CHAPTER 7

Early childhood leadership in Finland in light of recent research

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates research about leadership in Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC). The aims of this qualitative meta analysis are to analyse and examine what has been studied, to describe the perspectives on leadership that occur in these studies, and to identify the key participants. Each study's focus is described and the key findings summarised. Since ECEC research is relatively new in Finland, relevant studies are included from the year 2000 onwards. As a result of meta analysis, research findings are categorised into four classes, which represent different aspects of EC leadership in Finland. Typical features of EC leadership have been identified and trends in Finnish EC leadership research mapped.

Keywords: EC leadership, early childhood education, Finland

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tässä tutkimuksessa kartoitetaan suomalaista varhaiskasvatuksen johtajuustutkimusta laadullisen meta-analyysin avulla. Tarkoituksena on selvittää, mitä on tutkittu, mistä näkökulmista johtajuutta on tarkasteltu ja ketkä ovat toimineet tutkimusten tiedonantajina. Tutkimukset on luokiteltu tutkimusongelmiensa mukaan ryhmiin ja niiden keskeisistä tuloksista on tehty yhteenveto. Koska varhaiskasvatustutkimusta on tehty Suomessa suhteellisen lyhyen aikaa, tähän katsaukseen on sisällytetty kaikki relevantit 2000-luvulla tehdyt tutkimukset. Meta-analyysin tuloksena johtajuustutkimukset on jaettu aineistolähtöisesti neljään luokkaan, jotka edustavat eri näkökulmia varhaiskasvatuksen johtajuustutkimukseen. Lopuksi on kuvattu yleisiä varhaiskasvatuksen johtajuutta kuvaavia ilmiöitä sekä selvitetty suomalaisen varhaiskasvatuksen johtajuustutkimuksen trendejä.

Avainsanat: johtajuus varhaiskasvatuksessa, varhaiskasvatus, Suomi

ABSTRAKT

Dette paperet evaluerer forskning om ledelse i Finsk barnehagesektor. Målet med denne kvalitative meta analyzen er å analysere og undersøke hva som har blitt studert, å beskrive de perspektiver på ledelse som forekommer i disse studiene, og å identifisere nøkkeldeltakerne. Hver studies fokus er beskrevet og hovedfunnene oppsummeres. Ettersom barnehageforskning er relativt nytt i Finland, er relevante studier tatt med fra år 2000 og framover. Som et resultat av meta analysen, er forskningsresultater kategorisert i fire klasser, som representerer ulike sider ved barnehageledelse i Finland. Typiske trekk ved barnehageledelse er identifisert og trender i Finsk forskning om barnehageledelse er kartlagt.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces a systematic literature review of leadership research undertaken in Finland since the year 2000. Most of this material comes from master's theses and doctoral dissertations found on the electronic publication databases of Finnish universities. It seems that until recently, leadership in early childhood education was not of particular interest to Finnish researchers; however, since 2000, some doctoral and post doctoral studies of early childhood and care (ECEC) leadership in Finland have been completed.

The Finnish language has only one word, *johtaja*, to refer to leader, director, principal, manager, and curriculum head. In this chapter, the term 'director' is used when referring to a leader in ECEC centre. However, the connotation of the word does not represent the current status of centre leadership well, because of its democratic nature. When referring to an administrative municipal early childhood (EC) leader the term 'EC leader' is used. When talking about leaders in general, both director and EC leader are used.

Leadership in ECEC in Finland has changed over the years to reflect the changes that have taken place in childcare organisations. Today, Finnish ECEC units are larger and/or geographically distributed in different locations. In the past, the childcare centre directors usually divided their time between duties as a part time kindergarten teacher and part time director. Centres were small, for example, consisting of two groups with 42 children and six employees in total. In this earlier dual role, working with children was prioritised, and managerial tasks were given only marginal time resources. Today, centre directors do not usually work with a group of children; instead, they are the administrative leaders of one to five childcare centre units (The Association of Kindergarten Teachers in Finland, 2007).

In Finnish communal ECEC directors are increasingly expected to work in

multi-disciplinary leadership teams alongside healthcare workers and other professionals responsible for children's wellbeing. Directors have greater challenges concerning human resource management at the centres because the competencies of staff members are now more diverse. Some staff members have university level pedagogical training and others have secondary level healthcare training. This leads to a situation where staff members need more guidance in ECEC and support in teamwork than previously.

