



Strengthening leadership skills through embodied learning in Early Childhood Teacher Education

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Abstract

This research paper presents a qualitative, single case study based on empirical material collected during a course in microteaching in Norwegian Early Childhood Teacher Education. Our research question is: *What leadership skills do students develop in Early Childhood Teacher Education through embodied learning with microteaching?*

We aim to increase research-based knowledge of interdisciplinary and student-active leadership learning, using drama and pedagogy. This paper reports an analysis of last-year-students' experiences of pedagogical leadership, captured through video documentation, written reflection assignments, and written evaluative assignments. We use thematic analysis, and find three main themes: embodied expression, embodied reflection, and embodied collaboration.

Norwegian ECEC teachers seem to lack competence on leadership (Ministry of Education, 2018). Our research contributes on how to strengthen the students' leadership skills. Students express that through embodied learning they have strengthened their self-confidence, ability for reflection, creativity, and giving and receiving feedback, which are important leadership skills. The students report that their embodied experience has given them embodied learning.

Keywords: *drama; embodied learning; leadership skills; microteaching*

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Introduction

This research paper presents a qualitative, single case study based on empirical material collected in 2017, during a course using the method of microteaching in Norwegian Early Childhood Teacher Education (ECTE). The course has been carried out annually from

2013 to 2020. This project explores how students can learn through theoretical studies combined with performance of leadership tasks and reflection in front of and with peers.

Our educational research (Bassey, 1999, p. 39) aims to increase research-based knowledge of the development of leadership skills, with drama and pedagogy in the student-active learning method microteaching. Our research question is: *What leadership skills do students develop in Early Childhood Teacher Education through embodied learning with microteaching?*

Leadership and leadership skills might be defined diversely. Our positioning corresponds to Rodd's basic definition (2013): "Leadership is about how a group of people are influenced (using values and visions) to achieve a common goal" (p. 12). Important factors in leadership from our point of view might be named as human relations, influence through communication, organising the work and reaching common goals. The article points to leadership as embodied. Winther emphasises it as developed through real-world processes (2018, p. 2), as we do in this microteaching course. This study's understanding of leadership and learning will be further outlined in the next section.

We base our definition of embodied learning on Eeva Anttila:

Meaning that learning happens in the entire body, in the human being as a whole and in the social and physical reality that is shaped between people. Embodied learning also means that embodied activity is a crucial part of learning incidents. (2013/2019, p. 48, our translation)

We interpret embodied learning as a combination of the embodied memory of the entire body, integrated with cognitive understanding. The embodied learning stems from the embodied experience.

As practitioner researchers (Taylor, 1996), we inhabit complementary competencies and academic fields from pedagogy and drama, and we contribute with an interdisciplinary exploration. The research is linked to bachelor students in their sixth term, studying to be leaders in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). They attend a 30 ECT interdisciplinary specialisation called *Pedagogical Leadership*. It includes a three-week full-time course in microteaching and preparatory teaching in drama. The literature on the method seems to focus on education in teaching for schoolteachers (see, among others: Allen & Ryan, 1969; de Lange & Nerland, 2018; Karakas & Yükselir, 2021; Kourieos, 2016). We also found studies on microteaching and leadership (Ata, 2018; Hensley, 2021; Winther, 2018). These studies focus on leadership in artistic disciplines and developing self-efficacy as school administrators. Both topics correspond to our research findings. We find our focus on developing leadership in ECTE through embodiment, to be a new and expanded addition to already established use of microteaching.

Developing leadership through the microteaching course also aims to reach the learning outcomes of national and institutional white papers. Paragraph two in the Norwegian

Framework Plan for ECTE states that the student should be able to “use their professionalism to improvisation” and to “lead and supervise colleagues, reflect critically on their own practice and adjust this under supervision” (Ministry of Education, 2012, our translation). A Norwegian report on ECEC teachers’ competences state that they seem to lack competence on leadership (Ministry of Education, 2018). The learning outcomes of our specialisation of *Pedagogical Leadership* stresses that the students should be able to use different mentoring methods to develop the competence of the staff; get experience and courage to use drama pedagogical tools and methods involving both children and staff in ECEC; be conscious of the importance of using their voice and body language in working with leadership roles and have the ability of and understanding for giving and receiving feedback.

