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ENACTMENTS OF DISTRIBUTED PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP BETWEEN EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRE DIRECTORS AND DEPUTY DIRECTORS IN NORWAY

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative explorative case study aims to investigate Norwegian early childhood education and care directors` and deputy directors` enactments of distributed pedagogical leadership to get a deeper understanding of the relational dynamics between them. In order to achieve the aim, an interpretative approach was used to collect data from individual interviews with six participants. In addition, we collected the participants job-descriptions. Distributed leadership frameworks that involve multiple persons enacting pedagogical leadership in interdependent ways, inform the study. The findings of this study illustrate those enactments of distributed pedagogical leadership between ECEC directors and deputy directors occur both by leading together where they enact the same leadership task and where they work separately with tasks, they have divided between them. Additionally, shared authority, dialogue on pedagogical development, support and division of tasks show various forms of distributed pedagogical leadership enactments. The study highlights some implications for further attention to take benefit from distributed pedagogical leadership. This is important as distributive leadership is seen to increase the capacity of pedagogical leadership through collaboration to deal with challenges and high workload resulting from new requirements and changes.

Keywords: Distributed pedagogical leadership, early childhood education and care, centre director, deputy director, qualitative interviews, Norway

INTRODUCTION

Globally, considerable attention is being paid to the importance of leadership in early childhood education and care (ECEC), and pedagogical leadership is emphasised as a key factor for high-quality pedagogical work (Cheung et al., 2019; Modise et al., 2023; OECD, 2020). In this article, we understand pedagogical leadership as a broad concept assuming that pedagogical leadership means combining both leadership and management tasks, such as curriculum work, pedagogical development, administrative and human resource management (Fonsén et al., 2023; Halttunen et al., 2022). In addition, pedagogical leadership involves both internal and external influential factors such as values, culture, customs, policies, national curricula and global economy (Palaiologou et al., 2023). This means that in ECEC, pedagogical leadership can be distributed between several actors according to the country and local contexts (Halttunen et al., 2022). Functions can be shared within the leadership team, between centre directors and

teacher leaders, or between centre directors working in pairs that have responsibility for more than one centre (Douglass, 2019; Fonsén & Mäntyjärvi, 2019; Heikka & Suhonen, 2019).

In this qualitative explorative case study (Yin, 2014) we investigate the enactments of distributed pedagogical leadership between Norwegian early childhood centre directors and deputy directors' pedagogical leadership. According to Heikka (2014) distributed pedagogical leadership refers to an interdependence between the leadership enactments by different leadership stakeholders in the work community that rely on a shared understanding of pedagogical work. In Norway, the director of the centre is the daily leader with an overall responsibility for pedagogical and administrative tasks and the deputy director is the second responsible leader who works in close relationship with the director (Halttunen et al., 2019). This means that both the leadership positions operate at centre director leadership level.

While pedagogical leadership distribution between centre directors and teacher leaders has been a primary research focus (Heikka et al., 2019; Heikka & Suhonen, 2019), less attention has been paid to investigating the distribution of leadership between ECEC centre directors and deputy directors (Halttunen et al., 2022). In fact, according to Halttunen and Waniganayake (2021) deputy directors seem to be the `forgotten leaders` in ECEC. Nevertheless, the position of deputy director is important as they are employed to assist the centre director in leading the centre and thus provide workplace support for the centre director and other staff (Halttunen & Waniganayake, 2021), This is crucial as ECEC centre directors and teacher leaders across countries have challenges enacting their leadership role balancing administrative and pedagogical leadership duties (Palaiologou et al., 2023). They experience a demanding work environment and workload (Elomaa et al., 2020; Kristiansen et al., 2021; Kupila et al., 2023; OECD, 2019).