Directors are responsible for the daily running of an ECEC centre, but their challenge is also to work as an advocate for the staff (Riekko, Salonen & Uusitalo, 2010). The director also disseminates research to the staff, takes care of planning, coordinates the parent–teacher partnership, and communicates with other stakeholders (Nivala, 1999). Due to changes in Finnish public administration (for example, the growth of the new public management ideology), financial skills are increasingly required of directors. This has also lead to a situation where, rather than engaging in qualitative efforts to discover how pedagogical actions are conducted, the assessments of quality made by the municipality are limited to quantitative surveillance.

This research extends a previous paper (Hujala & Eskelinen, 2013), which aimed to map and define what leaders and managers in the ECEC field do in Finland. Seven leadership task categories were defined based on a literature review: pedagogical leadership, service management, human resource management, financial management, leadership in change, network management and daily managerial tasks. The key finding was that leaders considered human resource management to be an important and very time consuming task. Pedagogical leadership was also seen as important, but its interconnection with the core tasks of ECEC was not clear. The nature of EC leaders' work was fragmented, and leaders may have several tasks on their hands that require immediate action. The research indicates that the mission, core tasks and leadership responsibilities of EC leaders should be defined more clearly.

META ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP RESEARCH IN FINNISH ECEC

Qualitative meta analysis aims to form a synthesis of results of studies. The difference between a meta analysis and a literature review is that meta analysis is driven by a research question and its reach for meaningful and interpretative summary of data (Schreiber, Crooks & Stern, 1997). Literature reviews of ECEC leadership have been made internationally (for example, Muijs et al., 2004; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2006; Dunlop, 2008), but not in Finland.

In this meta analysis, leadership studies were sorted into four categories (Table 1). The studies are categorised depending on the main focus of the tasks. This may lead to an approach that is a little too simplistic: it is difficult to arbitrarily categorise when many studies overlap each other. Nevertheless, the studies were classified in order to identify main dimensions in Finnish leadership research, and to initiate discussion about the current status of the research field and the future challenges for developing research based leadership in ECEC. Translated titles of evaluated studies can be found in the reference list of this chapter.

THEME	WRITER(S)	PARTICIPANTS	METHODOLOGY
Pedagogical leadership	• Fonsén (2014) • Heikkilä (2014) • Hirvelä (2010) • Kari (2012) • Kasurinen (2013) • Lehtinen (2011) • Liukkonen (2012)	• centre directors • teachers • administrative EC leaders	• interview, diary, focus group interview, questionnaire, action research • narrative analysis, content analysis, statistical analysis
Distributed leadership	• Aumala (2014) • Halttunen (2009) • Heikka (2014) • Sillanpää (2010) • Soukainen (2013)	• centre directors • cenre teachers • administrative EC leaders • municipal committee members	• focus group interview, group interview, ethnographic observation, questionnaire • content analysis
Leadership in changing ECEC organisations	• Karavirta (2013) • Ottman (2008) • Päivinen (2010) • Saksa (2006) • Söyrinki (2010)	• centre directors • centre teachers • administrative EC leaders • municipal EC leaders	• interview, focus group interview, questionnaire • narrative analysis, content analysis, statistical analysis
Directors' and EC leaders' Responsibilities	• Akselin (2013) • Hujala (2004) • Hujala & Eskelinen (2013) • Kauppinen (2004) • Kirvesniemi (2004) • Pisto (2013)	• centre directors • centre teachers • centre nurses • municipal EC leaders, trainers, & students • parents	• questionnaire, interview, focus group interview • statistical analysis, content analysis

Table 1. Finnish EC leadership research in four categories.

As shown in Table 1, leadership research is categorised into pedagogical leadership, distributed leadership, leadership in changing ECEC organisations, and directors' and EC leaders responsibilities. Internal consistency was greater in 'Pedagogical leadership' and 'Distributed leadership' categories: studies focused on defining the phenomenon of leadership and evaluated how it was enacted in everyday life of ECEC services. It seems that in the earliest

Finnish research about leadership, the main focus was on the directors' responsibilities. Later, the focus shifted to distributed leadership and leadership functions. Currently, pedagogical leadership attracts the most interest by Finnish researchers but recently research interest in distributed leadership has also started to increase.

