



Research on a Joint Leadership Model for Early Childhood Education in Finland

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ABSTRACT: This article presents the results of a study assessing the quality of joint leadership in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the city of Hämeenlinna, Finland. The assessment was carried out through an online survey in August 2015. The study's respondents were ECEC centre directors and teachers in Hämeenlinna. The results indicated that the teachers did not consider the joint leadership model to be as yet entirely successful, but the directors were more satisfied. The challenges of this model focused on the different dimensions of joint leadership, namely time, interaction, situation, and diversity. To develop joint leadership, the following conditions are necessary: time for reflection, discussion, and the clarification of practices and structures; permanency in interactions, communication, and relationships; the vertical distribution of leadership between directors and teachers; and the commitment of all stakeholders.

Keywords: Joint leadership, distributed leadership, early childhood education and care, evaluation

Introduction

In this study, we examined the quality of a new joint leadership model in ECEC in the Finnish city of Hämeenlinna, a medium-size municipality located in southern Finland. Hämeenlinna's executive administration and local officers began restructuring the leadership model for ECEC at the beginning of 2014. The aim of developing the new

leadership model for ECEC was to strengthen the directors' leadership position and skills in pedagogical leadership and also to enhance ECEC finances, human resources, and client processes. This arrangement was unique in the Finnish municipal ECEC system.

The administration of ECEC in Finland falls under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Culture. ECEC services are regulated by legislation (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 36/1973) and they are mainly (92%) provided by municipalities. The national development agency, the Finnish National Board of Education (FBNE), is responsible for the development of ECEC, and the implementation of national education policies including the National Core Curriculum on ECEC. Finnish society has a deep trust in its educational professionals, allowing teachers a high level of pedagogical autonomy. Even if this can be seen as a strength of the pedagogical quality of Finnish ECEC, there has been an obvious need to focus on developing the quality of its services and pedagogical leadership (Eskelinen, Halttunen, Heikka, & Fonsén, 2015, 82; Fonsén & Vlasov, 2016).

Qualification requirements for ECEC leaders are defined in the Act on Qualifications Requirements for Social Welfare Professionals (272/2005). It shows that centre directors must be qualified ECEC teachers and have adequate management and leadership skills. Nowadays, centre directors do not usually work directly with children but work instead as administrative leaders across one or more ECEC centre units. The number of units and employees has been increasing, and it seems that the centre director's tasks and responsibilities are not clearly defined (Eskelinen et al., 2015, 83). A wide variety of administrative tasks connected with human resources and economic concerns, are shifting the focus of directors away from pedagogy to other issues. In order to provide high-quality pedagogy, directors need to reflect and develop pedagogical practices with the ECEC practitioners who work with children (Fonsén, 2014; Heikka, 2014).

In 2014, Hämeenlinna had 32 municipal ECEC units comprising day care centres and preschools, led by 19 directors. After the reorganization of the municipality, ECEC units were still led by 19 directors, but they began working together in pairs. In the pairs, one of the directors worked as the finance and human resources director and was officially and administratively responsible for the supervision of ECEC staff. The other director worked as the client processes and pedagogy director and was responsible for managing the work processes. (Note - one of the 19 directors worked together with a pair as a triad because of the odd number of directors in this municipality.)

In the change of ECEC leadership model in Hämeenlinna, the key element was the *concept of joint leadership* (Aronen, Fonsén, & Akselin, 2014). The concept of joint leadership is based on the foundation of distributed leadership both horizontally and vertically. From a horizontal perspective, joint leadership in the ECEC centres involved the two directors

working together as a pair, whereas from a vertical viewpoint, leadership consisted of the interaction between all staff and the two directors. The joint leadership model in Hämeenlinna's ECEC was also implemented using a distributed organization model. The distributed ECEC organization uses a model in which one director may have at least two physically separate ECEC units to lead (Halttunen, 2009; Soukainen, 2015).