In previous research, the authors of this study investigated the roles of both centre directors and deputy directors in Australia, Finland and Norway (Halttunen et al., 2022; Halttunen et al., 2019). Findings from the small-scale cross-national studies demonstrate that there are differences within and across the three countries in the way that the two leadership positions and leadership responsibilities are structured and enacted. Expectations of each role and how they engage in leadership are framed by their centre contexts. In both Australia and Finland deputy directors seem to focus more on administrative work, while in Norway the deputy director appeared to be more involved in pedagogical work. The findings indicate that there is more flexibility for the centre director and deputy director in Norway to negotiate their roles and functions. Nevertheless, we have little insights into distributed pedagogical leadership between the two leadership positions that goes beyond task distribution (Halttunen & Waniganayake, 2021). Therefore, our aim was to investigate Norwegian ECEC directors` and deputy directors` enactments of distributed pedagogical leadership to get a deeper understanding of the relational dynamics between them. This is important because their distributed pedagogical leadership is essential for supporting each other and other colleagues in improving centre quality. An interpretive approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) was chosen to achieve our aim. Data consists of semi-structured individual interviews with three directors and three deputy directors in Norwegian ECEC and their job-descriptions. The research question that we address is: How do centre directors and deputy directors describe their enactments of distributed pedagogical leadership?

The centre director and deputy director in the Norwegian context

As stated in the Kindergarten Act (§17) (The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2005), centres must have adequate pedagogical and administrative leadership. This means that the owner must set aside sufficient resources for the centre director position so that she/he can perform the tasks required by law and the Framework Plan, which create the space in which the position of deputy director arises. While the director is the daily leader and has an overall leadership responsibility for her/his centre, the deputy director is the second in charge. As Norwegian ECEC centre directors have complex leadership responsibilities that requires leadership capacity and the sharing of leadership responsibilities, some directors work in close-knit networks of directors within their ownership organisation or communities, while others have a deputy director to assist them. This means that the deputy director has a different position than an ECEC teacher whose primary work is to lead a group of children. How leadership is distributed depends on both the size and the organisation of the respective centres, which means that directors operate in rather different contexts and with different organisational support (The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2018).

In Norwegian ECEC, a director is either a trained ECEC teacher (with a bachelor's degree) or has another type of education on a tertiary level that qualifies them to work with children and provides them with pedagogical expertise (The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2005). A director has responsibility for the centre's tasks overall, including those performed by other staff.

Leadership positions and the time allocated to leadership tasks are regulated through special agreements between employee and employer (The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, 2020). These regulations apply to both public and private centres. In centres with an enrolment of 42 children or more, a full director position must be set aside for leadership tasks. In large centres, a deputy director position should be created. For example, a centre with 100 children may have two full-time leadership positions: director and deputy director.

Distributed pedagogical leadership

In taking a distributed perspective, leadership is seen as a collective social process that emerges from interactions between multiple actors. Spillane et al. (2001) has suggested a framework of various ways in which professionals can collaborate to achieve common goals. "Collaborated distribution" is where two or more leaders work together in the same place and time to perform the same leadership task. "Collective distribution" and "coordinated distribution" means that professionals are working separately, but interdependently enabling each other's work. In coordinated distribution, professionals work in sequence to complete a leadership task. Although these various ways of collaborating are developed from research in the school context, they can occur in the ECEC organization (Heikka, 2014; Heikka & Suhonen, 2019; Kahila et al., 2020).

Interdependence between multiple professionals in enactments of distributed leadership is essential when working towards shared goals (Spillane et al., 2001). Heikka et al. (2019) have identified five dimensions of distributed pedagogical leadership in the ECEC organisation that create interdependence between the enactments of professionals. The *fir*st dimension is relating to enhancing the shared consciousness of visions and strategies between the professionals in a municipality. The *second* dimension, distributing responsibility for

pedagogical leadership, involves support and resources from leaders to realise pedagogical leadership. Distributing and clarifying power relations between stakeholders is the *third* dimension, which includes supporting centre directors and pedagogical leaders in their decision-making in respect of pedagogical development, the distribution of authority and guiding and developing the leadership tasks of staff. Distributing the enactment of pedagogical improvement within centres involves designing leadership functions that are shared between centre directors and teachers as facilitators of pedagogical reflection and development in staff teams (the fourth dimension). The *fifth* dimension relates to developing a strategy for distributed pedagogical leadership that is based on planning, goal-orientation and evaluation to enhance the participation of staff and create efficient structures for distributed leadership. By focusing on the five dimensions, Heikka (2019) suggests that distributed pedagogical leadership can be promoted.

