Pedagogical Leadership in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care through the Lens of Practice Architectures

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Abstract

This research examines how practice architectures, i.e., cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements both enable and constrain the pedagogical leadership practice of early childhood education (ECE) center directors (*N* = 3). The data were collected by a qualitative shadowing method and analyzed deductively using the theory of practice architectures. The findings revealed that social-political arrangements were fundamental for directing pedagogical leadership practice, affecting both material-economic and cultural-discursive arrangements. The social-political arrangements of pedagogical leadership were grounded in the municipality's organizational structure; in turn, this structure organized daily pedagogical leadership practices. Social-political arrangements were narrated as the directors emphasized the importance of national guidelines, legislation, and implementation of the national and local curricula. These were related to the material-economic arrangements because they required organizing time for discussion and further training of personnel. The national guidelines combined material-economic and social-political aspects as well as cultural-discursive arrangements in leadership practice, as pedagogical development aligned with legislation and national curriculum demands in a wide range of leadership functions in ECE centers. The essence of pedagogical leadership practice was the focal point of joint discussions regarding pedagogy and the implementation of curriculum in the ECE centers. Most significantly, the quality of these discussions could enable or constrain pedagogical leadership and were influenced by cultural-discursive arrangements and leadership philosophy of the center directors alike.

Keywords: *early childhood education and care; pedagogical leadership; practice architectures; shadowing*

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Introduction

The concept of pedagogical leadership in early childhood education (ECE) is still evolving, and interpretations of the concept vary, challenging pedagogical leadership in practice. In Finland, ECE policy documents do not provide sufficient guidance on implementing pedagogical leadership; on the contrary, ECE is regulated by law and steered by curricula. The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (Act 540/2018) sets the goals for ECE and is steered by the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Agency for Education [EDUFI], 2022). Pre-primary education is comprised of a one-year preschool for 6-year-old children, as legislated in the Basic Education Act (Act 628/1998) and directed by the National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education (EDUFI, 2014). In Finland, a two-year pre-primary education experiment is underway in 2021–2024 that is regulated by law (Act 1046/2020) and guided by the national core curriculum (EDUFI, 2021).

ECE services are mainly provided by municipalities. Municipal authorities prepare and align the local ECE curricula with the core curricula (EDUFI, 2022). In Finland, the work of ECE center directors is dependent on the municipality's unique decision-making and structures. In Finnish ECE settings, the ECE center directors are responsible for the center's overall functions, and they usually lead a cluster of units and ECE services. One unit can contain from 1 to 10 children's groups.

In this study, we adopted the leadership-as-practice approach to investigate the pedagogical leadership practice of three ECE center directors in Finland. The leadership-as-practice approach sees leadership manifesting itself as practice instead of being formulated by leaders' traits, habits, or positions. From a leadership-as-practice perspective, leadership is viewed as a joint performance which has been shaped by the influence of the social setting and interplay of contextually related factors. (Raelin, 2020). Gibbs (2022) has suggested that the practice of leading in ECE settings is enabled by the setting's practice architectures. The practice architectures include cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements (Kemmis et al., 2013), which can enable yet complicate the practice of leadership.

The aim of the present study was to investigate pedagogical leadership practices of the three center directors in ECE settings. Pedagogical leadership practice is shaped by both ECE contextual factors and the various aspects of center functions. Therefore, this study has investigated the daily practice of pedagogical leadership by ECE center directors and how it is enabled or constrained by the setting's practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2013). The research question was formulated as follows: How do practice architectures, i.e., cultural-discursive arrangements, material-economic arrangements, and social-political arrangements both enable and constrain the pedagogical leadership practiced by ECE center directors?

Pedagogical leadership in early childhood education settings

Understanding pedagogical leadership in ECE settings requires combining the basic concepts of pedagogy and leadership and looking at these through pedagogical lenses. Pedagogical leadership focuses on pedagogical responsibilities: The concept includes (1) taking responsibility for children's learning, development, and well-being while (2) promoting a mutual understanding of the aims and methods of teaching young children in an ECE setting (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011). Pedagogical leadership is also associated with maintaining a pedagogical discussion of values and goals in ECE communities in particular and society in general (Corrick & Reed, 2019; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Jalkanen, 2020; Stremmel, 2019).