In this study, we examined the phenomenon of joint leadership vertically. The research questions considered how ECEC teachers and directors assessed the quality of the joint leadership model of ECEC in Hämeenlinna and the main differences in the quality and assessments of joint leadership between ECEC directors and teachers. We were also interested in the developmental needs of the joint leadership model. As an evaluation tool, we used the assessment of the quality of leadership (Hujala & Fonsén, 2009, 2010, 2012; Hujala, Roos, Nivala, & Elo, 2014). The survey was carried out online in August 2015, and the respondents were teachers and directors of ECEC in Hämeenlinna.

Distributed leadership: the theoretical basis for joint leadership

The discourse of distributed leadership, especially in Finland, can be seen as the shared responsibility for the organization's core tasks, goals, and guidelines (Eskelinen et al., 2015, 84). Heikka, Waniganayake, and Hujala (2012) consider distributed leadership to be the complex interaction of people who are working for a common purpose, while Heikka (2014) considers distributed pedagogical leadership to be the collective enactment of ECEC leadership responsibilities, especially pedagogy – the core task of ECEC.

Spillane (2004) has described distributed leadership from two perspectives, namely as coordinated and collective distribution. In a situation of coordinated distribution, leaders work separately or together on different leadership tasks that are arranged sequentially. In a situation of collective distribution, the practice is shared by two or more leaders who work separately but interdependently. To succeed, distributed leadership requires planning, organization structures, and continuous development. The key issues concern how the leadership is distributed and what form the distributed leadership should take to contribute to improvement (Harris & Spillane, 2008).

Distributed leadership can also be understood as the sharing of the activities and responsibilities of leadership. In this case, leadership appears as an entity that can be partitioned or divided. Leadership elements can be constructed by more efficient work processes, by encouraging employees, and by building teams. With this approach, the aim

of distributed leadership is to generate effective management and to ensure organizational order (Juuti, 2013; Ropo et al., 2006).

This study emphasizes a broader and deeper understanding of distributed leadership by using the concept of *joint leadership*. According to Wilhelmson (2006), joint leadership depends on common core values, supportive relationships, and common work processes in addition to complementarity, joint sense making, and critical reflection. Both perspectives of distributed leadership are implemented in the joint leadership model: the sharing of activities and leadership responsibilities and the collective and collaborative construction of the new collective reality of leadership are equally emphasized (see Ropo et al., 2006; Viitala, 2005).

Distributed leadership, like joint leadership, widens the perspective, seeing leadership as a social process arising from the relations within and between organizational units. The practice of leadership takes shape in the interactions of people and their situation (Bolden et al., 2011; Paukkuri, 2015). In this study, social processes and interactions take place within individual ECEC centres and between several ECEC centres.

Distributed leadership should continue to be part of ECEC improvement discussions (see e.g. Spillane & Diamond, 2007). The time of heroic and individual leaders has passed: the challenges of practice are too complicated for a single leader to cope with (Kocolowski, 2010). The contributions of teachers, parents, children, the local community, and other stakeholders are necessary in building an effective joint leadership model for ECEC (see e.g. Bolden et al., 2011; Paukkuri, 2015; Spillane, 2004; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Miles and Watkins (2007) argue that the greatest benefit of joint leadership is the diversity of thought and talent. Decision-making may be slower, but the decisions arrived at are often better, since “two heads are better than one”, and the paired leaders can utilize their individual strengths. As Wilhelmson’s (2006) study reveals, joint leadership can provide the leaders themselves with the basis for personal development and learning. Thus, joint leadership depends on common core values, a supportive relationship, and common work processes as well as complementarity, joint sense making, and critical reflection (ibid.).

