teachers and municipal ECE leaders. However, at the same time, ECE leaders were considered to be responsible for constructing resources and structure for leadership within the municipality. These mutual expectations resulted in no one actually building interactional relationships between stakeholders as one was waiting for the other to make the effort to lead.

### Conclusion

In Finnish municipalities, the ideas about distributed leadership are evolving, and there is limited understanding of this concept in practise. Development of distributed leadership should be focused on building practices which enable the interdependent enactment of leadership responsibilities between stakeholders within a municipality system. This study of ECE leadership has shown that the pedagogical work of leaders, directors and teachers is critical in quality service delivery. However, better enactment of distributing leadership responsibilities could contribute to sustained quality improvement and enhance the capacity to deal with changing and competing leadership responsibilities. The development of interdependence requires, firstly, quality assurance systems and tools to share information and decision-making between stakeholders and secondly, reforms of leadership practices from hierarchical forms of leading to building interaction between stakeholders and enhancing teachers' participation in leadership and decision-making. Finally, questions about distributing leadership responsibilities require discussion between stakeholders. This final challenge is connected with the administration of coordinated leadership processes.

Leaders have to establish structures for active interaction and negotiation of responsibilities between the various stakeholders and to promote learning to develop leadership skills of teachers. The challenge of the leaders is to nourish competency for learning in centres, which brings capacity for sharing leadership responsibilities and sustained quality improvements within centres. The efficiency of leadership is based on coordinated structures and tools for information sharing processes which are flexible, depending on the tasks at hand. Knowledge can grow based on these processes supporting capacities to change.

This study clearly shows that there is a need for a better way of implementing leadership by sharing and extending the boundaries of leadership. Multiple perceptions could be heard in the leadership discussions within the seven municipalities included in this study. Along with the traditional leadership role perceptions, the leadership discussions reflected expectations of shared leadership practices to foster change and development. Awareness of the need to develop distributed leadership reflects the need to focus on practices inhibiting leadership change. Such a change may mean that we must stop thinking about leadership as one person's work. This may mean the reduction of managerial work and more time and resources being allocated to valuing pedagogical leadership by supporting both directors and teachers within ECE centers.

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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 kehittämissihtotuksia, joiden avulla eri tasojen välistä johtamistoimintaa voidaan kytkä 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
<b>Municipal ECE leaders in pedagogical leadership</b>	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.	<b>Provision of prerequisites for ECE</b>
<b>Centre directors in pedagogical leadership</b>	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.	<b>Pedagogical improvement within centres</b>
<b>Teachers in pedagogical leadership</b>	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.	<b>Developing as professionals</b>

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, disjointed 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; Mascal, 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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## DISTRIBUTION OF LEADERSHIP AMONG ECE LEADERS AND MEMBERS OF MUNICIPAL COMMITTEES IN FINLAND

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### ABSTRACT

This article will focus on studying early childhood leadership operationalised within municipalities in Finland. The study examined the perceptions of the members of municipal committees and municipal Early Childhood Education (ECE) leaders about the core purpose and leadership of ECE. The data was collected through focus groups and analysed using qualitative content analysis. The findings indicate that ECE leaders and members of the municipal committees have a common understanding of the importance of distributed leadership. The most salient challenges were the differences in the way the core purpose of ECE was understood, uneven distribution of authority and lack of tools to enable the effective distribution of leadership.

Keywords: early childhood education, leadership, distributed leadership, Finland

### INTRODUCTION

Municipal administrative structure of ECE in Finland

The power of the municipalities in local government is significant for the administration of ECE in highly decentralised Finland. Self-government exercised by municipal residents is based on the Constitution of Finland (Suomen perustuslaki, 1999). The functioning of municipalities and their responsibilities in relation to ECE services are stipulated mainly by the Finnish Local Government Act (Kuntalaki, 1995) and the Finnish Child Care Act (Laki lasten päivähoidosta, 1973). According to the universal entitlement prescribed by law, all children before comprehensive school starting age of seven years, are entitled to municipal early childhood education and one-year pre-school for six-year olds. In accessing these programs, moderate customer payments might be required.