Fonsén et al. (2022) revealed that sufficient implementation of pedagogical leadership in an ECE setting supports children's well-being and their involvement in the learning process. Leadership also relates to children's having positive emotions in ECE as well as positive social interaction. Heikka et al.'s (2021) study indicated that functioning pedagogical leadership enhances ECE teachers' commitment to pedagogy and leadership in their children's groups. Effective leadership also affects the overall quality of ECE (Douglass, 2019; Sylva et al., 2010).

Contemporary findings indicate that the main pedagogical leadership responsibilities in ECE settings are leading pedagogical practices, professional development, and curriculum implementation according to ECE foundational values, ethical principles, and goals (Corrick & Reed, 2019; Heikka, 2014; O'Sullivan, 2009; Stremmel, 2019). The findings of the study by Heikka et al. (2023) reflected three main areas of responsibility for pedagogical leadership: (1) leading pedagogical activities and curriculum work within the center, (2) leading professional development of educators, and (3) leading pedagogical evaluation and development. Furthermore, it was revealed that the municipality's leadership structures, and center directors' leadership approaches significantly influenced how pedagogical leadership was performed.

Pedagogical leadership is also linked to change and development (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Sacr, 2022). According to Ahtiainen et al. (2021), when leading change, the director promotes the professional learning of the entire working community by initiating joint discussion and creating organizational structures that allow diverse ways of professional learning. Regarding practice development, the director has to lead and support educators to reflect on their practices (O'Sullivan, 2009) and guide teaching and learning towards ECE goals (Modise, 2019). It has been said that pedagogical leadership is leading pedagogy pedagogically. This means creating common understanding and direction among staff by enhancing the collective construction of knowledge at the center (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Male & Palaiologou, 2012). For this purpose, the center directors are responsible for creating structures and developing practices that enable communication and learning between staff (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011).

It should be noted that the focus and strategies between the concepts of pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership overlap one another. How an ECE center director shares pedagogical leadership responsibilities and encourages their development relates to this leadership's functionality (Douglass, 2019; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). Kahila et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of teachers' involvement in implementing pedagogical leadership in ECE centers. According to the Finnish study, teachers' pedagogical leadership is based on collaboration and distribution; teachers intentionally influence pedagogical practices in their teams. According to Zhou and Fenech (2022), educational leaders in Australia enhance quality improvement in their centers by supporting educators' professional development and promoting the centers' vision and goals. Bøe et al. (2022) also connect pedagogical leadership in all activities involving children. Pedagogical leadership with children is implemented flexibly as teachers shift between teacher-initiated, child-initiated, and basic activities according to goals and situations.

The combination of pedagogical and distributed leadership presupposes that pedagogical leadership is enacted by center directors and teachers separately yet interdependently through organizational contexts (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001). Interdependence in enacting leadership responsibilities by directors and teachers within an ECE center is crucial to achieving common goals (Heikka & Suhonen, 2019).

Practice architectures

This paper is theoretically based on theory of practice architectures (TPA), in particular those introduced by Kemmis et al. (2013); for example, it is widely used to examine literature related to leadership (e.g., Edwards Groves & Rönnerman, 2013; Grootenboer et al., 2015; Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015). And in connection to early childhood education, there are several studies related to practices of early childhood educators (e.g., Rönnerman et al., 2017; Salamon et al., 2016) and leadership (e.g., Gibbs, 2020; Hognestad & Bøe, 2016).

The core of TPA is expressed using the concepts of *sayings, doings, and relatings*. Kemmis et al. (2013) adapt sayings and doings from Schatzki (2005); they add relatings in the conceptualization of practices. Further, while sayings, doings, and relatings are what can be realized in practice, there are arrangements that either enable or constrain them: cultural-discursive (in particular, ideas and languages and specialist discourses), material-economic (particular objects and layouts in time and space) and social-political (particular kinds of relationships between people) (Kemmis, 2022, p. 87). Schatzki (2005, p. 467) uses the concept of *site ontology*, which refers to how "human coexistence is inherently tied to a kind of context in which it transpires." Sites are important when analyzing and explaining a phenomenon because the sites to which we are connected affect our sayings, doings, and relatings by these three types of arrangements. However, a site is not just a particular location; rather, "the practice is itself a social site organizing what happens; the practice is a site

that meshes together a semantic space, a place existing in physical space-time, and a social space" (Kemmis et al., 2013, p. 36).