Many Finnish EC leadership studies are grounded on contextually defined leadership, where the context shapes the leadership discourse and leadership culture (Hujala, 2004; Nivala, 1999; Akselin, 2013). In these studies, leadership has been researched from the perspective of ECEC mission and core tasks. Naturally, most leadership researchers' studies are derived from ECEC centres' mission because the researchers themselves have a background in the ECEC teaching professions and they wish to develop ECEC practices by researching and developing leadership. The contextual leadership approach provides the framework for leading practices in the ECEC environment at the micro and macro levels, and it allows the examination of the interaction between the different levels (Nivala, 1999; Hujala, 2004). According to Hujala (2013), leadership roles and responsibilities should arise from the core task of ECEC at every level.

The participants in the studies broadly represented the different levels of contextual leadership. Participants were mostly centre directors, but other staff members have also been studied, as have municipal EC leaders and even municipal committee members. The data collection methods include interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussions, ethnographic observation, and diaries. Most of the research used qualitative data analysis, typically content or narrative analysis. Quantitative analysis as the sole analysis method was rare, although some studies used mixed methods. The central findings are summarised under four sub sections. The conclusions show links to the findings of leadership in Finnish ECEC contexts.

1) Pedagogical leadership

Pedagogical leadership is the core task of ECEC and aims for high quality in centres. The core task is, in turn, shaped by discussion of values and intends to enhance the regulatory basis of childcare. EC leaders need to understand this basis in order to create functional pedagogical practices for their service units (Fonsén, 2014; Kasurinen, 2013; Lehtinen, 2011). Pedagogical leadership is manifested as systematically planned and goal oriented action, which ensures high quality pedagogical practices and equal and homogenous ECEC services (Kari, 2012; Kasurinen, 2013). Pedagogical leadership also aims to

foster an open and confidential atmosphere of communication in the working community (Hirvelä, 2010). The pedagogical leader must have work experience and expertise in pedagogy and the substance of ECEC (Fonsén, 2014; Kasurinen, 2013).

For pedagogical leadership to be successful, employees must feel secure; this security is derived from the leader's presence in the work community and from the leader's trust in their employees' expertise. The leader must also set a good example and encourage his/her employees to commit to high quality pedagogy on a day to day basis. (Kari, 2012; Kasurinen, 2013; Hirvelä, 2010; Heikkilä, 2014; Liukkonen, 2012). The pedagogical leader is also responsible for ensuring the employees' professional development and peer learning (Hirvelä, 2010; Heikkilä, 2014). Today, due to the large size of their units, EC leaders are often absent from their centres and this creates an insecure atmosphere and threatens high quality pedagogy (Hirvelä, 2010; Kasurinen, 2013; Kari, 2012).

Successful pedagogical leadership requires organisational structures. Without such structures, pedagogical leadership relies too heavily on the leaders' personal qualities, such as their enthusiasm and/or individual skills (Fonsén, 2014; Heikkilä, 2014; Kari, 2012). The requisite structures consist of organisational guidelines, work and time allocations, the presence of the leader, and the leader's personal abilities and skills (Kari, 2012). Findings from several studies imply that a lack of organisational structure or goal orientation, unspecified work allocation, and undefined leadership tasks and responsibilities force leaders to use their work time on practical tasks – usually dealing with daily management issues – rather than on pedagogical leadership (Fonsén, 2014; Hirvelä, 2010; Liukkonen, 2012; Kari, 2012; Heikkilä, 2014; Kasurinen, 2013).

Pedagogical leadership is undertaken at many different levels and with different predefined modalities, with leadership responsibility dispersed throughout all levels (Kasurinen, 2013). Guidelines decided at the administrative level are implemented in ECEC settings and factually performed by teachers, systematically planned and goal oriented actions with the children (Kari, 2012, Fonsén, 2014).

Pedagogical leadership comprises human resource management, guidance on pedagogical practices, planning and assessing the pedagogical actions, and envisioning pedagogical practices. In ECEC, leaders with undefined responsibilities and too large an area of responsibility may take their focus away from pedagogy and this can make the prioritisation of work difficult (Hirvelä, 2010; Fonsén, 2014; Liukkonen, 2012).