Elected municipal councils decide on the principles for the organisation of municipal administration (Kuntalaki, 1995). Due to the decentralisation of community services, the municipal organisation varies between municipalities. Even though the establishment of the committees is not obligatory, the implementation of ECE services is usually administrated by the

municipal committees set up by municipal council. The members of the committees are residents of the community, and are not necessarily involved in ECE services and are selected to serve for four years. That is, municipal committees represent the residents of their municipality in local decision-making. ECE leaders are responsible for leading, coordinating and developing the functions of ECE services. ECE leaders are employed in the municipality as professionals eligible as municipal civil servants.

Within the municipalities, ECE leaders and the members of the municipal committees implement internal decision-making within the municipality. Although the municipal committee is required to be involved in decision-making, committee members rarely have the necessary expertise in all those issues on which they must make decisions. Hence those who prepare issues for decision-making have real power within the municipality (Nuorteva, 2008). Currently there is a general division of tasks, where public servants prepare and present issues for the municipal committees, who in turn make the decisions on the basis of these presentations at monthly meetings. The ideal situation is where the chair of the committee and public servants prepare the issues together. According to democratic values, it is essential that the committee members enjoy a strong position in decision-making. Furthermore, when organising municipal structures and organisations, such influence on democratic principles should be taken into account (Korhonen & Merisalo, 2008). According to Mutanen (2008), good cooperation includes mutual respect and a shared understanding of responsibilities and roles. This demands conversations on a regular basis and constant updates on forthcoming issues.

### Distributed leadership in ECE

Earlier leadership studies of early childhood leaders investigated leadership mainly as a micro phenomenon and researchers have investigated the leaders themselves (Hayden, 1996; Jorde-Bloom, 1992, 1995; Morgan, 2000; Rodd, 1996, 1997, 2006; VanderVen, 2000). The analysis of leadership was usually combined with that of roles and positions of leaders. There is an increasing awareness of the importance of taking into account the meaning and connections between societal contexts and leadership as reflected in early childhood leadership research conducted by Finnish researchers including Hujala (2002, 2004), Nivala (1999), Karila (2004) and Puroila (2004).

The perspective on studying leadership beyond a single leader was introduced decades ago by Gibb (1954), who was the first to address leadership as a distributed phenomenon. However, discussions of distributed leadership began appearing only recently in the early childhood literature (Aubrey, 2007; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Heikka, Waniganayake & Hujala, in press). In their literature review of distributed leadership, Heikka et al. (in press)

suggest that the successful achievement of distributed leadership is determined by the interactive relationships between multiple members in an organisation.

Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001) based their leadership thinking in the school context on activity theory and theories of distributed cognition. This approach emphasises the meaning of situations and contexts of leadership suggesting that leadership activity is distributed over various facets of the situation, including cultural tools. Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004, p. 11), state that leadership is best understood as a practice distributed over leaders, followers, and the school's situation or contexts. Spillane et al. (2001, p. 25) refer to leaders who work towards a shared goal through "separate, but interdependent work". Leadership involves multiple personnel, consisting of those with either formal leadership positions and/or informal leadership responsibilities (Spillane et al., 2004). Likewise Harris (2009) connects two properties, interdependence and emergence with distributed leadership. Similarly, Hutchins (1995, p. 20) emphasises the meaning of the interaction of the people with each other and with physical structure in the environment. The significance of distributed leadership has been established through the exploration of the capacity to cope with changes and develop leadership for learning. For example, Woods and Gronn (2009) connect distributed leadership to organisational capacity and sustainable change.