We add to the theory of distributed pedagogical leadership the concept of hybrid leadership that has been developed by Gronn (2011) as a revision of distributed leadership. He argues that the concept of hybrid leadership is better to reflect the combined work of individual and collaborative leadership, and thus highlight the dynamics in distributed leadership between power and democratic leadership. The hybrid leadership theory helps us to emphasise diverse pedagogical leadership practices in the ECEC work community (Bøe & Hognestad, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this qualitative exploratory case study (Yin, 2014) was to gain a deeper insight into ECEC centre directors and deputy directors' enactments of distributed pedagogical leadership. Therefore, we chose an interpretative approach to achieve this aim because we wanted to understand the leadership enactments from the perspectives of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The Norwegian agency for shared services in education and research (2022) approved this study, and informed consent was obtained from the six participants after being given information about the purpose of the study. The participants were assured of their confidentiality and informed they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. When reporting the findings, names are replaced with fictitious names.

Participants and procedures

We used the findings from semi-structured individual interviews with three Norwegian directors and three deputy directors including their job descriptions that was completed as part of a tri-nation study of ECEC centre directors and deputy directors in Australia, Finland and Norway (Halttunen et al., 2022; Halttunen et al., 2019). The participants were women between the ages of 40 and 60. They were invited by email, and after they accepted the invitation, further agreements were conducted. The centres selected were in different municipalities in Southeastern part of Norway, two of which was private non-profit ECEC centres and one public centre. The centres had 100 children or more and had a full-time centre director position and a formal deputy director position. In two of the centres, the deputy director position was an 80 percent position and in one centre it was a full-time position. The criteria for centre selection were that both directors and deputy directors have a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and two or more years of experience working as a leader. Both private and public centres were selected. Given these selection criteria, this study relied on convenience sampling, taking account of geographical considerations and professional networks in the researchers' local communities. Information about each participant`s experiences, further education and position is provided in the table below.

Table 1
Participant`s experiences, further education and positions.

Director	Deputy director	Position	Years of experience as leaders	Further education	Type of centres
Trine		100%	33 years	60 credits leadership and administration studies	Private
Anne		100%	20 years	15 credits leadership study. Work based leadership training program	Public
Helene		100%	11 years	Work based leadership training program. Coaching study	Private
	Maria	80%	2 years	10 credits supervision	Public
	Randi	80%	3 years	Starting 30 credits national leadership program Participating in leadership network for deputy director	Private
	Ellinor	100%	4 years	Starting 30 credits national leadership program.10 credits supervision	Private

The individual face-to-face interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) were conducted at the participants' workplace (three centres in total) and they were kept open to enable participants to talk freely about their work as director or deputy director. The interviews were audio-recorded, and each lasted 45 minutes and were transcribed verbatim. Transcribed interview data were 29 pages in total (15 pages from interviews with directors and 14 pages from deputy directors). Six pages of job-descriptions were added.

Data analyses and interpretations

Data analyses involved reading the interview transcripts and job-descriptions several times. The theoretical framework described above, and interpretations were used to balance between structure and openness in the process of analyses. We discussed the data set in the research team in order to identify categories moving between the contextual data set and the theoretical framework (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). This meant that we did not have a fully inductive or deductive analysis but, rather, an abductive process (Brinkmann, 2014).