A distributed perspective can be used as a descriptive tool for researchers and practitioners to explore reality (Spillane & Diamond, 2007, 148–163). However, relatively few scholars have taken up the challenge of theory building on, for example, the ECEC practice aspect of the distributed perspective. Since the very beginning of the change in leadership model in Hämeenlinna’s ECEC, it has been crucial to avoid overlapping processes and to critically assess what structures and procedures best serve the joint

leadership of the ECEC director and teachers from the viewpoint of ECEC's core task. The change in leadership model has challenged the ECEC directors, forcing them to examine their work in a new way – both individually and jointly – and to build new functional structures for leadership (Aronen, Fonsén, & Akselin, 2014).

The phenomenon of joint leadership offers an opportunity for developing a theory of practice. In this research, joint leadership is understood as a multi-dimensional concept which is studied within the context of the day care centre in practice. When assessing joint leadership, it is important to understand the different perspectives and differences between the perspectives of the stakeholders, namely those who conduct (directors) and those who execute (teachers) the new leadership model (Akselin, 2015).

The challenges of distributed organizations and joint leadership can be characterized by four dimensions: time, situation, diversity, and mode of interaction (Vartiainen, Kokko, & Hakonen, 2004). By combining the views of the directors and teachers in these four different dimensions, it is possible to discern an outline for joint leadership (Figure 1).

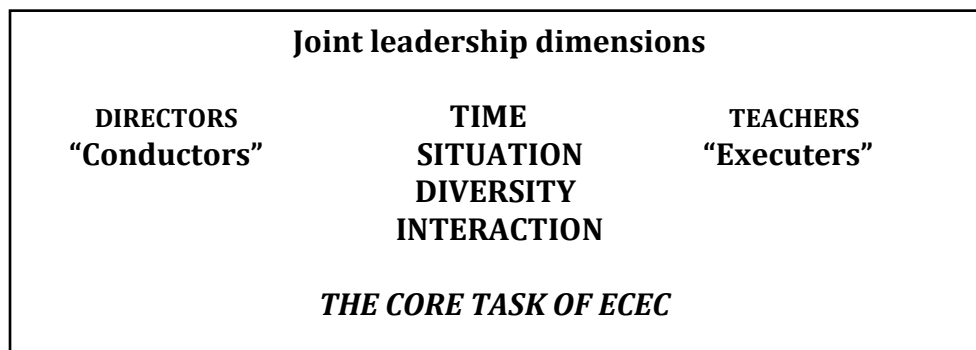


FIGURE 1 An outline for joint leadership (adapted from Vartiainen et al., 2004)

The dimensions of joint leadership point to the importance of reflecting on which practices and structures will best serve functional joint leadership (time and situation) and how distributed leadership should continue to be strengthened when ECEC directors lead a variety of early childhood services simultaneously, like day care or family day care centres, and child care at atypical times, and reflecting diverse services within a single organisational unit. As emphasised by Soukainen (2015), mutual confidence should be built between directors and teachers through the support of pedagogical leadership structures and adequate mutual interaction interaction.

Study objectives and methods

Aims of the research

The joint leadership phenomenon is investigated through ECEC directors and teachers. The aim is to describe how the assessed quality of the joint leadership of ECEC in Hämeenlinna has rebuilt common dimensions of leadership. In this research, the quality of the joint leadership model has been examined based on the assessment of leadership (Hujala & Fonsén, 2009, 2010, 2012; Hujala, Roos, Nivala, & Elo, 2014).

The research questions were:

- 1) *How do ECEC directors and teachers evaluate the quality of joint leadership?*
- 2) *What are the main differences in the quality assessments of joint leadership between the ECEC directors and teachers?*
- 3) *What are the developmental needs of the joint leadership model?*

Quality assessments of joint leadership

The assessment of the quality of leadership evaluation tool was originally produced in 2008 in a development project on ECEC leadership and quality in Finnish municipalities by the University of Tampere (Hujala & Fonsén, 2009). This assessment tool has been used in four ECEC leadership and quality development projects by the University of Tampere between 2008 and 2014 (Hujala & Fonsén, 2009, 2010, 2012; Hujala, Roos, Nivala, & Elo, 2014).