When applying distributed leadership views to ECE settings, it is essential to remember the unique characteristics of this sector. In addition to uniqueness of the core purpose of ECE, their structure and governance, incorporate a variety of programs and personnel. As such, the unit of analysis may vary, including leaders on vertical as well as horizontal dimensions of the organisation, and depending on the leadership tasks at hand or the particular focus of the study (Heikka et al., in press). In addition, customership of ECE in Finland is twofold. Firstly, entitlement to services as a part of labour policy serves parents. Secondly, ECE supports children as users of services. According to the Finnish Child Care Act (Laki lasten päivähoidosta, 1973), ECE is required to support the overall development of the child. Likewise, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö, 2002) states that ECE aims to enhance children's development and learning. Therefore, when addressing the core purposes from the perspective of a child as a customer, high quality pedagogy is emphasised.

Based on ecological psychology, Nivala (1999, 2001) has developed a contextual leadership theory, which provides a framework to examine leadership within contexts specific to early childhood education. Contextual leadership theory is based on the core purposes of ECE and addresses the interactive influences of micro and macro systems of social interactions (Hujala, 2004; Nivala, 2001). Distributed leadership supplements the contextual perspective by enabling a deeper level of investigation of the interdependencies between stakeholders beginning from parents to the municipal manager.

## THE RESEARCH TASK

The aim of this research was to study leadership in ECE within local municipalities. This study investigated how the members of municipal committees and ECE leaders in Finland perceived the core purpose and leadership of ECE.

In Finland, public ECE services dominate the context of leadership. ECE leadership is interwoven and distributed in municipal structures involving a variety of stakeholders. In this study, leadership was understood as a contextual phenomenon influenced by micro and macro interactions in local communities and as a part of wider society. Traditional research approaches focusing on the centre director's role are insufficient for studying leadership as a contextual phenomenon. This study explored municipal level administration and decision-making impacting on ECE services.

The two key stakeholder groups responsible for decision-making and arranging early childhood services within municipalities are municipal committees and ECE leaders. The members of the committees were often selected by municipalities as trusted residents in local decision-making. The ECE leaders were municipal employees responsible for arranging the early childhood services within the municipality, including ensuring that childcare centres meet the requirements of the national ECE legislation and local policies. The principle research questions addressed in this study were: First, how do the members of municipal committees and municipal ECE leaders perceive the core purpose of ECE as a base for leadership? Second, how do the members of municipal committees and municipal ECE leaders perceive the leadership of ECE?

## METHODOLOGY

The data were gathered as part of a more extensive research project by focus group interviews with municipal committee members and ECE leaders. Focus groups are commonly used by educational researchers (Hydén & Bülow, 2003) and consist 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). In this study, the focus group method was chosen because it can provide an opportunity to understand the research topic from the participants' perspectives. During the focus group discussions, participants can express opinions, formulate points of view and discuss their perceptions of the phenomenon of leadership and its various dimensions (Wibeck et al., 2007).

In this study, the focus group participants were individuals within a local municipality. The two groups of ECE stakeholders included in these focus groups consisted of members of municipal committees responsible for ECE and municipal ECE leaders. These stakeholders were

influential in ECE decision-making and administration of their local communities. In general, each ECE leaders' group consisted of the employed municipal ECE managers, a sector leader, and the development, personnel and financial managers selected for the study.

The data was collected in four municipalities in different parts of Finland. Each municipality selected the people who participated in the focus group discussions and coordinated their participation. The goal was to convene a maximum of 10 people in each group; in reality, 2–10 people participated in each focus group. The number of participants remained low in the ECE leaders' groups as small municipalities had few ECE leaders. Overall eight focus groups were conducted for this study, one group of the members of the municipal committee and one group of ECE leaders in each municipality. The overall number of the members of the municipal committees and ECE leaders participated in the study was 37 and 13, respectively.

The two main themes formulated for the focus group discussions were the core purpose of ECE and leadership of ECE. The data were analysed using a qualitative content analysis approach (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2003). Transcripts of the discussions of each group were analysed separately in order to form categories describing participants' perceptions of the core purpose and leadership as discussed. The perceptions of stakeholders were compared in order to identify similarities and differences in emphasis between them. The perceptions investigated have evolved from and therefore represent collectively formulated picture of lived working situations in local Finnish municipalities where stakeholders are involved. Citations from the original data have been inserted in the results. Before citations, it is indicated whether the citation has been commented by a member of the municipal committee or an ECE leader. The number codes after the stakeholder group, e.g. (3), indicate the municipality.