According to Kemmis et al. (2013, p. 32), cultural-discursive arrangements "are resources that make possible the language and discourses used in and about this practice; these arrangements enable and constrain the sayings characteristic of the practice." This arrangement shows us which language or discourse is appropriate to use. Material-economic arrangements are related to resources enabling and constraining doings, for example, how staff members engage in activities. Social-political arrangements "are the resources that make possible the relationships between people and non-human objects." These arrangements enable and constrain the relatings, for example how staff members relate to the ECE work community. The sites' practices are shaped by historical and material conditions; moreover, arrangements create the conditions needed for the practices. People on the sites learn what is the appropriate language to be used, what are the material circumstances, and what kind of stances are taken in relation to solidarity and power. Most significantly, whether or not we recognize these arrangements, they exist. In this study, we acknowledge the existence of these arrangements and try to discover how they are related to sayings, doings, and relatings.

Methodology

Participants

Three directors working in municipal ECE centers in Eastern Finland gave their informed consent to participate in this qualitative study. They were employed as directors for one to three ECE centers, and the length of time they had been in this position varied between 2 and 12 years. Director 1 was the leader for three ECE units and had worked as a director for 10 years. Director 2 was the leader of two ECE units. She had worked as a director for a relatively short time (two years) and considered herself a novice in the job. Director 3 had 12 years of experience as an ECE center, and she worked as a pedagogical leader in flexibly scheduled ECE. She implemented co-leadership along with another leader with regard to task distribution, where she was responsible for pedagogical leadership and the other leader was responsible for administrative tasks.

The data

The data for this study was collected in 2018 using a method called *qualitative shadowing*, where the researcher's purpose is to act like a "shadow" by constantly following participants with a video camera and observing them while they work (Czarniawska, 2007; Gill et al., 2014). "Observing" included taking notes about the participants' actions, especially when recording was not possible. The collected data from shadowing produced a substantial set of data about ECE leadership practices (see Bøe et al., 2016).

During the data collection process, all ethical principles and standards set by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity were followed, which included making sure that participants' anonymity and autonomy were protected along with their privacy. In addition, participants were shielded from feeling uncomfortable or harmed during this process. Shadowing is an intense data collection method, and researchers must take several ethical aspects into account during both data collection and analysis (see Bøe et al., 2016; Johnson, 2014). While shadowing, it is important to make sure the atmosphere feels safe to the participants; there needs to be a mutual understanding between the researcher and participants about the research project's aims and process. In this case, the shadowing process was carefully explained to participants beforehand. Researchers were supposed to follow the participant without causing distractions. Participants could ask questions and pause the recording any time they needed to do so (see Johnson, 2014). If participants' actions needed clarification, researchers asked about what they were doing – for example, if they were working silently at their computers. It is vital that researchers remain sensitive at all times during shadowing sessions, constantly evaluating the recording's suitability and whether being present or taking notes is appropriate (see Johnson, 2014). For instance, notetaking and video recordings were stopped during a few emotionally sensitive situations.

The three directors were shadowed for three consecutive days, an appropriate length of time during which a great deal of data was gathered without overly burdening participants. In addition, during this period, the chance of situations arising that could influence participants' behavior or researchers' objectivity was minimal. According to Bøe et al. (2016), shadowing can produce ethical challenges when data collection takes place over a long period of time. However, the length of shadowing time might also be a limitation for this study because situations and tasks appear and occur on different days and at different moments. In other words, if there had been more time, more information about the enactment of pedagogical leadership could have been gathered. The total video material comprises 29 hours and 10 minutes.

At the end of the shadowing process, the directors were interviewed and asked about their experiences (Gill et al., 2014). The semi-structured interviews provided supplementary information for the study (see Edwards & Holland, 2013). While the interviews brought up participants' perspectives on their pedagogical leadership, the video material and shadowing notes allowed analysis of their leadership actions from "outside." Directors were interviewed about their perspectives and experiences on leadership – for example, how they defined pedagogical leadership, and what goals and tasks their leadership included either during or outside of shadowing or in particular situations. Although the semi-structured interviews had predetermined and defined themes, their structure allowed the interview to proceed conversationally and give participants the chance to narrate their own thoughts and experiences (Edwards & Holland, 2013; Galletta & Cross, 2013). All interviews were recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis.