RESULTS

The analyses identified both collective and collaborated distributed pedagogical leadership enactments were interdependence between ECEC centre directors and deputy directors occurred by leading together and separately. Additionally, shared authority, dialogue on pedagogical development, support and division of tasks show hierarchical and democratic relationships, which indicate various forms of distributed pedagogical leadership enactments in line with Spillane (2006) and Gronn (2011). Figure 1 below illustrates the main findings.

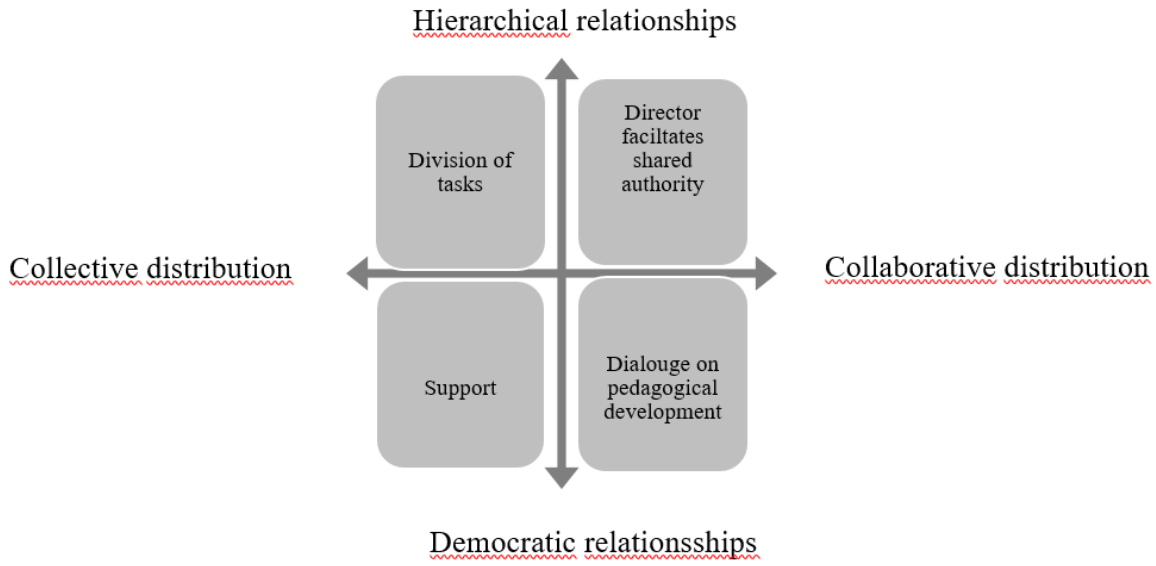

Figure 1
Various enactments of distributed pedagogical leadership

Shared authority

The leadership distribution includes both hierarchical and democratic interdependent relationships. Hierarchical relations emerge through vertical distribution, which is emphasised in the job descriptions. The job description for the director and deputy director closely followed each other, but the wording of responsibilities was different. Using the word "in charge of" (directors) and "contribute to" (deputy director) clarify that the main responsibility lies with the director and that deputy director is assisting the director. The director–deputy power relationship creates a hierarchical relationship, as the director is the one who can "give" shared power and authority to the deputy directors. This seems to influence how deputy directors see themselves, as an assistant who facilitates the director's workload but has less autonomy than they would like.

> You are in a somewhat in the shadow, and this does not have to do with your relationship with the director but with us as deputy directors experiencing ourselves as assistants. Sometimes I might want to take other paths to a goal than what I am instructed to do. That does not make it a difficult collaboration, but it is clear that this has to do with what I have highlighted as a desire for more autonomy and independence. (Deputy director, Randi)

The deputy directors feel that they have an important leadership responsibility, and they are happy that they do not have the overall responsibility for the centre. At the same time, they want to be more independent than they feel they are. Even though they make everyday decisions on their own, some find that they have fallen into a pattern where they often must get confirmation from the director.