## FINDINGS

The key findings of this research suggest that the core purpose of ECE was perceived differently by members of the municipal committees and municipal ECE leaders. On the one hand, leadership was understood as a shared responsibility for ECE in municipalities. However, stakeholders were not satisfied with the level of cooperation between the stakeholders in decision-making processes. Both types of stakeholders were hoping for a better distribution of leadership within municipalities. The findings are presented according to their perceptions of the core purpose and leadership of ECE within their municipality, respectively. Under the results on leadership, the main issues identified were leadership as cooperation and shared responsibilities and, the findings that one's expertise guided decision-making.

### The core purpose as service and education

Perceptions about the core purpose of ECE differed between the ECE leaders and the members of the municipal committees. The ECE leaders saw the core purpose from the perspectives of educating the child and the provision of ECE as a quality service. The members of the municipal committees tended to focus on the provision and maintenance of ECE services for the municipalities' residents and as a way of supporting families. The members of the municipal committees highlighted the importance of adequate accessibility and provision of services. Table 1 lists the main features of perceptions of the core purpose of ECE among municipal committee members and ECE leaders.

Table 1: The core purpose of ECE as perceived by municipal committee members and ECE leaders

Perceptions of Municipal committee members	Perceptions of Municipal ECE leaders
Labour policy	Children and education
Provision of ECE services	Provision of ECE services
Accessibility	Child welfare
Support families	Partnership with families
Continuum from ECE to school	Learning pathway from ECE to school

It seems that the perceptions of the municipal committee members were often guided by personal opinions, emotions and attitudes rather than familiarity with the national ECE legislation or practice. The ECE leaders agreed that ECE continues to have a purpose related to labour policy in that these programmes were necessary to enable mothers to return to paid employment following the birth of their children. Similarly, relationships with families were emphasised and mention was made of neo-helpless families who may receive support from ECE. Cooperation with the welfare authorities and preventive social work were considered important, but at the same time there was concern that ECE might slip over into family work. Both types of stakeholders highlighted the cooperation with families and took the view that families have the main responsibility for bringing up their children.

According to the ECE leaders, quality was produced in partnership with the families. Partnership was seen as important from the point of view of understanding the child and implementing child-based pedagogy. They noted unanimously that the demands from families have increased and that the individual needs of families must be taken into account in ECE. The satisfaction of families was considered important when assessing whether the core purpose had been fulfilled. With decreasing family size, ECE was regarded as an important opportunity for children to have social contacts with their peers. Participants also noted that children have

varying needs, hence the importance of providing choices. That is, participants felt that at that point in time there was too little variety in service provision.

In addition to labour policy, some members of the municipal committees mentioned the pedagogical significance of ECE. However, this did not receive unanimous support from the participants. Those who referred to pedagogy considered it as creating a caring environment that supported the child's individual development. Learning social skills was emphasised in the discussions. Some considered ECE to be a bonus in a child's life. However, some committee members felt uncomfortable with the professional, planning-based approaches. It was believed that the children might be subjected to too demanding goals and teaching, meaning that ECE turns into work for children. Overall, the views on early education perceived it a service focusing on care. There was little talk of education and learning. However, childhood was viewed in a positive light, and ECE as an opportunity to care for childhood. There was faith in the opportunities provided by ECE to prevent problems and create a firm base for a child's future.

Both types of stakeholders highlighted the importance of the continuum from ECE via pre-school to school. However, again, when ECE leaders addressed children's learning, the municipal committee members tended to focus on training children in ECE to cope at school. In addition, the committee members felt that there was an attitudinal gap between school and early education. By contrast, the ECE leaders understood the learning continuum as a path ensuring continuity from ECE through to pre-school and to school.