In the following we will present the theoretical framework, the methodological design and discussions and findings. Finally, the paper will conclude with some reflections and implications for the practice field.

Theoretical framework

Leadership is about working together to reach common goals (Gotvassli, 2019; Rodd, 2013; Skogen, 2005). To reach these goals, leaders need to help people and organisations to develop, improve, adapt, and change. This might be done by cooperation, collaboration, and giving effective feedback. Nordhaug et al. (2008) say that “by understanding leadership as relation, one has another perspective on leadership, namely that leadership occurs among people. Relations goes both ways. To be guided is in this sense just as active as to lead” (p. 15, our translation).

In the following we will present a short overview of microteaching, as originally described by Allen and Ryan (1969) at Stanford. We will additionally introduce research on embodied learning, as our findings point in this direction. This includes explaining different aspects of feedback.

Microteaching

Allen and Ryan (1969) developed microteaching as an educational concept for teaching at Stanford University. Since then, this concept has been used at universities worldwide (de Lange & Nerland, 2018; Karakas & Yükselir, 2021; Kourieos, 2016; Winther, 2018). The concept lets the students practice teaching with a small group of fellow students or children, with their professor and fellow students giving feedback. When teaching, students need to perform with both body and voice, but we have found little literature on microteaching stressing embodied learning. The aim of microteaching is to develop the students’ self-confidence in their role as teachers. This confidence is made possible by developing a safe environment within a group of peers. At Stanford, each student created a five-minute

teaching sequence documented on video, and they were given response afterwards. Video documentation is not necessary, but according to Allen and Ryan it strengthens the process (1969, p. 54).

Microteaching is connected to social constructivist theories' understanding of learning (Bruner, 1960, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). "Understanding comes from interactions with the environment, cognitive conflict stimulates learning and knowledge occurs when students negotiate social situations and evaluate individual understanding" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2004, p. 29).

Embodied learning

The embodied experiences and the use of both body and mind are part of the learning process in general, as pinpointed by many philosophers and pedagogues from Dewey in 1934, to Gardner in the 1990s, and beyond to Anttila in 2013/2019.

The academic tradition has principally relied on the intellectual and reflective use of the brain, rooted in Cartesian dualism, "understood as thoughts and consciousness as independent of the body" (Anttila, 2013/2019, p. 48). In a Norwegian literature review the term *embodied learning* seems to be linked mostly to physical education and the arts (57 per cent), and 16 per cent to pedagogy (Østern & Bjerke, 2021).

Philosophers have discussed the need to consider the body's importance in learning and comprehending. In his introduction to the Norwegian translation to Merleau-Ponty's book *Phénoménologie de la Perception* (original work published in 1945), Dag Østerberg (1994, p. VI, our translation) writes that "Merleau-Ponty is one of few thinkers in the Western world that takes as a starting point that our understanding of the world is based on our body's understanding of its environment or its situation". Merleau-Ponty himself (1945/1994, p. 103) wrote that *understanding* comes from the body, and Dewey (1934, p. 58) compared the experience with bodily *breathing*: "Experiencing, like breathing, is a rhythm of intakings and outgivings." In psychology and philosophy, the term body schema is used. Body schema with its embodied experience, can be seen as preconscious (Gallagher in Halák, 2018, p. 44). Merleau-Ponty writes that "the body has understood [...], when it has allowed itself to be pierced of a new meaning, when it has acquired a new core of meaning" (1934/1994, p. 103, our translation). We see this as a need for reflection on our embodied experiences, to translate embodied experiences to embodied learning.

As Anttila expresses in her definition, bodily learning takes place in the entire body, where we meet the world with our body in a social context (2013/2019, p. 57). This perspective is also raised by the Danish researcher Holgersen (2007, p. 11), who says that awareness of ourselves and the surrounding world starts by being present with our body. It does not start within the mind. Dahl and Østern (2019, p. 50) describe how feelings, thoughts, and affects are activated in embodied learning. Thomas Dahl contradicts the notion that knowledge is needed before we can perform. He says, "The case is the opposite:

We get knowledge by performing, by distinguishing between what works out well and what does not” (2021, p. 35, our translation).