Both directors and deputy directors experience democratic enactments of distributive pedagogical leadership. Common decision-making related to pedagogical work, leading reflective meetings together, daily communication, collective commitment to organisational

aims, values and strategies, trust and equal support lie at the foundation of relations of mutual dependence and influence in leadership. The deputy directors find that they are listened to, and that the director follows up their opinions on pedagogical work and development. Likewise, the director shares her power so that the deputy director can report on pedagogical work that does not meet the centre's quality standards. In the democratic enactments, the deputy directors experience the relationship as a learning relationship, where both parts learn from each other by discussing new solutions and in this way improve together. Thus, a relation of mutual influence is created through this learning relationship.

Dialogue on pedagogical development

In their day-to-day leadership, mutual dependence involves collaboration and requires both formal and informal meetings where the director and deputy director discuss and share their views on pedagogical issues, give feedback to each other and communicate strategies for pedagogical leadership. When working together in the same place and/or at the same time, collaborated leadership involves mutual contributions in meetings with ECEC teacher leaders and other staff where they discuss and reflect on pedagogical work to realise their pedagogical intentions and plans. Together with the director, the deputy director sometimes participates in director team meetings in the organisation or community, as well as in professional development courses that relate to the centre's focus areas.

According to the directors that we interviewed, the relationship between director and deputy director is strengthened in that they are two leaders at the top leadership level, even though their leadership authority is not equally shared. Directors value deputy directors as conversation partners with whom they can discuss pedagogical work and get support when "it is blowing a little on the tops sometimes and if you sit alone". Sharing ideas and discussing pedagogical plans with deputy directors' means that directors do not have to involve ECEC teachers in the first stages of pedagogical planning. When new cases are to be implemented, director and deputy director discuss which decisions are to be made. According to the directors, decisions on professional work are largely made together. Nevertheless, both directors and deputy directors are very much aware that it is the directors who are in the position to take the final decision.

Equally important is joint decision-making through daily conversations and ad hoc meetings. The director and the deputy director talk a lot during the day. Where the deputy director and the director have an office in the same building, they emphasise how important their close collaboration is to their common understanding of their pedagogical work. Directors believe it is important to have close collaboration and daily informal dialogue because through dialogue they "develop something in common". A common understanding of their centre's aims, values and strategies is considered important, as they are both responsible for representing these to the staff and to the parents.

Directors find that dialogue and collaboration with the deputy offers a greater opportunity to follow up local and national demands and expectations. In addition, it enables them to keep each other up to date, to discuss quality issues and support one another in respect of solving various problems. The directors find the new requirements and expectations that have led to changes in directors' leadership responsibility challenging.

> Yes, there has been rapid development in the ECEC sector. That is for sure. I find my job exciting but demanding. It is something completely different today than it was a

> few years ago. With everything that comes from the Ministry and the ownership organisation, I have to act on many levels. There are many pedagogical tools to be implemented in the organisation. I try to stay up to date on new research and communicate this to the others in the centre, but it is challenging to do everything you want. (Director, Trine)

Because of the collaboration with the deputy director, the directors find that they are better able to maintain their professional focus over time.

> We make plans together. We always make a rough sketch of what we are going to do over half a year. Then it may well be that the deputy director gets an important role in relation to professional improvement. We may come up with input and then she (the deputy director) brings up new ideas and new knowledge on topics that contribute to the competence development of staff, at staff meetings, we take discussions further as part of further plans. (Director, Anne)

Both the director and deputy director lead pedagogical development among staff in meetings, either alone or together. Professional development may involve facilitating reflection on pedagogical work, implementing pedagogical methods, or guiding the staff. The directors feel that the deputy directors have an important role in facilitating pedagogical development.