The most vital tool for pedagogical leadership is discussion (Kari, 2012; Heikkilä, 2014; Fonsén, 2014). Most staff of ECEC centres want more pedagogical content in general discussions. Conversations and benchmarking are also seen as tools for professional development. Peer group discussions enable mutual feedback regarding the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the staff, and in addition, it enables shared meaning-making among practitioners (Kasurinen, 2013; Heikkilä, 2014; Liukkonen, 2012).

2) Distributed leadership

Distributed and shared leadership manifests as multilevel and multifaceted action, and it can occur between different levels (for example, between the administration and ECEC centre). The most important requirement for successful distributed/shared leadership seems to be trust between the practitioners, which must involve face-to-face communication to flourish. Shared information, understandings, and structure of the leadership were also seen as important (Aumala, 2014; Heikka, 2014; Sillanpää, 2010; Soukainen, 2013). In a distributed organisation – that is, where director may have several centres to take care of – the director's staff is more independent than in a traditional EC organisation. However, the director must be available to staff when needed. Independence – and help from the director when needed – may lead to the empowerment of the entire staff, which improves work wellbeing (Halttunen, 2009; Aumala, 2014). Distributed organisations should be led by self-guided teams. Unclear power relationships prevent leadership sharing: commanding or yielding to peers was considered very difficult by staff, so human resource management was seen a leadership area that could not be shared with other practitioners (Halttunen, 2009; Aumala, 2014).

Shared leadership can be enacted in many ways: it involves expertise in decision making, explanations about the meaning of ECEC to stakeholders, dialogic leadership, the sharing of tasks with staff, and the maintenance of workplace wellbeing. In particular, it is crucial in the area of pedagogical leadership, which is considered the most important leadership responsibility in EC leadership. Mutual understanding and collectively agreed practices are crucial for successful pedagogical leadership (Aumala, 2014; Heikka, 2014).

Shared leadership can be successful only with an explicit organisational structure and established resources for decision-making, communication, and interactions between practitioners (Aumala, 2014; Soukainen, 2013). Even though employees are willing to share leadership and responsibilities, they do not want more work without compensation (Sillanpää, 2010). Centre

directors can find sharing leadership more difficult than their staff. Finding time for knowledge and information sharing and joint meaning making in the busy everyday life of ECEC centres is also difficult (Heikka, 2014).

3) Leadership in changing the ECEC organisation

In recent years, communal ECEC organisations have been changing: discourse about ECEC has been shifting from social services to the educational services. The core task of ECEC is perceived in a similar way at all administrative levels (municipal civil servants, centre directors, kindergarten teachers), which enables shared visions and strategy making. On the other hand, the term 'early childhood education' is poorly defined, which causes difficulties when defining ECEC services (Ottman, 2008; Söyrinki, 2010). Due to Finland's deteriorating financial situation, municipalities are trying to optimise the organisation of services. This has led to organisational changes, such as favoring the distributed organisation model, i.e. reducing the number of middle management positions.

Several studies have focused on ECEC management reforms. One typical feature of these reforms has been the change of the director's position or mandate. The role of ECEC program director has been shifted from a part time leadership position to administrative leadership, which means that the director does not work with a group of children but focuses instead on administrative tasks exclusively. Directors of childcare programs thought the organisational reforms helped to clarify their work and their authority over the pedagogical issues in their own unit. On the other hand, the director's power to influence ECEC issues has decreased at the municipal level. The new situation has brought new challenges and a greater workload: directors thought that the amount of secretarial work and service management had increased and consequently they did not have enough time for pedagogical leadership or human resource management (Karavirta, 2013; Päivinen, 2010). The organisational changes aimed to ensure consistently high quality across the ECEC organisation; however, this has increased the amount of work needed to conduct human resource management, plan activities, and implement new procedures (Karavirta, 2013; Päivinen, 2010; Ottman, 2008).

Directors also hoped that they could use their expertise in ECEC while undertaking strategic planning and acting as advocates for children and families. However, directors of centres thought that their leadership only influenced people at their centre, whereas municipal EC leaders considered their leadership influenced the whole municipal ECEC organisation. Most of

the directors' time was spent on human resource management, pedagogical leadership, planning, service management, and the development of ECEC practices in their own unit (Päivinen, 2010; Söyrinki, 2010).