The pedagogy of drama in education is based on the use of body, voice, and mind, in a fictional “as-if”-world (Anderson, 2004, p. 284). Embodied experience and reflections are important elements. Janek Szatkowski (1985) pinpoints this fact by defining drama pedagogy as “a collective process of investigation, which has as dominant activity the use of an improvised fiction, taken place when two or more participants – in a joined room – represent *as if* actions, using their body and their voice” (p. 142, our translation). Being in-role and engaging “in cognitive tasks (thinking as), they employ metacognition (thinking about) to guide the execution of the task” (Anderson, 2001, p. 268).

Through our bodies and our presence, we have physical and mental experiences which are then subject to further processing and adaptations (Anttila 2013/2019; Braanaas, 1985; Heathcote & Bolton, 1994; Heggstad, 1998). Springborg (2010) points out the use of art and senses in connection with leadership. He describes leadership as an art and stresses the need for sense-making among leaders and the need of leaders coming to their senses. This situation underlines the connection between embodiment and leadership. Katafiasz (2013) points to how “the ability to challenge the status quo and encourage creativity” is similar in drama and transformational leadership (p. 23). Through embodied challenges, such as in drama, there is an input to go forward. “Embodied leadership must in fact be developed through richly faceted real-world learning processes and a common educational journey” (Winther, 2018, p. 2).

Reflection is crucial for strengthening leadership skills. When we look at the etymological meaning of reflection, it is connected to our ability to look at things once more, and it necessary to have something to reflect and sharpen our thoughts upon (Klemp, 2013). Reflection challenges thoughts that we take for granted, and makes us look at and evaluate ourselves, called self-reflection (Grüters, 2011).

Feedback is an important element in microteaching. Our case study puts major emphasis on the experience of giving and receiving feedback, and we therefore present a theoretical framework of embodiment in feedback. It is based on the thought that “intelligence and intellectual activity depends on the body, where information processes and physical processes are attached to each other” (Anttila, 2013/2019, p. 54, our translation). Anttila claims that cognitive and sensorimotor processes are closely related in meaning-making activities, as when one makes decisions or solves problems (2013/2019, p. 54). This is relevant for the students’ experiences of feedback in microteaching.

As human beings we constantly give feedback to and receive feedback from people around us. Such feedback shapes our personality. As coming leaders, the ECTE students need embodied learning to understand the effect of feedback on both themselves and their future colleagues. According to Rodd (2013, p. 168), good leadership is based on delivering effective feedback, to ensure that performance is maximised.

Feedback is a continuous social relation, given through words, eye contact, and body language. It is communication in which content and form merges. Giving feedback is to talk to each other with acknowledgement (Skoglund & Åmot, 2012, p. 21, 23). Respect and appreciation of the other person as an individual is emphasised. Sometimes feedback might emotionally disturb our self-image, and participants receiving feedback might agree or disagree on feedback given to them. Through honest communication, a new understanding of one's own performance might occur. Positive feedback might encourage personal growth and strengthen self-confidence and identity.

Feedback must be explicitly articulated so that a person understands what is expected of him/her and how he/she can change. Espedal (2010, p. 39) uses the term *feedforward* when feedback promotes progress. Constructive feedback might help narrow the gap between present and future competencies (Engh, 2011, p. 105). Such feedback must be clear, specific, and goal-oriented, emphasising the positive without being judgemental. How the language is used is crucial when giving feedback. By using 'I-statements', one can give feedback which will provide ownership and be embodied. It is important to focus on behaviour that is attainable and can be improved or changed. Spurkeland (1998, pp. 49–57) emphasises two qualities needed in relational leadership: awareness of interdependence and awareness of relational courage. Relational courage seems most important in relation to embodied feedback. This is the ability to face difficult conversations and to handle conflicts or other demanding relational situations.

Methodological design

This chapter will present the case study, the research ethics, and the analytic design of the study.

Microteaching as a case study

This is a single case study, within a microteaching-course in ECTE. The case study gives us the opportunity to study the development of students' leadership skills. Winston (2006) states that the intention of a case study is "to further our understanding by concentrating on depth rather than breadth." (p. 41). We have chosen to concentrate on the implementation of a single year (2017) of the microteaching course.