In the discussions of the ECE leaders, the core purpose was described using the concepts of education, teaching, learning and care. The content of the ECE work was defined as supporting the individual growth and development of the child. The goal was seen to be a balanced childhood and happy children. Providing special education for children in need of it was also included in the core purpose. The work methods mentioned by the ECE leaders were planning, assessment and documentation. Participants felt that the national ECE curriculum (STAKES, 2003) steered ECE programmes throughout Finland. The ECE curriculum is seen to have significantly speeded up the clarification of the goals of the core purpose. In this sense, the curriculum served as a tool for leadership. The core purpose priorities are reflected in the following comments by participants:

A member of the municipal committee (3): We do not have sufficient amount of services and at least we have to take care that there will be enough them and should receive money for them.

An ECE leader (3): ...should secure the wholeness of care, up-bringing and teaching and enhance right for equal early childhood education for every child.



The ECE leaders and the members of the municipal committees seem to mean different things when speaking about responsibilities for the provision of quality ECE. The committee members mostly spoke of quality through the construction of enabling structures and prerequisites for service. They did not address the qualitative challenges involved in developing ECE practice and the main emphasis was on safety issues. The ECE leaders continuously drew attention to the processes of work performed by early childhood educators.

#### Leadership as cooperation and shared responsibilities

The findings indicate that leadership was a shared responsibility of various stakeholders including those working daily in ECE, as well as parents, municipal decision-makers and the Parliament of Finland. The ECE leaders considered leadership to include cooperation with parents, schools and decision-makers. They highlighted the importance of discussing early childhood issues with municipal committee members and cooperation with the social services sector. They were concerned about how to develop cooperation and a culture of open discussion within their municipality. Table 2 illustrates leadership and its challenges as perceived by the municipal committee members and ECE leaders who participated in this research.

Table 2: Leadership perceptions of municipal committee members and ECE leaders

Perceptions of Municipal committee members	Perceptions of Municipal ECE leaders
Develop high quality ECE services	Responsibility for quality
Increase cooperation prior to decision-making	Cooperate with diverse professionals
Develop cooperation with the practitioners	Develop service provision
Clarify guidelines for leadership	Manage finances
Clarify roles for leadership	Clarify guidelines for leadership
	Develop distributed leadership

The ECE leaders considered that leadership included responsibility for quality. Similarly, the members of the municipal committees defined their leadership role as consisting of making structural reforms and developing high-quality services. Anticipating future ECE needs of families within municipalities was also identified as an important leadership consideration.

The ECE leaders and the members of the municipal committees agreed on the importance of ECE personnel involvement in the changes. According to the ECE leaders, these personnel must be involved in leadership and joint discussions with leaders. They emphasised centre directors' role in supporting other centre personnel and giving them support, thereby enabling leadership sharing. It was considered crucial for leadership that personnel be encouraged to keep up with developments and be up to date with any changes.

The ECE leaders highlighted the importance of increasing the discussion on funding of services. They felt that the competition for limited resources within municipalities and looking after the economy becomes an increasingly important challenge for early childhood leaders, especially because politicians frequently reply that ECE services should be provided at a lower cost. Although the leaders were aware of the financial constraints, they felt that there was a better understanding of the nature of ECE due to the fact that it has been studied in the broader context of education and teaching.

### Expertise guiding decision-making

The findings indicated that expertise was essential in determining power-relations in decision-making between ECE leaders and members of municipal committees. The critical point seemed to be the preparation of matters prior to committee meetings. Municipal committee members felt that matters had already been decided by the time they were presented at committee meetings, or matters were brought to meetings in a great hurry and there was little or no room for criticism. Consider for instance, the following comments:

A member of the municipal committee (3): I would return to my own role as a municipal committee member, that is, I certainly have to say, that I have frustrated little by little here, as I really feel, that these issues come to the meetings so as they are so prepared by civil servants, that you cannot say yes or no anymore. Sometimes it is possible to express your opinion, but they are so pre-chewed. And then about, if you express your own opinion, you get the feeling that it was not really...