Support

When working separately with pedagogical leadership tasks, both the director and deputy director experience support from each other. The relationship is based on trust, and both parties perceive their relationship as supportive. The directors emphasise in particular the support they receive from the deputy directors when they need to raise difficult issues with staff in cases where the pedagogical work is not sufficiently well carried out. Because some deputy directors have an 80 percent position as a deputy, they spend one day a week working as a teacher in the classroom together with the teacher leader and other staff. Working as a teacher gives them insight into how the centre's aims, values and strategies are realised in the direct work with the children, and they can follow up on whether what has been decided upon has been carried out or not, and whether it is working as intended. In this way, deputy directors can assist the director into what is happening in the classrooms as a basis for further pedagogical development.

Working as a classroom teacher is something the deputy directors' value, even though they also find it challenging because the work is fragmented. It is challenging to work as a teacher who is equal to the others in the group because they do not know the children in the same way, and they do not get into the routines as well. At the same time, they find the work meaningful because they can provide guidance to staff and contribute to pedagogical development in classrooms as well as in the organisation.

Division of tasks

Our data shows that leadership tasks distributed from the director to deputy directors can vary according to factors such as organisational size and decision-making and collaboration within centres. Tasks are distributed through negotiation and agreement between director and deputy directors, and the results indicate that deputy directors must largely agree with what the director wants, how the director wants to share leadership tasks and what responsibilities the director wants the deputy directors to have. However, one of the directors believes that it is important

that deputy directors are not only given responsibilities for tasks that they find less interesting but that they are also given challenges in their work. Due to the power relations that are present, the deputy directors are very aware of the director's position as overall leader.

> It was very clear from the beginning that it is the director who has the main responsibility for both staff leadership and pedagogical leadership. She sorts of said that yes, she would like to drop purchases and some administrative things like that. It has really worked well, and I think we both are happy with the division of responsibilities. We have figured things out over time, but we had some things from the start. We have talked about me having a role in relation to children with special needs. I think that is okay to share. It is also a very exciting challenge in the end. (Deputy director, Maria)

The responsibilities of the deputy directors vary according to pedagogical leadership. Some deputy directors have more responsibility for administrative tasks such as purchasing, invoicing, accounting, customer care, caretaker tasks and admission of children, while others have a more distributed responsibility for pedagogical leadership. Deputy directors' pedagogical responsibility largely relates to supervision of staff, chair reflection meetings, following up pedagogical focus areas, pedagogical planning and coordination of daily pedagogical tasks. In their administrative leadership work, there is a lot of practical administrative routine for which the deputy director is responsible. These may be caretaker tasks, operation of buildings, follow-up of routines and HSE. The differences between administrative leadership tasks and pedagogical tasks are not always clear-cut, as many of the tasks relate to administrative leadership, such as facilitating pedagogical work within the staff group. To ensure that the day goes smoothly, and that structures and resources are in place to maintain quality in the pedagogical work, both director and deputy director make morning rounds visiting the classrooms. Then it is a matter of director and deputy director taking turns in order to be effective.

Previously, the directors spent a lot of time coordinating the pedagogical work, facilitating, and preparing for the ECEC teacher teams to work in pedagogical processes in the classrooms. Because the deputy directors have taken a larger role in the coordination of pedagogical work for the entire centre, this has freed up time for directors to work on staff matters.

> Now she (the deputy director) makes a weekly plan where she sets up who is where at all times. It was a bit like my heart child. Moreover, I spent a whole day on that. Every single week, so that it should be completely planned. In addition, changes kept coming. She has taken over that task now. (Director, Anne)

The deputy directors are aware of the power relations and of the director having the overall leadership responsibility. However, because the director is busy with many meetings both inside and outside the centre, many tasks appear that the deputy directors need to handle. Interdependence demands leadership operations that are both administrative and pedagogical, which must be resolved there and then, and often in combination with each other. There may be questions from staff that require guidance or advice in relation to children or parents. The deputy directors indicate that they sometimes worry about maintaining "the professionals in themselves" because they feel responsible for a lot of administrative work that does not require the use or development of their professional competence. At the same time, the deputy directors

have experienced competence development and pedagogical improvement when enacting various tasks.