4) EC leaders' responsibilities

Becoming a strategic leader in ECEC is usually an accidental and unplanned process. Quite typically, EC leaders – both directors in ECEC settings and administrative municipal leaders – are practitioners who have been reluctant to take a position of leadership (Akselin, 2013; Kirvesniemi, 2004). Strategic leadership was found to entail the pursuit of competent leadership, which involves considering of the wellbeing of children and their families, and ensuring the cooperation of practitioners. The most important leadership tasks of the strategic leader are maintaining relationships and influencing other practitioners, such as politicians, municipal administrative leaders, civil servants, directors of centres, and families. The strategic leader, like any EC leader, must have an understanding of pedagogy and the core task of ECEC (Akselin, 2013; Kauppinen, 2004). EC leaders are responsible for making the meaning of ECEC clear to stakeholders, thereby raising their appreciation (Kauppinen, 2004; Akselin, 2013).

The mandate for leadership varies between municipalities, which logically influences leadership practices. The areas of responsibility falling under the remit of EC leaders seem to have increased in recent years. To be a successful leader, one must have a clear position and mandate, and have a clear understanding of one's responsibilities (Kirvesniemi, 2004; Akselin, 2013; Kauppinen, 2004; Saksa, 2006). However, there is common understanding that leadership in ECE should be democratic and dialogic (Saksa, 2006).

A competent director or EC leader possesses the following qualities: good interpersonal and communication skills, service management skills, perseverance, courage, openness to change, spontaneity, self-confidence, organisational skills, and a supportive attitude toward employees. In addition, an effective professional leader has considerably experience and training in ECEC (Kirvesniemi, 2004; Akselin, 2013; Saksa, 2006).

The professional development of EC leaders is related to experiential learning, solving work challenges, training, obtaining new knowledge, support for work, and development as a leader. The means of professional development are training, professional guidance, feedback from employees, and self-reflective practices (Pisto, 2013; Saksa, 2006). A lack of time hinders professional development and makes it quite difficult for leaders to attend

training. Leaders believed that they get enough support in their work from their peers (that is, other leaders) but not from their superiors, especially not from municipal administrative leaders (Pisto, 2013).

CONCLUSION

In Finland, it seems that ECEC leadership has been researched diversely since 2000. The leadership studies reported in this chapter are representative of the entire EC leadership and management field and the municipal decision making system concerning ECEC matters in Finland. Based on this analysis, four thematic categories were created. These studies focused on pedagogical leadership, distributed leadership, leadership in changing ECEC organisations and the responsibilities of directors and EC leaders. Pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership have been researched most. These studies aim to ensure high quality ECEC practice: pedagogical leadership develops the content of ECEC, and distributed leadership develops organisation's functions. Significance of pedagogical leadership arises from the diverse backgrounds of ECEC staff, which has led to the increasing need of instructive leadership and support. Distributed leadership tries to find new kinds of leadership practices in distributing the functions of EC organisations.

Other categories comprise studies of leaders' and directors' responsibilities, changes in ECEC organisations and professional development of leaders. Generally, most of the studies are strongly connected to the core tasks of the ECEC and adopt a theoretical approach based on contextual thinking. One explanation for this is that typical Finnish EC leadership researcher is someone with an ECEC training background, usually as a kindergarten teacher with many years work experience in the field.

The review of the literature revealed common areas of interest in each of the research categories. Successful leadership actions require open and safe communication, appreciation of everyone's expertise and especially trust between leaders and other practitioners. It requires adequate face-to-face communication with the director (Kari, 2012; Kasurinen, 2013; Hirvelä, 2010; Heikkilä, 2014; Liukkonen, 2012; Soukainen 2013). In that sense it seems contradictory that directors and EC leaders have more and more units and subordinates to take care of, because it is all the more difficult to have enough time and possibilities for face-to-face communication.

Common concerns were inadequate leadership structures (such as guidelines and explicit mandate and responsibilities) and poorly defined work descriptions of ECEC practitioners. This was seen in all organisational levels.

Significance of defined leadership structures was raised in all research categories. Especially, when positional leaders share leadership with various staff, structures are necessary. Otherwise, taking and committing to leadership responsibilities depends on the individuals' own interests (see Fonsén, 2014; Heikkilä, 2014; Kari, 2012; Akselin, 2013).