There was a sense that municipal committee members did not have sufficient knowledge about ECE legislation or the needs of ECE practitioners in their municipalities. The committee members felt that they did not have sufficient knowledge about the backgrounds of decisions, and under these circumstances, the ECE leaders wielded more power, as reflected in the following comments:

A member of the municipal committee (3): I just got it in to my head now, that should we have more cooperation with just, like, to the side of the early childhood education, there just with the centres, so as the staff will contact us more, as we do not get anything from there, they come as a proposal of the civil servant and then you do not always know what is behind it.

An ECE leader (7): The big challenge is certainly that how we as middle-level leaders will get conversation partners from political decision-makers. That is, how the municipal committee plan, make strategy-work, discuss and what about others, in addition to the municipal committee? If we think for example municipal

council and others who can influence. So this is, in my opinion, like which we can make strategies, visions and all sorts of things, but it remains easily among civil servants.

The committee members found the relationships between committee members and ECE leaders were confusing. The interactions reflected both functioning as an external control and as a desire for genuine participation with ECE leaders. As one member of the municipal committee (3) described it:

I am getting the feeling now, that each of us could feel enormously confused about their own role, that is what it is now. We have responsibility for big issues, but after all, the basic knowledge about the actual nature of the issues is not what it perhaps should be.

However, ample variation in the leadership discussions was perceived between and within municipalities. It would seem that the satisfaction of ECE leaders was paralleled by the critical attitudes of municipal committee members, and vice versa. In some municipalities, committees still considered the power to rest with the committees, but in the others, the leadership authority was considered to rest with the ECE leaders. Municipal committee members also voiced fairly strong criticism of their own work, and some of them also criticised ECE leaders. Although the ECE leaders were trusted, there was also an underlying suspicion of their purposes and some even wondered whether it was a conscious tactic used by the ECE leaders. At worst, it was suspected that the ECE leaders might form a barrier between the members of the municipal committees and ECE practitioners in the sector.

In some municipalities, municipal committee members were perceived to be well acquainted with the crucial points of implementing daily activities in ECE centres, while in other municipalities there seem to be little flow of information from the practitioners to the municipal committees. The ideal was considered to be one where decision-making was shared more than was the case at that time. More discussion with practitioners was also anticipated. According to some of the committee members, the expertise of the sector was not being used in decision-making within municipalities. The two groups agreed on the desire for leadership distribution, open discussion and more cooperation in decision-making processes. These perspectives are reflected in the following comments made by ECE leaders (7) participating in this research.

But I certainly feel, that one of the challenges is that how we could share information with the level of political decision-makers so that it won't be too much, but it comes.

...so in one way, what is the capacity then, that what they can receive, that it could be quite slow process in one way. One piece at the time, which it will move on, and then it is already time for changing folks and decision-makers.

Yeh, but if we have those forums and if we have something, I do not know what it is though, some kind of web-place, where we could have different contemporary issues and possibilities for discussion of guidelines. I do not know who will make those, and I do not know how much it would demand work and so on, but it just, that at least it would be possible to receive information. I do not know, it might be a slow process, but on the other hand...

In order to improve cooperation, some committee members proposed a system of informal meetings during which centre directors, other employees and committee members could jointly discuss issues at the beginning of the term of office. Both the ECE leaders and committee members also wanted to see a clarification of ECE leadership guidelines.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study showed that there was a lack of trust between the municipal committee members and ECE leaders. This could be interpreted as an indication of deficiencies in sharing information and lack of opportunity for regular open communication between these two groups of stakeholders. In addition, this research has also shown that major challenges in the implementation of distributed leadership concerned a two-way exertion of influence between municipal committees and practitioners in ECE centres. The municipal committee members seemed to be unfamiliar with the contexts of ECE where daily practice occurs. Therefore we might question whether increased interaction between municipal committee members and ECE leaders would suffice to establish equal positions in relation to expertise. Jalonen (2006, p. 39) suggests more interaction, not only between decision-makers but also “between the process and its environment” to improve decision-making in complex, changing environments. In relation to ECE matters, this means that in the processes of decision-making, more interaction with the practitioners and customers would be anticipated: listening to the opinions of centre based personnel, parents and children and reflecting on decisions in relation to what is known about the appropriate circumstances for children’s learning and well-being. Similarly Jalonen (2006) stated that improvements in the processes of preparation during decision-making were essential in municipal decision-making.