Analysis

The first three authors of the article were responsible for conducting the analysis. First, all three authors familiarized themselves thoroughly with the shadowing video observation data of one director and made transcripts from this data. Next, the data were analyzed using theoretically driven content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018), informed by the TPA (Kemmis et al., 2013) and initially categorized as sayings, doings, and relatings. After this, we exchanged the data with another researcher, who cross-checked the initial categorization and made suggestions and corrections, if necessary. These were then discussed in the research group, where all disagreements were resolved. The next analytical step was to study in more detail the sayings, doings, and relatings and their relationship with cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements. This was done by interpreting and comparing categorized empirical examples and scrutinizing their connections arrangements, which influence, enable, or constrain pedagogical leadership in practice. The analytical process was conducted in a similar manner to the interview data, and sayings, doings and relatings were explored. The final steps of the analysis were to combine the directors' categorized observation and interview data for a more detailed examination, explore the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political categories in detail, and analyze their connections. However, the analysis using TPA was sometimes challenging, as the different categories overlapped one another. When this happened, either the most suitable category was chosen, or it was stated that multiple categories were present simultaneously.

Results

Cultural-discursive arrangements in pedagogical leadership

The shadowing of ECE center directors reflected cultural-discursive arrangements of pedagogical leadership practice as the directors described both their own perceptions, values, and aims with respect to pedagogical leadership and the factors affecting them. The directors particularly highlighted the importance of their interaction with educators and the significance of joint pedagogical discussions; these initially took place between director and teachers at the center level and, secondly, between teachers and educators at the child group level. Through enabling these joint pedagogical discussions, the strategic and pedagogical goals for ECE were achieved.

Director 1 considered it to be her responsibility to participate in discussions with educators, which could take place on either an individual basis or in teams (for example, while having coffee together). This was reflected in the cultural-discursive thinking of Director 1 when she stated that "usually in these [discussions] they [educators] want some kind of decision regarding policy, how this [agenda] is implemented in our center." Director 2,

however, considered that her task as a pedagogical leader was to raise staff awareness about which pedagogical principles to follow in their work, because "you have to learn to talk about your work from a pedagogical perspective." According to Director 3, the aim of the pedagogical discussions with educators was to operate in accordance with the law and the unique characteristics of their ECE unit, flexibly scheduled ECEC, and how these could be implemented in practice, as the following example illustrates.

> *Example 1.* Director 3 stated that the annual plan for pedagogical leadership is a leadership tool used at the ECE center. The plan includes team activities, shared leadership responsibilities, and a plan for pedagogical teams [consisting of the director and teachers]. The director has shared leadership by asking the teachers about the [key pedagogical] topics and their evaluation by the pedagogical team. The director has also conveyed a message to all employees about the issues discussed by the pedagogical team. She sent the agenda to everyone in advance so that the teachers could discuss the topic in their own educator teams in child groups, subsequently bringing their opinions to the center's pedagogical team. The director did so with the reasoning that everyone must know what they are doing. (Shadowing, Director 3)

The excerpt indicates how Director 3 aimed for high-quality ECE by enforcing the evaluation of pedagogical practices within predetermined key ECE topics. By doing this, she pursued achieving pedagogical goals and enabled structuring pedagogical leadership distribution between the director and teachers in accordance with the pedagogical leadership plan. The importance of organizing pedagogical discussions within the ECE center, with pedagogical teams (director and teachers) and educator teams was highlighted. All the directors described the multilevel distribution of pedagogical leadership duties; they had distributed pedagogical leadership tasks for teachers, who in turn were responsible for pedagogical leadership in their own team of educators.

The idea of working in teams and sharing responsibilities was emphasized in the cultural-discursive thinking of all three directors, and this division of responsibilities established the structure of pedagogical leadership in centers. Nonetheless, responsibilities for pedagogical leadership were shared and discussed in ECE (i.e. cultural-discursive arrangements), their enactment in practice mingled with material-economic arrangements, as structuring of pedagogical leadership was organized. This was manifested, for example, by allocating clear responsibilities and tasks to teachers, arranging weekly team meetings for educators in the child groups, and drafting the director's annual plan for pedagogical leadership described by all three directors. These structures of pedagogical leadership also helped to support the development of staff members' pedagogical skills.