The assessment of the quality of leadership instrument includes 41 items (see Appendix), which models six dimensions: pedagogical leadership, the working atmosphere and community, distributed leadership, support for well-being at work, information and communication, and the quality dimension. The assessment frame is constructed on the basis of ECEC planning (National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood and Care in Finland 2005), pedagogical leadership examinations (Fonsén, 2009), and the quality evaluation model of ECEC (Hujala-Huttunen, 1995; Hujala, Parrila, Lindberg, Nivala, Tauriainen, & Vartiainen, 1999; Hujala & Fonsén, 2010). *The assessment of the quality of leadership* is based on ECEC leadership research (Hujala & Puroila, 1998a; Nivala, 1998, 1999; Nivala & Hujala, 2002; Puroila, 2004; Rodd, 2006) and research on wellbeing at work (Juuti, 2006; Mäkipeska & Niemelä, 2005).

The pedagogical leadership dimension evaluates different issues connected to the directors' actions and the execution of ECEC planning. The purpose was to evaluate if

work communities have created mutual practices for pedagogical conversations, and, if they have, how these practices were actualized. The well-being at work support dimension evaluates human resource leadership, including the personnel's development discussions, professional guidance, and support from the director in problematic situations (Hujala & Fonsén, 2009, 2010, 2012; Hujala, Roos, Nivala, & Elo, 2014).

The information and communication dimension evaluates the inner communication and flow of information within organizations. The working atmosphere and community dimension includes the work communities' atmosphere and mutual communication, and the personnel's experiences of succeeding in their work and finding their work meaningful and significant. The distributed leadership dimension evaluates the personnel's own responsibilities in advancing the functionality of the work community (employee skills) and the director's actions in sharing and distributing leadership and responsibilities. The quality dimension measures the ECEC organization's structures, such as group sizes and consistency, pedagogical support in the organizational structure, and different practices with associates (Hujala & Fonsén, 2009, 2010, 2012; Hujala, Roos, Nivala, & Elo, 2014).

The questionnaire included one open-ended question evaluating the new leadership system. This question was added to the survey to obtain qualitative information on the changes in the leadership system. Such questions can give deeper information on the issues behind the assessment and bring out possible arguments that were not included in survey.

Data collection and analysis

Quantitative research methods were used to investigate the assessment of leadership. The data was collected in the autumn of 2015 using an electronic survey in Hämeenlinna. In the questionnaire, the responses were given by using five-point Likert scales, with 1 standing for the lowest quality level and 5 standing for the highest. The questionnaire included one open-ended question: "Evaluate your experience of the new joint leadership model in Hämeenlinna's ECEC". The survey was sent to 486 staff members in Hämeenlinna's ECEC and the number of the respondents was 233. The participants who completed the survey comprised of teachers (n=214) and directors (n=19) working at Hämeenlinna's 32 ECEC units. Their response rate was 48 %. The participants were informed of the research and their consent to participate was obtained.

The questionnaire comprised 41 items and was sorted into six dimensions and a sum score of means was calculated. The total sum of leadership was constructed from these dimensions. The internal consistency of the dimensions was statistically tested by

computing Cronbach's alphas using SPSS. The reliability of the tested dimensions was proved to be good, as a reliability coefficient of .70 or higher is considered acceptable (Heikkilä, 2008; Introduction to SAS 2016) as indicated below:

- Pedagogical leadership (Number of items: 12; Cronbach's Alpha: .815)
- Support for well-being (Number of items: 6; Cronbach's Alpha: .814)
- Information and communication (Number of items: 4; Cronbach's Alpha: .738)
- Working atmosphere and community (Number of items: 5; Cronbach's Alpha: .792)
- Distributed leadership (Number of items: 6; Cronbach's Alpha: .845)
- Quality dimension (Number of items: 8; Cronbach's Alpha: .815)

The open-ended question in the survey was analysed using content analysis methodology (Krippendorff, 1981; Chelimsky, 1989). This qualitative data described the attitudes towards changes in the leadership system. The responses represented three different attitudes towards new leadership model: positive, critical, and mixed attitudes. These categories were analysed separately in order to understand the elements behind attitudes.