Expertise also seemed to guide perceptions of the core purpose of ECE, the core purpose being understood differently by different stakeholders. Robinson (2008, p. 251) suggests that “if distributed leadership research is to make stronger links with student outcomes, it needs to be

informed by a normative theory that is grounded in our knowledge of the conditions that teachers require to improve teaching and learning.” Following this perspective one can continue that in ECE, leadership has to be organised in ways which support pedagogical functions and processes. This was based on the belief that in early childhood contexts, knowledge and learning guide leadership practice and distribution of organisational roles (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). When municipal committee members did not know the reality in which teachers practice, they were inhibited from participating in decision-making about developmental proceedings. In this case, when there was also a lack of expertise, the potential for participating in development was even less.

In Finnish municipalities, the ideas about distributed leadership are evolving, but yet underdeveloped in practise. Distributed leadership is a gradually developing process and needs efforts from leaders in developing distributed leadership through different developmental phases (MacBeath, 2005). At the early stages of development, the significance of planning, leaders active monitoring and supervision of leadership is emphasised. However, distributed leadership does not demand a change in prevailing leadership structures. Persons holding leadership positions can adopt the role of being the monitors of distributed leadership (Harris, 2008). As such, Spillane et al. (2001, p. 25) refer to leaders who work towards a shared goal through “separate, but interdependent work”.

Understanding leadership as a contextual phenomenon should be emphasised when considering recommendations for leadership practise. In Finnish municipalities, the development of distributed leadership through vertical set of stakeholders, who are functioning geographically dispersed from each other, demands greater amount of self initiation, guidance and development than between leaders operating in one setting. Traditional practises and history of Finnish municipal decision-making makes the development of distributed leadership even more challenging.

## CONCLUSION

This research showed that the development of distributed leadership between ECE leaders and the members of the municipal committees needs first, interaction between stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of the core purposes of ECE. Second, tools to assist knowledge sharing and interaction in decision-making are required. Finally, there was a need for better development of practises, which allow for interdependencies between stakeholders within municipalities.

Leadership actually functions on two levels to be efficient. Firstly, on core purpose of leadership, which consist of key leadership responsibilities e.g. maintaining and improving

services and secondly, on development of leadership functions, which contribute on achieving those purposes. These functions include e.g development of distributed leadership. The following recommendations focus on development of leadership functions.

Distributed leadership is a process to be developed. One of the most important leadership challenges in Finnish ECE was the enhancement of interactions between micro and macro level systems. What is crucial, is bottom-up channels to exert influence so that the daily development challenges in the practice of ECE regulate higher-level decision-making. Negotiating the core values and purposes of ECE between the members of the municipal committees, municipal personnel as well as centre based personnel, children and families as equals, could serve as a pathway to developing a better understanding of the core purpose of ECE and sharing of expertise prior to decision-making. All this requires the development of a quality strategy, which can form the basis for distributed decision-making, communication and the systematic development of ECE. At the moment, this is a marginal part of ECE leadership in municipalities.

The initiation for developing distributed leadership within Finnish municipalities is missing and also needs to be clarified. Currently, the real power for decision-making appears to be held by municipal ECE leaders. Although they seem to anticipate higher level of expertise on behalf of the members of the municipal committees, ECE leaders rarely make any real efforts to develop a shared understanding or enhance relationships thus maintaining the prevailing power-imbalance between the stakeholders. On the other hand, the members of municipal committees change every four years. Therefore, if the initiation for development rests with the chair of the municipal committee, there may be difficulties in terms of contributing to long-term development plans. In the Finnish municipalities, the municipal councils determine the principles of local government decision-making. The enhanced interactions between stakeholders and responsibility for development of leadership could also be advised by municipality councils. After all, systematic, research based, long-term evaluation and development is recommended for its efficiency in making decisions concerned with ECE within municipalities.

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