Leadership responsibilities and power distribution are often ambiguous. In Finland the structure of ECEC system is strictly regulated by legislation. ECEC services are mainly provided by municipalities. All the decisions are made at the municipal level by committees and boards composed of elected politicians (see Heikka, 2014). Finnish ECEC centres are not independent, stand alone units with their own administration, agenda, and finance policies, but are an integral part of the whole municipal organisation. As such, they lack independent decision-making power over the structure and finances of ECEC settings. However, analysed research indicates that responsibility for ECEC decisions predominantly rests on the shoulders of the centre directors (cf. Hujala, 2004), although ECEC governance is conducted at the municipal level rather than at the level of a childcare unit.

ECEC as a part of municipal service organisation has not been researched and work at the ECEC setting is not seen as a part of municipal service production. Municipal organisation manifests itself only through financial optimisation, not as an employer or decision making body. The director of the centre was rarely seen as a representative of the employer (for example, the municipality); rather, the director was seen as a colleague and an important member of the community with authority to make decisions concerning other staff members (Hjelt, 2013). Also other stakeholders – staff and parents, tend to think that the director of a ECEC setting has the authority to make decisions concerning staff recruitment, resourcing, financing, and the pedagogical agenda, even though almost all of these decisions are made at the municipal level. EC leadership occurs on different levels, and is also seen differently: centre directors think that their leadership influences people working at the centre, while municipal EC leaders consider their leadership influence to extend to the whole municipal ECEC organisation (Fonsén, 2014; Heikka, 2014; Söyrinki, 2010).

In terms of the directors' responsibilities, pedagogical leadership is still seen as central in the work of centre directors. Strong pedagogical leadership must be based on vision, tools, and strategy, and on the structure of pedagogical leadership, the staff' expertise and professionalism, a clear core task, and the values that are articulated (Fonsén, 2014; Heikka, 2014). Providing a high

quality service is also a part of pedagogical leadership. In order to ensure high quality pedagogy, directors must affect both the pedagogical practices and the practitioners who physically work with children (Hujala & Fonsén, 2009; Fonsén, 2014).

It seems that the tasks and responsibilities of EC centre directors are not clearly defined and the workload is excessive; this may lead to the directors experiencing burnout. The numerous tasks and fragmented responsibilities that directors face shift the focus away from pedagogy. Furthermore, the fractured nature of directors' work may hinder them from carrying out human resource management and pedagogical leadership, which are considered the most important functions for succeeding in the core task. Hurried everyday life in a ECEC setting limit the amount of communication, information and knowledge sharing and also hinder development of new practices (Fonsén, 2014; Hujala & Eskelinen, 2013; Pisto, 2013).

Distributed leadership is increasingly evident in the work orientation of pedagogically trained teachers because ECEC organisations are nowadays distributed and directors have bigger units and more subordinates. Because this can lead to a situation where the leader is absent more and more, teachers should show initiative and independent development of their own work and profession, but also the pedagogy and practices of the whole work community. This is called *teacher leadership* (see more, for example, Harris, 2003). To date, this kind of teacher leadership however, has not been researched in Finland.

Distributed leadership can be understood as the shared responsibility for the core task, goals, and guidelines of the organisation. It is a reciprocal process among the practitioners and among the different levels. Shared leadership in EC environments could enhance the pedagogical practices and lead to a self-directed work culture and hence improved quality (Hujala, Heikka & Fonsén, 2009; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011). Pedagogical leadership is not shared adequately among the directors and teachers, or among the administration and centres (see Heikka, 2014; Halttunen, 2009). Furthermore, staff members are not always willing to commit to shared leadership or to leading their own work, and reinforcing shared leadership requires determined action (Fonsén, 2014; Sillanpää, 2010). In distributed organisations, sharing leadership with self-directed teams seems to lead to independent decision making and the strengthening of team work (Halttunen, 2009).

DISCUSSION

It is interesting that even though Finnish teachers are highly trained and very competent, research on teacher leadership remains scant. This indicates that thinking about leadership is not being shaped by the challenges faced by leaders of expert organisations. Currently, although teachers are independent in their teaching profession, they feel they lack leadership power. It may also imply that teachers lack leadership training, and this prevents them from taking on demanding leadership responsibilities within their roles as an EC teacher. In addition, structures that enable and support teacher leadership are lacking. It seems that to strengthen and support the importance of teachers' professional work, research into teacher leadership topics in Finnish ECEC will be one of the most important topics in the future.

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