We will present a description of the case, to make it easier to understand our findings. The microteaching course has two goals concerning the development of leadership skills:

1. To let students develop their consciousness of and competence in leadership through fictional student-active experiences.
2. To let students experience different aspects of feedback as a tool for learning and mentoring fellow students and future colleagues.

We base our course on three elements described by Allen and Ryan (1969): planning; teaching; observation and critique. Half of the students plan and conduct a drama in education either as if it was with a group of children or as an introduction at a staff meeting. Drama in education refers to the use of drama techniques to support learning (Anderson, 2004, p. 282). The students are given children's literature as their starting point for developing a fictional "as-if" world (Anderson, 2004). The rest of the students prepare for observation and feedback. We mentored both groups in their preparations.

Each drama group presents the task in front of student peers and professors. This presentation is followed by critique from their feedback group, other peers, and professors. The student's presentations from both drama- and feedback groups are documented on video.

Following the session, each student receives a video-copy of their performance and can study themselves from the "outside". In the last session, all the students and teachers look through some of the videos together. Straight afterwards the students write their evaluative assignments, and later a written reflection assignment.

The research setting is the microteaching course. Our empirical data is based on the work of the 2017-course with 27 final-year students attending. We have video-documentation from all ten student-group presentations, 27 written evaluative student assignments, and 27 written reflection assignments. We started to transcribe and analyse the ten videos from student presentations of both drama- and feedback groups, each approximately twenty minutes. We then analysed the written evaluative assignments and the reflection assignments. As explained in the next chapter, we decided to use only our written material.

Research ethics

We made a written agreement of consent with each student on using the course material for research purposes. The Norwegian Committee for Research Ethics approved the project. We have the permission to use video-documentation, written evaluative student assignments, and the reflection assignments. The students signed an agreement of consent on the first day of the course, and an improved form after finishing the course and the writing of the reflection assignment. We decided to do this to assure students of their right to withdraw their permission at any time and that the research would not affect their grades. All 27 students signed the agreement in both rounds, but fewer students (two) in the last round withheld the rights for their videos to be presented in research conferences.

The written material is anonymised before the analysing process. We considered the ethical legitimacy of using videos to be uncertain, since they cannot be anonymised. We did a first analysis of the videos and finding no contradictions between the results of video analysis and the analysis of the written material, we therefore decided not to use the videos.

As professors we designed the evaluative student assignments and the reflection tasks. The students might censor written answers to please their professors (Greene & Hill, 2005;

Meyer & Reigstad, 2014), and therefore our data will not necessarily catch all details of the experiences. In addition, the student quotations used in this paper are translated from Norwegian, which entails the risk of inaccurate translation. We find the results of this study to be similar to those of Meyer and Reigstad's comparable study from 2014. Despite the limited number of informants, we therefore find our findings to be valid.

We have chosen not to distinguish the gender of the students but name them all as women. The five male students are a minority and more easily identified.

Analytic design

In this combined teaching- and research project, we enter with roles as both professors and researchers. Philip Taylor (1996, p. 27) calls this research position *the reflective practitioner-researcher*, building on Donald Schön's writings (1991). New research points to reflexivity as a further development, "complexifying thinking or experience by exposing contradictions, doubts, dilemmas, and possibilities" (Cunliffe in Springborg & Sutherland, 2014, p. 40). As professors and researchers in action, we reflect and analyse while teaching and take a reflexive approach afterwards. This context is an insider's view. To be a reflective practitioner-researcher in this case study allows for a process of analysing and coding the data while still collecting new data (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 204). Together with the analyses of the collected data, this strengthens the reliability of the study.

We use thematic analysis on the written material and the video-documentation of this case study. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis can report on "experiences, meanings and the reality of participants", and "can be a method which works both to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality'" (p. 81).

For our analysis of the qualitative data, we began by immersing ourselves into the data and coding expressions of interest for the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 204). We looked for codes connected to leadership skills, student experiences, and learning outcomes. As already mentioned, we first transcribed and analysed the ten documented videos from student presentations of both drama- and feedback groups, but chose not to use them. For the written student assignments (evaluations and reflections) we started with open coding, by identifying data related to the research question.

The students had marked if they took part in a drama- or feedback group. That helped us gain information from different perspectives. We will in our analysis mark the student quotes with (a) for the written evaluative student assignments and (b) for the reflection assignments.

