

# Extending Understandings of Early Childhood Education Leadership: Guest Editorial

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During the past few decades, researchers have made significant scientific progress in developing our understanding and conceptualisation of leadership practice within early childhood education (ECE) centres. Much of this research has been based on analysing leadership perspectives of various ECE stakeholders working in different countries. Looking back at the 1980s and 1990s, ECE was a relatively unknown area in leadership research. Today, our knowledge and understanding of various leadership concepts are well developed, and we are able to articulate and interpret leadership phenomenon and its manifestations through enactments, influences and interdependencies in diverse contexts incorporating a mix of ECE roles and relationships. We could say that today, ECE leadership research has matured, arriving at the doorstep of ‘adulthood’, established, but yet young.

In this special issue focusing on *Early Childhood Leadership*, the editorial board of JECER publish the selected work of leading early childhood education researchers from Australia, Finland, Germany and Norway, to further extend our understandings through findings based on their recent research. Reflecting on the findings of papers included in this special issue, inevitably reminded us of the basic ontology of early childhood leadership. In the 1990s Nivala stated that the ontology of early childhood leadership lies in the responsibilities arising from the core purpose of early childhood education. Although the research that has emerged and its many manifestations have changed focus over the years, this special issue indicates that this foundational philosophy is as imperative as ever.

Key messages arising from this special issue makes it evident that there are non-positional manifestations of early childhood leadership, which are timeless and exists because the core purpose of ECE organisations continue to emphasise children's learning. Children are at the heart of this work, and our responsibility is to educate and cherish their wellbeing and protect the future of the next generations. The focus and emphasis of ECE leadership research therefore must continue to anchor itself in the roots of education, pedagogy and care of young children. This message is affirmed by **Moen** who highlights the importance of pedagogical leadership in achieving the core purpose of promoting children's learning. Her paper presents findings about how a consensus of commitment to children's learning was being achieved in ECE centres in Norway.

The interconnectivities between leadership and pedagogy have fascinated educational leadership researchers for some time now. Contributing to this body of knowledge, **Granrusten** writes about his investigation into early childhood leaders' identities, aimed at addressing research questions on how centre directors considered themselves to be EC teachers or leaders, and to see how the experienced identity influenced the performed leadership. Likewise, building on previous studies on the preparation of early childhood leaders, **Waniganayake and Stipanovic** analysed the relevance of postgraduate studies for advancing ECE leadership capacity.

**Heikka, Halttunen and Waniganayake** adopted the classical conceptualisation of ECE leadership as administration, management and leadership when investigating the leadership acts of ECE teachers in Finland. They noted that various aspects of leadership were embedded in the daily practices of teachers. This study shows how teacher leadership is connected with responsibilities for ECE pedagogy in multi-professional staff teams, and included sharing responsibilities with centre directors in promoting children's learning, development and curriculum processes.

Enacting ECE leadership collaboratively between various staff at a centre has been noted in ECE leadership research for some time now. **Keski-Rauska, Fonsén, Aronen and Riekkola** examined innovative ways of restructuring ECE directors' work as 'joint leadership' in a Finnish municipality, where the pedagogical and managerial responsibilities of ECE leadership were divided and enacted by two people acting in partnership. This study provides a useful lens in studying and developing strategies which strengthen pedagogical leadership.

Little is known about early childhood leadership research carried out in Germany. **Strehmel's** commentary paper is therefore a welcome addition in this special edition in raising awareness about theoretical and empirical approaches influencing leadership work in this country. In a similar way, we are pleased to publish findings by **Boe and Hognestad**, who explored the importance of both informal and intentional or purposeful

action that demonstrated leadership care within ECE centres in Norway. Importantly, the practice of leadership care is an under researched area in ECE, and this paper provides new insights to stimulate further thinking and future research considerations.

As a collection, the papers in this special edition of JECER offer new learnings to provoke discussion and action in terms of changing policy and practice in ECE centres. Given the contextual nature of early childhood leadership enactment across countries and cultures, translating findings from Australia, Finland, Germany and Norway is left in the hands of our readers. Readers can also contact authors directly for further information and collaboration in extending on this body of knowledge on early childhood leadership.

In conclusion, we note that the majority of the papers included in this special edition arose through presentations at the *International Leadership Research Forum* (ILRF) held at the University of Eastern Finland in Savonlinna, in 2015. The ILRF is an international network for those interested in pursuing early childhood leadership research. Next year, we will be gathering in Hamburg, Germany between **3 to 5 September 2017** at the University of Applied Sciences. For further information please contact the host of *ILRF 2017*, Professor Petra Strehmel by email: [Petra.Strehmel@haw-hamburg.de](mailto:Petra.Strehmel@haw-hamburg.de)

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With best wishes

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Guest Editors for this special edition of JECER