Alongside the distribution of responsibilities, the cultural-discursive arrangements included the dialogical nature of leadership and the directors' values, aims, and principles regarding pedagogical leadership. All directors emphasized the significance of interaction

and highlighted the dialogical nature of pedagogical leadership practices. During these interactions and discussions, the cultural-discursive and social-political arrangements were both present. For example, Director 2 did not want to appear authoritative; rather, she wanted all participants to state their perspectives during discussions. At the same time, she also considered it her responsibility to initiate pedagogical discussions when observing difficulties or questioning educators' pedagogical justifications because "it is our joint task to develop the culture and practices of the unit." Director 1 described herself as a "motherly" leader: "Perhaps it's funny to say that I have a motherly leadership style, but that's what I'm like." In addition, Directors 2 and 3 emphasized not only educators' support and guidance, but also their trust. Director 3 considered trust, which is built through her own example, as the most important basis of leadership. She also described how "the employees' joy when you notice their commitment" and their success are important at work.

Taking responsibility for the entire staff and unit's overall function is reflected in the cultural-discursive aspect of pedagogical leadership thinking. For example, Director 3 emphasized that at the heart of pedagogical leadership lay taking care of every staff member's well-being, pedagogical competence, and commitment as well as the overall quality of early childhood education. However, all of these topics were not identifiable during shadowing. The following examples illustrate how pedagogical leadership and the directors' role are narrated.

> *Example 2.* My leadership style is very discussion-based. I try to find out what the strengths of my staff members are and support them. I emphasize that each staff member is responsible for the ECE center's atmosphere, their own work, and their team's work. […] You must give [your employees] power and responsibility. (Interview, Director 1)
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> *Example 3.* In my opinion, [pedagogical leadership] is basically about observing, and thinking about, what is the right place to raise issues for discussion and with whom. […] I try to ask the right questions and help people to realize these issues themselves, but at the same time, I bravely intervene in situations when needed. […] I hope that each of our staff members, no matter their position, will learn to talk about why they're doing something and what the [pedagogical] aim is behind their actions. (Interview, Director 2)
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> *Example 4.* I think it [pedagogical leadership] has been the most important thing for me now; of course, to promote well-being at work and things like that, we have flexibly scheduled ECEC, which is quite challenging in a way, so maybe it's emphasized even more here. (Interview, Director 3)

As these examples show, with regard to their role as pedagogical leader, Director 1 described herself as being discussion-oriented and supportive. She found it important to identify each educator's strengths in their pedagogical work. Having a positive and supportive atmosphere among educators was also considered important by Director 1. Director 2

emphasized the importance of promoting joint discussions and intervening, if necessary, whereas Director 3 saw her responsibility as taking care of her staff members' well-being. In practice, however, these narrations were shaped by the directors' individual leadership styles as well as their center's cultural-discursive and social-political arrangements. These included, e.g., the mutual relationship between educators and directors, which influenced how these directors communicated with staff members and the municipality's administrators, which in turn influenced the directors' practical administrative responsibilities (including also material-economic arrangements) and role. Ultimately, these shaped directors' leadership thinking regarding their pedagogical leadership duties.

However, constraints and challenges regarding cultural-discursive arrangements were also observed. The results revealed that the effectiveness of the use of joint discussions depended on the skills of the individual center director, and how they directed discussions concerning pedagogical perspectives. Some directors struggled to adapt their leadership style in accordance with the demands posed by their center's changing situations, thereby creating a discontinuity between "sayings" and "doings." For example, despite highlighting the importance of dialogical discussions, these either did not take place, or, if they did, these discussions were constrained by directors adopting a rather authoritative role in them. Further, despite emphasizing the director's role as pedagogical leader, acting in this manner could be avoided in practice; for instance, they could refrain from "having the last word" in a discussion. Therefore, what the directors said were their aims and principles with respect to pedagogical leadership did not always transfer to what they practiced. Moreover, material-economic arrangements often challenged the enactment of pedagogical leadership, as the directors were unable to plan properly or set aside enough time for pedagogical leadership amid trying to meet all the other demands of their job.