The evaluative assignments consist of nine questions, where the first five are directly related to the frames of the course. Our analysis concentrates on the last four questions. These questions focus on the students' experiences with their role in the practical assignments and video-documentation, their learning outcomes, and what, if anything, they might have learned about themselves. The reflection assignment asks for analysis of their

video-documented work and a reflection on their choices while leading sessions, how the making of these choices affected them, and the challenges they faced in leading drama sessions.

Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 224) state that a good code captures one idea, while a theme has a central organising concept that contains many different ideas or aspects. In the content analyses of the two assignments, we have looked for statements that belong together. We found the key aspects and codes to be feelings, the use of body, mind and voice, self-reflection, mastering, aesthetic processes, creativity, collaboration, and collaborative feedback. These findings were then organised in three main concepts as themes: embodied expressions, embodied reflection, and embodied collaboration. We will work on these findings in the next chapter.

Findings and discussion

This paper looks at what leadership skills students develop in Early Childhood Teacher Education, through embodied learning with microteaching.

Embodied learning is a keyword in our finding. We see embodied experience as “crucial for the development of concepts and abstract reasoning” (Anttila, 2013/2019, p. 52, our translation). As pointed out by Biljana Fredriksen (2013) the learning process should integrate body, mind, feelings, and intellect (p. 28). Our students report that their *leadership skills* and ability for *reflection* are strengthened. We see this as embodied experiences transformed to embodied learning.

The main concepts of the findings; embodied expressions, embodied reflection, and embodied collaboration, are all encapsulated in the term *embodied learning*. This chapter will present the main findings as aspects and codes, based on the students’ statements in their written evaluations and assignments.

Feelings

We find that many students write and talk of feelings, thoughts and affects (Dahl & Østern, 2019, p. 50). They express feelings and thoughts connected to both the drama- and feedback processes and to looking at the video documentation. We asked the students how they experienced the video documentation and what they learned by looking at the videos afterwards (*a*). Their answers focus on two aspects: the video-documentation itself and looking at the videos afterwards. Many students felt uncomfortable during the video-documentation. They use words such as: “challenging”, “uncomfortable”, “artificial”, “unpleasant”, and “afraid of insulting”. But even though they experienced the video-documentation as challenging, they also found it useful and felt that it generated learning. One student says, “It was useful to look at myself, afterwards. I could observe the positive

aspects that I didn't see during the video recording" (a). We find that this student has gained new competence, which has come from adjustments made after looking at the video-documentation. This corresponds with Kourios' (2016, p. 67) reference to Baecher on viewing video-documentation. There can be an imbalance between what teachers/students believe happens in a lesson and what really has happened. Looking at video-documentation might lead to new understanding.

A student from a drama group expresses that "to practice makes us dare more than when we started practising in ECTE. I feel safer by getting experience as a leader of a meeting and by collaboration" (b). Another says: "To feel it on your body, how it can be to lead a staff meeting, I think it can make me more suitable for leading one in the future" (b). One student report getting better at believing in herself. She says these tasks helps her to be more self-confident, also as a teacher-to-be (a). Ata (2018) expresses the importance of self-efficacy for leaders, and that "increasing self-efficacy beliefs of educational leaders is important in that they need these beliefs in order to be successful in their occupations" (p. 2731). By practising leadership, these students report experiencing a feeling of security, and this embodied experience gives them self-confidence.

Our student data (a)+(b) suggests that the use of the senses is essential for learning (cf. Anttila, 2013/2019; Springborg, 2010). Most of the students express how senses and feelings are activated, building competence and self-confidence. They describe how experiencing with one's body is established in a social context (cf. Anttila, 2013/2019; Salovaara & Ropo, 2013) and it seems that feelings, thoughts, and emotions are activated (cf. Dahl & Østern, 2019, p. 50).

Body, mind, and voice

One of our students reflects upon what will be important for her future as a leader:

To understand the whole process of leading drama-work in ECEC, I find it important to have one's experiences with one's own body and with participation. When leading educational drama, one needs to be aware of the voice as part of the body, and there needs to be a consistency between the voice and the body. (b)

This student recognises the need to learn leadership through experience with the whole body. Anttila underlines the same view by saying that "bodily knowledge also creates concepts and language and causes thinking" (p. 50).