Evaluation of the quality of joint leadership

Comparison of the assessments of ECEC teachers and directors

The assessments of leadership by ECEC directors (n=19) and teachers (n=214) were examined separately. The normal distributions of the dimensions were tested. The test (Kolmogorov-Smirnov .068-.118, $p < .01$) indicated that the distributions of the dimensions were skewed in all dimensions for the teachers' assessments except for the total sum of leadership (.036, $p > .05$), which was normally distributed. The normal distribution of the dimensions of the directors' assessments was tested with the Shapiro-Wilk test. The dimensions of pedagogical leadership, support for well-being at work, and distributed leadership, plus the total sum of leadership (.925-.966, $p > 0.5$) were normally distributed.

The statistical significance between the assessments of the respondent groups (ECEC teachers and directors in Hämeenlinna) was tested. The independent samples *t*-test indicated the same significance as the Mann-Whitney *U* test. Non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney *U*) were chosen. Only the total sum of leadership was tested by the independent samples *t*-test ($t = -2.64$, $p = .013$) and it indicated that the difference between tested groups was significant. The differences between the tested groups was significant in the dimensions support for well-being at work ($p = .000$), information and communication ($p = .008$), and distributed leadership ($p = .023$).

TABLE 1 Assessments of leadership by ECEC teachers and directors.

	<i>ECEC TEACHERS</i>		<i>ECEC DIRECTORS</i>		The differences between the tested groups
	n=214		n=19		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> test
Support for well-being at work	3.55	.612	4.04	.293	<i>p</i> =.000***
Information and communication	3.63	.538	3.92	.382	<i>p</i> =.008**
Working atmosphere and community	4.25	.480	4.23	.477	<i>p</i> =.749
Distributed leadership	3.49	.633	3.76	.301	<i>p</i> =.023*
Pedagogical leadership	4.03	.476	4.11	.268	<i>p</i> =.522
The quality dimension	3.68	.543	3.71	.493	<i>p</i> =.451
Total sum of leadership	3.80	.438	3.97	.244	Independent samples <i>t</i> -test <i>p</i> =.013**

***=*p*<.001 **=*p*<.01 *=*p*<.05

The overall assessment results were good (Table 1). The mean sum scores of the dimensions varied between 3.49 and 4.25. The directors evaluated five of the six dimensions of leadership higher than the teachers. The exception was the working atmosphere and community dimension, which the teachers evaluated slightly higher than the directors, but the difference was not statistically significant. In the dimensions pedagogical leadership, the quality dimension, and working atmosphere and community, there were many items that were assessed similarly by both the teachers and directors.

The support for well-being at work dimension showed a statistically significant difference between the teachers and directors. Interestingly, the assessment of directors was higher than the assessment of the teachers (Table 1). The information and communication dimension also had a statistically significantly lower evaluation by teachers than by directors. In addition, the total sum of assessment of leadership in ECEC was statistically significantly higher according to the directors (3.97) than the teachers (3.80).

The main differences in the quality assessments of joint leadership between the ECEC directors and teachers

These results indicate that the directors evaluated the joint leadership model more positively than the teachers, and the teachers' evaluation indicated that the leadership model was not entirely successful. The results of present study highlight that the understanding of the directors' support for well-being at work was the main difference between the teachers' and directors' thinking.

TABLE 2 Three items directors evaluated more highly than the teachers.

Dimension Item	<i>ECEC TEACHERS</i> Mean	<i>ECEC DIRECTORS</i> Mean	Difference
Support for well-being at work 14. Development discussions for employees are implemented.	3.88	4.63	0.75
Support for well-being at work 15. Employees have the opportunity to participate in service training and additional education.	3.83	4.47	0.64
Pedagogical leadership 8. The director is aware of and interested in the educational activities of our group.	3.69	4.32	0.63

The greatest differences between the evaluations were in the single items shown in Tables 2 and 3. As Table 2 shows, directors evaluated the teachers' opportunities for development discussions and opportunities to participate in service and additional training very highly, while the teachers evaluated their opportunities to participate clearly more weakly. The directors furthermore assessed their own awareness of and interest in the educational activities of the groups more highly than the teachers evaluated their director's awareness and interest.