As mentioned earlier, leadership positions and time allocated to leadership tasks are regulated through job-descriptions and special agreements between employee and employer. However, the practical division of leadership responsibilities between director and deputy directors is determined mainly at the centre level, where the director's needs and wishes would establish the basis for negotiating the division of tasks. As one of the directors, Helene, sees it, there is no need for further pre-planned meetings to discuss the division of responsibility because, according to both the directors and deputy directors, when the division of tasks and responsibility is discussed and agreed upon, this division is clear. If there is a need to discuss it further, they find time during their daily work. One of the directors, Anne, views the division of responsibility as a more shared process where they can support each other. This is why she facilitates space for the negotiation and discussion of pedagogical and practical issues. One strategy, for example, is to have offices that are close to each other in the same building, which enables informal daily encounters. Mutual dependence thus seems to demand easy access to physical informal meetings.

The division of responsibility between director and deputy directors is communicated to the rest of the staff at meetings. One of the directors, Helene, says that they have had conversations with the staff where they make it clear that it is the director who has the main responsibility for the decisions that are made. Even if tasks are defined as the responsibility of the director or the deputy directors, in practice the staff are not always able to remember who is responsible for what. Because the director is often away from the centre attending meetings, the staff contact the deputy director when issues and problems arise. If there are major issues, the deputy director takes responsibility for passing these on to the director.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the further discussion, we point to some implications.

When collaboration consists of interactions that encourage leading through dialogue with input from both the director and deputy director the collaboration fosters an atmosphere that creates opportunities to share professional ideas and experience, engage in pedagogical discussions and joint decision-making. When a director and deputy director lead together in the same staff meetings that involve pedagogical leadership, collaborative distribution may contribute to staff development (Spillane, 2006). This is of great importance as it may prevent divergent practices (Gronn, 2002), which is important to multi-professional staff teams that are enacting pedagogical leadership. According to Heikka (2014), the core of distributed leadership is pedagogical work having the same meaning for the professionals within an organisation. As found by Fonsén and Soukainen (2019) there is a lack of consensus in staff views on pedagogical leadership. This implicate the significance of collaborative distribution through dialogue in deeply ways so that greater impact can be achieved (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018, p. 1). As stated by Kupila et al. (2023), pedagogical leadership as a process of reaching a common understanding of pedagogical work is developed through relationships and dialogues in the work community.

Collaborative distribution can relate to the concept of partnership when it comes to pedagogical leadership as experienced by deputy directors in Finland (Halttunen &

Waniganayake, 2021, p. 6). In accordance with the findings of the Finnish deputies, their partnership was characterised by frequent contact and meetings sharing and exchanging views on pedagogical issues for mutual support. Leading and learning together tend to be more like supportive conversations for each other than like a professional learning community where continuous improvement of the work are undertaken together (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018, p. 1). Spillane (2006) notes that collaborated distribution is more typically found in everyday routine meetings than in the evaluation of leadership tasks as this study shows. Therefore, the findings suggest there is a need to develop and strengthen the collaborative partnership in ways that creates spaces for critical collective reflections and evaluations of pedagogical leadership.

The director and deputy director may share leadership authority, but not in a joint leadership model where they have the same leadership position and share the same responsibility and authority, as is the case in Finland (Fonsén & Mäntyjärvi, 2019). As the deputy was appointed to assist the director, distributed leadership in this study was also negotiated, hierarchical and, to a large extent, "the gift of the head teacher", similar to the findings by Torrance (2013, p. 356). Such vertical/hierarchical distribution of power may challenge a learning relationship and the development of collective capacity if the director does not empower the deputy director to work together with them. At the same time, it is also important to emphasize that in the Norwegian context, the director has the overall legal responsibility. Therefore, distributed pedagogical leadership is not merely collaborative situations (Spillane & Diamond, 2007) as someone has to coordinate and facilitate (Harris et al., 2017). However, as found by Halttunen and Waniganayake (2021, p. 8), the director`s acknowledgement of distributed leadership was essential to ensure a supportive, successful and satisfying role as a deputy director. Due to the increasing need for ECEC leadership in order to take benefit of the distributed capacity of both administrative and pedagogical leadership, we suggest that directors and deputy directors use the five dimensions of interdependence developed by Heikka et al. (2019) as a starting point to discuss and assess their interactions and interdependence. In this way, they can get a better understanding of the relationship dynamics in leadership distribution.