When we asked the students how they felt about the video documentation, many students pointed out *the use of body and voice* (a). One student giving feedback says the video made her more aware of her own body language and voice, and that has made her more secure in providing feedback (a). Another says: "It was interesting to observe myself and evaluate the use of words and voice" (a). One student perceives a fellow student as secure

during their presentation. However, when asked to comment, the student in question said she felt insecure throughout. She has spotted how a person can have an inner uneasiness, while at the same time seem calm and confident on the outside (*a*).

We find three critical comments in our material, and one of them concerns embodied learning. A student giving feedback describes her discomfort in front of the camera resulting in insecurity. She expresses that her feedback failed, and that it therefore lost its purpose (*a*). This student had an embodied experience, but the experience seems blocked for learning and further development because of the camera. This information tells us how external elements can influence the learning outcome.

When students interact and communicate using their bodies, voices, and eyes, we see this as an embodied learning not attainable from cognition alone. We also see a fulfilment of the learning outcomes concerning consciousness of voice and body language, and experience and courage to use drama pedagogical methods involving both children and staff in ECEC.

Reflection

We have seen how feelings are an integrated part of the students' learning processes (Dahl & Østern, 2019). What we also see is that embodied experience does not automatically lead to learning. Learning is dependent on reflection (Anttila, 2013/2019; Dewey, 1934; Illeris, 2012; Schön, 1991). Earlier research also points to the importance of reflection, connected to microteaching (Karakaş & Yükselir, 2021; Kourieos, 2016; Yim, 2021). We have students commenting on their experience in the use of video for reflection and learning. Several students point to the video as a bonus, expressing something like what this student says: "It is very valuable for further reflections and self-development" (*a*). Another student who points at the video as good for her self-reflection, expresses that the video made her see how she handles challenges, inputs, and improvisations (*a*). We found such reflections in both drama- and feedback groups.

One student points to how the drama has made her question herself more, and how this has made her "become more secure and get experience in leading a staff-meeting and cooperating and being aware of different methods" (*a*). A student remarked that: "To use creative thinking is important, also in staff meetings. We should show each other different ways of thinking and working, so that each one opens for the other's creativity and can learn from it" (*b*).

These findings show how this microteaching course strengthens the students' ability for reflection. As one student puts it: "It was strange to see oneself on video, but I see the importance of it. Because then I can reflect and develop to be a more distinct leader." This reflection is the bridge between embodied experience and embodied learning. To be able to reflect on embodied experiences is important for developing leadership skills.

Mastering

A student's learning and understanding comes from the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1994, p. 103) and seems to stem from the situation the student is exposed to (Østerberg, 1994). Our data suggest that there is a connection between the experience of mastering and embodied learning. The students seem to learn from their embodied experiences, when they are subjected to reflection-on-action (Schön, 1991) from feedback from peers and professors, and writing reflection assignments. Anttila (2013/2019) points to embodied learning as personal and coming "into the human existence in the shape of and on the bases of senses, impressions, experiences, and feelings" (p. 49, our translation).

Many students report that experiencing mastering strengthens their embodied learning ($a + b$). A student from a drama group concludes that she feels she mastered leading the drama-in-education process (a). Others write, "We must act to master. I can do more than I believed" (a) or "I learn more easily when I exercise leadership instead of just reading about it." (a). The experience of mastering seems to influence students' self-confidence.

Aesthetic processes and creativity

Learning through drama is an integral part of the embodied learning in this course. In our analysis, we found students commenting on having their status quo being challenged and of being encouraged creatively. This corresponds to Katafiasz' point of view. In student responses we also found what Anderson (2001) describes as the cognitive task of "thinking as" and the simultaneous metacognition of "thinking about" when in role (p. 268). A student responded to what skills are necessary when leading from inside a fiction, an "as-if" world: "As a leader in the role we had to be present in the dialogue, answer spontaneously and think creatively, [...] to be able to act on the upcoming thoughts and suggestions" (b). The students report awareness of gaining competencies in leadership, through developing creative skills in drama, and the use of "professionalism to improvisation" which is a learning outcome in the Framework Plan of ECTE (Ministry of Education, 2012).