TABLE 3 Three items ECEC teachers evaluated more highly than the directors.

Dimension Item	<i>ECEC TEACHERS</i> Mean	<i>ECEC DIRECTORS</i> Mean	Difference
Pedagogical leadership 10. The early childhood education plan is implemented as practical pedagogy.	4.05	3.58	0.47
The quality dimension 41. Personnel are interested in professional development.	4.04	3.58	0.46
Pedagogical leadership 12. Joint discussions on mission and values are reflected in pedagogical activity.	4.01	3.58	0.43

The three items that the teachers rated higher (Table 3) included issues relating to the teachers' pedagogy. Teachers evaluated their ability to implement early childhood education plans, their interest in professional development, and their ability to reflect on pedagogy was higher than the directors' evaluation of the teachers' abilities. The results indicated that teachers valued their own pedagogical ability more highly than the directors. The differences between teachers' and directors' assessments indicated that more common discussion was needed.

The developmental needs of the joint leadership model

The questionnaire included one open-ended question to obtain additional information evaluating the new joint leadership model. Positive responses included understanding the importance of investing more in pedagogical leadership due to the changes. The responses showed that pedagogical structures have been strengthened for pedagogical planning, and the respondents regard them as functional in their work.

The challenges of joint leadership has been characterized by four dimensions: time, situation, diversity and interaction (adapted from Vartiainen et al., 2004). The most critical and challenging dimensions of joint leadership were 1) time resources and 2) the change in the directors' positions (situation). The responses indicated that the directors were too busy with all the units (diversity), and that teachers and directors were not close enough to the teachers' work and the life of the children and parents. The change in the

directors' positions had also created challenges in some units concerning continuity in the teachers' work.

Time resources were mentioned as a limiting dimension and the respondents wanted the directors to participate more in everyday work (interaction) but as said the directors assessed their own awareness of and interest in the educational activities of the groups more highly than the teachers.

Discussion

In Wilhelmson's (2006) study, joint leaders contributed to each other's development through common work processes. This arrangement makes the leaders more reflective, and it brings with it personal development. The results of this research indicated the same developmental element in the directors' personal and professional growth.

This study shows that ECEC centres share some similarities with schools. As Paukkuri (2015) has stated, schools are complex workplaces and communities where the culture is built and rebuilt in action repeatedly. Although the culture sets restrictions on implementing new models like joint leadership, new meanings of leadership could be reflected on and learned in collaboration with others.

Spillane and Diamond (2007) argue that distributed perspectives should be part of improvement discussions. A distributed perspective frames the practice as the sum of the interactions of the directors, the teachers, and various aspects of their situation.

On the other hand, the teachers rated issues relating to the teachers' pedagogy more highly. Items regarding the opportunity to receive professional guidance and distributed leadership had low evaluation from the teachers. The teachers did not yet consider the joint leadership model to be entirely successful.

Miles and Watkins (2007) studied joint leadership teams and conceptualized the model as involving complementary leadership; they point out that the risks inherent in complementary leadership cannot be avoided. Organizations should pay attention to four points in joint leadership: the common vision, common incentives, communication, and trust.

According to Bolden et al. (2011) distributed leadership – and joint leadership, as in this study – places leadership practice at centre stage rather than the director's actions; they also propose that leadership practice takes shape in the interaction of people and their

contexts. Similarities and differences in decision-making processes and participation seem to be affiliated with cultural issues (Paukkuri, 2015).