Collective distribution, in where leadership actions are separate, but interdependent (Spillane, 2006) is evident when directors create the conditions, by way of task distribution, for deputy directors to lead. Hierarchical relations occur as the task distribution is determined mainly by the director's needs and wishes. According to Gronn (2002), interdependence can manifest itself in two main ways, the first being overlapping responsibilities and the second being complementary responsibilities. Task distribution seems to reflect overlapping responsibilities, where the director and deputy directors work separately but in mutual dependence, enabling one another to ensure and safeguard the pedagogical work in line with their overall aims and values. For example, deputy directors are closer to the ECEC teachers, who foster learning and support in line with the core values of the centre (Halttunen & Waniganayake, 2021). Being close to their colleagues makes it possible for the deputy directors to build trusting relationships through everyday face-to-face interactions. By building trust the deputy directors create conditions for collaboration, which in turn may strengthen the pedagogical leadership in the work community wherein collaboration and interdependence are required.

One challenge in hierarchical task distribution is to be not fully taking advantage of complementary distribution, as the competence and skills of the leaders seem to a lesser extent to be used in the division of responsibility for tasks. Task distribution seems to be carried out more as "functionally divided leadership" for reducing the director's workload. In addition,

task distribution depends strongly on the director's suggestions and interests. Consequently, directors may not always take part in everyday pedagogical leadership. This in turn will influence organisational capacity for pedagogical improvement, as directors have a significant influence on working conditions and on the support for the professional learning of staff (Douglass, 2019). In order for directors and deputy directors to benefit from one another's knowledge as they develop individually in enactments of distributive pedagogical leadership, they can, according to Gronn (2002), create a common knowledge base consisting of different types of expertise. In this way, developing professional learning communities can be supported by distributed pedagogical leadership (Thornton, 2023). However, to benefit from distributed pedagogical leadership assessing the distribution of leadership responsibilities seem important, which suggests that there is a need to clarify roles and responsibilities and develop strategies for distributed pedagogical leadership (Heikka et al., 2019). As the findings of Halttunen and Waniganayake (2021) show, lack of clarity of the roles and responsibility of deputies and absence of authority to make decisions can hinder leadership enactment by deputy directors.

From the findings, democratic relations are present when the director and deputy director support each other about various issues and difficult matters and keep each other up to date. When working separately, collective distribution seems to foster mutual support, trusting relationships, and structures that enable the work of both, which is important as a lack of appropriate support may limit the potential impact of distributed leadership (Eskelinen & Hujala, 2015). As interdependence is created by way of emotional and professional support this implicate the need for the ECEC owners and the leadership teams to further discuss and evaluate the contribution made by way of various forms of distributed pedagogical leadership to supporting leaders who have a heavy workload as well as to improving pedagogical leadership.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study illustrated those enactments of distributed pedagogical leadership between ECEC directors and deputy directors occur by leading together in time and place where they do the same leadership task and where they work separately with tasks, they have shared between them. Additionally, shared authority, dialogue on pedagogical development, support and division of tasks show hierarchical and democratic relationships.

This study has limitations that need to be considered when generalizing our findings regarding the enactments of distributed pedagogical leadership between ECEC directors and deputy directors. First, as all qualitative studies, only six participants are a limitation, and second, the study relied on convenience sampling that do not produce representative results. However, it does provide rich qualitative information. Finally, we use data only from the Norwegian context. On the other hand, the use of interviews to connect with leadership dynamics between the director and the deputy is a strength.

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