Another student points to how reflections and evaluations in retrospect "improve one's abilities and knowledge of how to carry out an educational drama, and to see the difference between this and a theatre production" (b). In a drama-in-education perspective, this is an important reflection on an aesthetic process.

Collaboration

Both drama- and feedback groups were reliant on collaboration to prepare for their leadership tasks. According to Rodd (2013, p. 16), equality and listening to one another is fundamental in collaboration. Two students from drama groups reported on their collaboration by saying: "We were equal and accepted suggestions from each other. It was a good experience to collaborate so well" (a). and "It was nice working together with another student. To collaborate with colleagues and find a shared vision and goal is a part of ECEC's

pedagogical work” (*a*). These quotes show students’ experiences with collaboration, and how they value these experiences as leaders-to-be. It indicates that students understand collaboration and development of joint goals as an important leadership skill (Gotvassli, 2019; Rodd, 2013; Skogen, 2005).

Collaborative feedback

Our students benefit from embodied experiences of giving and receiving feedback, which is a crucial part of leadership (Rodd, 2013; Spurkeland, 1998). They experienced how feedback affected their feelings and self-perception. Those who gave feedback expressed that the form for giving feedback helped them to be prepared and to focus on positive and concrete feedback. They said they tried to help the receiver with descriptive words and to state the reasons for their comments. Students describe the giving of feedback as “an instructive process in being able to be specific and go into details, and to find elements the fellow student can work on further” (*a*), and report “a good feeling giving feedback to someone in need of it [...] and helping to shed light on their performance” (*a*). These statements support how feedback is to talk to peers with acknowledgement, as expressed by Skoglund and Åmot (2012), and *feedforward* to promote progress (Espedal, 2010). Their experience has shown them the importance of collaborative feedback, and we see this as embodied learning.

Some of the students who received positive feedback found it difficult to believe in the feedback. As one student says, “It is difficult to accept good feedback when you are unsatisfied yourself” (*b*). The video convinced another student; “It is one thing to hear the positive things but seeing it yourself [on the video] makes you believe it and bring it with you further on” (*a*). This corresponds to Kourieos’ (2016) findings that students “need to develop the ability to observe and reflect upon others and their own teaching in order to make sense of the learning experience” (p. 75). A student connects this to development of leadership skills: “To get constructive feedback and be capable of receiving it has a value for my development as a future leader” (*b*). Other students also expressed that to practice giving feedback was developmental for them as a future ECEC teacher, and one said, “I have learned a lot about how to separate a person from her actions by giving constructive criticism and feedback” (*a*).

It also requires courage to give peers feedback, as one student puts it: “To look at peers with a critical eye was a challenge. [...] to do it in front of the class was a bit uncomfortable” (*b*). Another says: “I feel that I have been out of my own comfort zone. That makes me develop myself and to dare to try” (*a*). This is what Spurkeland (1998) pinpoints as relational courage; the ability to face difficult conversations, and to handle conflicts or other demanding relational situations.

We found that through the experience of giving and receiving feedback, the students have strengthened their understanding of feedback as important leadership skill. This

corresponds to the focus in the Framework Plan for ECTE on leading and supervising colleagues (Ministry of Education, 2012), and the demand in *Pedagogical Leadership* to have “the ability of and understanding for giving and receiving feedback”.

Reflections and implications for Early Childhood Teacher Education

It can be difficult to judge the validity of educational research. Our findings indicate what leadership skills our students have developed through the microteaching course, but an OECD-report (2020, p. 3) points to the difficulties of knowing “how teacher qualifications impact teacher success”. There are various factors, certain and uncertain, internal and external, that can affect our students’ performance when becoming ECEC-teachers. Therefore, we cannot be sure of our students’ ability to transform their competence from the Microteaching course to their future work in ECEC.

The report on the role of ECEC teachers (Ministry of Education, 2018), concludes that the students have a low score on their ability to lead and supervise fellow-workers (p. 210). They emphasise that the education is weak in developing students’ relational competences as well as leaders of staff, individually and in teams. As educators we are aware of this need of leadership skills among our students. We mean that by giving the students embodied learning through embodied experiences with microteaching, their *leadership skills* in drama and feedback and their ability for *reflection* will be strengthened.