Conclusions

The results of the present study can be examined through the outline of joint leadership. By combining the views of the directors and the teachers over four different dimensions (time, situation, diversity and interaction), it is possible to design a new outline for joint leadership (Figure 2).

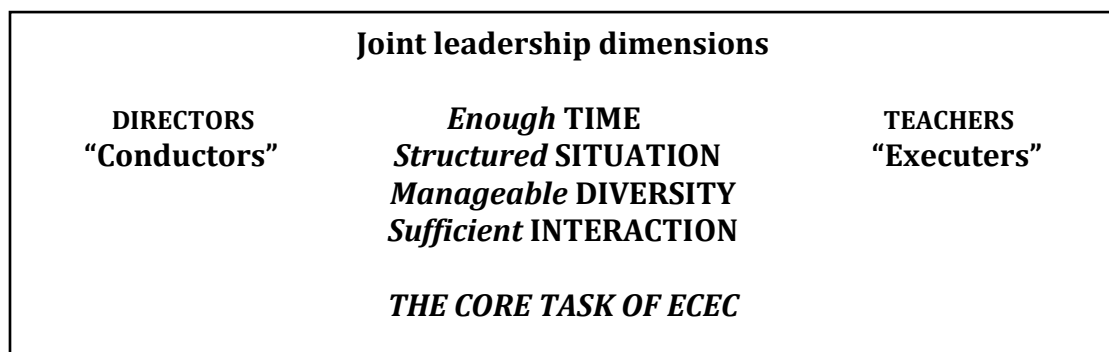


FIGURE 2 A new outline for joint leadership (adapted from Vartiainen et al. 2004)

Figure 2 shows that four dimensions (time, situation, diversity, and interaction; Vartiainen et al. 2004) can be identified as the following:

Time: *Time proved to be the most critical dimension in joint leadership.*

Sufficient time is needed to carry out the changes and various encounters on a daily basis. It is crucial to ask how is it possible to improve the teachers' awareness of the directors' availability and how to support independence and confidence in the staff's own abilities? (See Harris & Spillane, 2008; Miles & Watkins, 2007; Wilhelmson, 2006.)

Situation: *The teachers considered the number of units under the responsibility of the directors to be too high.*

Teachers' expectations of the directors' leadership can be rather traditional, which is not a functional premise of the organization in the joint leadership model (see Kocolowski, 2010). Therefore, there should be discussions inside organizations about the content and tasks of leadership as well as the expectations of leadership in order to avoid tensions arising. There should be an open discussion about expectations for both directors equally. This study provides evidence that the concept of distributed leadership should be clarified for teachers – and with teachers – to improve distributed pedagogical leadership (Aronen,

Fonsén, & Akselin, 2014; Halttunen, 2009; Soukainen, 2015; see Bolden et al., 2011, also Harris & Spillane, 2008).

We found – like Soukainen (2015) – that teachers looked for pedagogical support and guidance in interactions with the director. This pedagogical support includes discussions and the desire to allocate time to these discussions with the director. In Terho's (2014) study on ECEC, staff' perceptions of pedagogical leadership indicated similar perceptions as those found in Soukainen's (2015) study. Staff' expectations of the director included close support in everyday work, listening, offering counselling and guidance, and also the director's presence and even control.

Diversity: *The teachers considered their directors to have too many responsibilities.*

The main issue was to clarify the directors' responsibilities in order to have sufficient time to do the "right things". Diversity requires a lot of interaction and spontaneity in everyday work in structures and forums to enable pedagogical discussion. This is probably the most critical question regarding successful joint leadership with the aim of improving the quality of ECEC. It requires a system-wide perspective on the organization and the openness of the roles beyond the limits of leadership (Bolden et al., 2011; Spillane, 2004; Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Interaction: *Time and space is required for discussion.*

Joint leadership appears to be built through continuously deepening interactions between teachers and directors. In this phase of the development of the joint leadership model, the horizontal distribution of leadership seems to be more advanced than the vertical distribution between directors and teachers. This study indicated that the joint leadership model needs a lot of time and discussion to develop. According to Wilhelmson (2006), compared to the traditional leadership model, the strength of the joint leadership is the debate, mutual feedback, and peer support that occurs before decision-making.

Following Juuti's (2013) metaphor of walking the same path, the phenomenon of joint leadership can be described thus: the director can walk the path ahead, behind, or alongside the others (situation). However, it is essential that the stakeholders share with one another what they see through discussion (interaction). There can be attractive, alternative routes on the path (diversity). Which route to choose will be decided according to what seems to be the right solution (time). Although the path can be suddenly foggy or undulating, meaning that the path behind disappears (distributed organizations), the travellers should endeavour to share their visions – both their hopes and fears – with each other (teachers and directors).

In the case of Hämeenlinna, the model had been implemented for only one and a half years before this study. Our study gives an interesting insight into the beginning of the change in the leadership model and the challenges it can create. The teachers and leaders were assessing joint leadership as a practice. The results of the evaluation show that the joint

leadership model was worth developing. The results of this study can also be utilized in developing leadership models in other contexts.

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Appendix

The assessment of the quality of leadership

Pedagogical leadership

1. The work community has created mutual agreement for pedagogical conversation practices.
2. The teams have created mutual agreement for pedagogical planning practices.
3. The pedagogical practices of ECEC are discussed in the work community's mutual conversations.
4. The work community's pedagogical conversation practices are actualized as agreed.
5. The teams' pedagogical planning practices are actualized as agreed.
6. The core tasks of ECEC are defined in the work community's mutual conversations.
7. The director implements pedagogical leadership in everyday work.
8. The director is aware of and interested in the educational activities of our group.
9. The early childhood education plan is implemented as practical pedagogy.
10. The children's individual early childhood education plans are implemented as practical pedagogy.
11. The work community evaluates early ECEC practices and develops them based on the assessment.
12. Joint discussions on mission and values are reflected in pedagogical activity.

Support for well-being at work

13. Employees have the opportunity to receive professional guidance.
14. Development discussions for employees are implemented.
15. Employees have the opportunity to participate in service training and additional education.
16. The working conditions, such as ergonomic dimensions, safety, tools, etc. are appropriate.
17. The director supports employees in problematic situations.
18. The director evaluates the work community's action and develops it based on the assessment.

Information and communication

19. The flow of information within the work community is functional, transparent, and fair.
20. Information about current issues of ECEC in the entire municipal organization is available to all.
21. There are functional communication practices between the work community and the ECEC administration.
22. All members of the work community are aware of the main tasks and job descriptions.

The working atmosphere and community

23. The work community's atmosphere is open and accepting.
24. The work community's mutual communication is proper and takes its members into account.

- 25. I feel successful in my work.
- 26. I consider my work meaningful.
- 27. I can influence issues concerning my own work.

Distributed leadership

- 28. Employees have the power of decision in matters relating to the work community.
- 29. Leadership is distributed and leadership responsibilities are shared with director employees.
- 30. The responsibility for pedagogical development is shared in the work community.
- 31. Employees contribute to the community's common work goals through their own actions.
- 32. Employees contribute to the functionality of the relationship between the director and personnel through their own actions.
- 33. Employees evaluate the work community's action and develop it based on their assessment.

The quality dimension

- 34. The child group size and consistency are premeditated and functional.
- 35. The physical environment of child care is appropriate.
- 36. The stability of the human relationships has been paid attention to.
- 37. Leadership supports pedagogically high-quality everyday practices.
- 38. The structures of child care organization support pedagogically high-quality everyday practices (e.g. the extent of the kindergarten director's area of responsibility is manageable).
- 39. Cooperation practices between the parents and the personnel are functional.
- 40. Cooperation practices between the personnel and partners (therapists, school, etc.) are functional.
- 41. Personnel are interested in professional development.

The open-ended question: Evaluate your experience of the new joint leadership model in Hämeenlinna's ECEC.