Through the analysis of our data, we find that the use of embodied experience can increase the leadership skills among experienced students. Though the literature on microteaching mostly points to developing classroom *teaching*, this paper indicates its strength in Early Childhood Teacher Education and the development of leadership skills through embodiment. The students’ self-evaluation and self-reflection as leaders seem to be deepened through their embodied learning and reflections on leadership in the microteaching course. We see that students develop their creativity and self-confidence, and in mastering the challenges of leadership, the same findings as Winther in her research (2018). Most students report their analysis of the video-documentation as essential for their learning, by making them conscious of their own strengths and abilities in leadership. Unlike the findings of Karakas and Yükselir (2021, p. 169) and Kourieos (2016, p. 76), our students show and express an ability to reflect on their own actions and to give feedback.

Our students report embodied learning having developed leadership skills and self-efficacy through their embodied experiences. They have experienced that leadership is collaborative and relational, and at the same time they have gained independent interactional competence and the ability to make independent choices. As we have seen, many students express increased embodied learning through the combination of embodied experience in

leadership tasks and feedback and being able to analyse themselves on video. They report that they will bring this competence with them into their future profession.

The microteaching course can be seen as a step towards strengthening the leadership skills in ECTE. The importance and need of both reflection and practical experience is stated in the report from the Ministry of Education: “It is the combination of reflection on academic knowledge and practical experience, that forms the foundation for a professional ECEC-teacher” (2018, p. 201, our translation). Working as a teacher in ECEC requires leadership skills, and that includes mentoring staff members (Ministry of Education, 2012, p.16; UHR Teacher Education, 2018, p. 10). Our course is held on campus and is a supplement to the students’ learning experience of leadership in practice/internship.

Embodied leadership learning is found in prior research (Katafiasz, 2013; Ladkin & Taylor, 2014; Meyer & Reigstad, 2014; Salovaara & Ropo, 2013; Springborg, 2010; Winther, 2013, 2018). Our research explores what Salovaara and Ropo claim is a missing point in leadership development: “personal narratives about relational and embodied experiences of change and development” (2013, p. 193). They claim that knowledge seen as only a “head-subject” will remain an abstraction (p. 208). Our findings indicate that learning and gaining leadership skills through embodied expression, embodied reflection, and embodied collaboration corresponds to earlier research.

This microteaching-course is implemented with bachelor students in their sixth term. After the course, many of them expressed the need for similar courses already in their first year of education. We wonder if the embodied learning would be similar without the competence and the experience gained throughout their first five terms. The students’ experience with reflection has matured, and they have experienced giving and receiving some feedback on oral presentations, written assignments, and in collaboration within small student groups. In the microteaching course the focus on feedback and reflection is intensified, and the students need both pedagogical competence and knowledge of educational drama prior to the course. To use microteaching with the aim of developing leadership skills in ECEC, we believe it is necessary to have some maturity, as well as prior pedagogical knowledge and competence.

Microteaching is usually used with freshmen, while this study involves experienced students in their last bachelor-term. In microteaching, this maturity is required in order to develop leadership skills, but for other courses this might not be necessary. A challenge with microteaching as we have used it, is that it requires a strong interdisciplinary cooperation and high teacher recourses.

According to Max van Manen, “Experience can open up understanding that restores a sense of embodied knowing” (2016, p. 9). Microteaching has given the students embodied competences that hopefully will strengthen their skills as leaders in Early Childhood Education and Care in Norway.

This study has presented new insights into developing and strengthening leadership skills in Early Childhood Teacher Education. Embodiment can be seen as a key gateway to the development of leadership skills, using the method of microteaching. A follow-up study with participating students might explore if and how the microteaching course have influenced their leadership skills as ECEC teachers. In the future, multiple cases should be studied to see if they lead to similar findings (Ashley, 2013, p. 103). We would also like to perform a comparative study with Norwegian and international students attending the interdisciplinary specialisation *Pedagogical Leadership*.

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Ingunn Reigstad is associate professor emerita in pedagogy at NLA University College, Bergen. Her research interest has been student's Bildung in ECTE and analysis of ECTE student's "pedagogical creed". Reigstad has also researched student active learning as microteaching and problem-based learning. She has developed and lead the system of practice/internship in ECTE, and for many years been attached to "Nettverk for veiledning av nyutdannede" (Network for mentoring of newly graduated).

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