Material-economic arrangements in pedagogical leadership

Shadowing three center directors revealed the great influence that material-economic arrangements had on the practice of pedagogical leadership. The directors highly emphasized their discussions with educators regarding strategy, curricula, and pedagogy, all of which were dependent on the organization and human resources management within their particular center and municipality. Director 1 pointed out a hindrance in that discussion time was always very limited, and it was difficult to organize staff meetings so that all the teachers in their center could attend. In addition to organizing their center's curriculum work, all three directors organized weekly staff meetings in the child groups, assessed how well educators' teams were functioning and provided individual guidance and support to educators when needed. Cooperating with parents was also considered important for curriculum implementation, as parents were informed of weekly educational goals.

Directors 1 and 2 also emphasized that the diverse aspects of human resource management, including supervising, scheduling, hiring substitutes, approving vacations, recruiting

new staff members, and approving sick leaves all influence pedagogical leadership practice. These staff-related tasks could also challenge or constrain pedagogical leadership, given that the directors were forced to navigate in rapidly changing situations, e.g., by adapting existing resources in child groups according to the number (and lack) of staff available. During shadowing, for example, Director 2 decided to step in as an aid in the group and, by doing so, set aside her planned leadership tasks. Furthermore, the way in which the ECE services and work tasks of the directors were organized within the municipality influenced the practice of pedagogical leadership. For instance, Director 1 was responsible for the ECE services management in the entire municipality, which influenced the organization of her own work. In addition, staff members' continuing education resources and the way they were organized were considered important; they also reflected cultural-discursive arrangements as they revealed the focus and emphasis in the enactment of pedagogical leadership.

Directors also tried to influence material-economic arrangements. For example, Director 2 emphasized that taking care of the learning environment and keeping the workplace safe are all part of pedagogical leadership. In addition, clarifying and directing the educator's tasks and responsibilities, especially introducing these and center practices to new employees, and providing sufficient resources, for example for pedagogical planning, could be considered important aspects of material-economic arrangements with respect to pedagogical leadership practice. Educators' tasks and responsibilities were defined in team agreements, as the following example illustrates:

> *Example 5.* And you'll write down here your team's responsibilities, duties, practices, agreements, rules, and practical arrangements. And you'll write ECE teachers' tasks here. Next, I'll write here from the perspective of the [pedagogical] leader what the similar aspects are. Of course, if you're thinking of certain issues that you know are my responsibilities, you can write them there. And the new tasks of each team member [are written down] separately, and finally, the signatures. […] These agreements are intended for you, so that everyone will understand what your role is. (Shadowing, Director 2)

By completing a team agreement with their staff members, Director 2 ensured that the daily responsibilities and tasks of each staff member and the pedagogical leadership practices of the unit would be agreed upon. However, this process can also be interpreted from the perspective of reflecting the social-political structures, practices, and relationships, due to the fact that the existing power relations are manifested through Director 2's role as leader (i.e., "ordering" the employees to complete the task). The following example from Director 3 describes how more detailed structures, responsibilities, and tasks were defined:

> *Example 6.* I now meet with every single team to discuss these issues, and the team agreement that each group has signed is also brought up at this time; there's also a

short follow-up evaluation of the degree to which everyone's planning, goal setting, interaction, and team responsibilities has been successful. (Interview, Director 3)

Similarly, as Director 3 narrates the significance of having team agreement in clarifying roles and responsibilities, Directors 1 and 2 described in their interviews how they urged all their staff members to take responsibility for common tasks and commit to common goals, as they had agreed to do in their team agreement. Director 1 described how her task "is to support employees' professionalism, their professional work, and the teams' and, of course, the whole centers' joint work." However, during shadowing it remained unclear how the staff members' professional commitment was reflected in everyday life and how the directors promoted their achievements. Although pedagogical leadership concerned management and personnel administration, Director 2 stated that pedagogical leadership is also about being involved in minor details: "managing different things is [important] because what seems like a minor issue can be a major one for an employee." Also, Director 3 "broadly understands pedagogical leadership," which, according to her, included leading everyone from adult staff members to children.

All three directors stressed that their diverse tasks and responsibilities as leaders could also constrain their pedagogical leadership. This was evident, for example, in the shadowing data of Director 1, who sometimes had difficulty concentrating on her center's pedagogical issues because she sometimes responded immediately to her incoming emails, even while planning pedagogical discussions with her staff members. Director 3 also described her work as being full of interruptions and jumping from one thing to another, as the example below illustrates:

> *Example 7.* I jump to this thing, and then I jump to that thing, and then I jump to that other thing; you don't know how it looks from the outside, whether any of it makes sense. (Interview, Director 3)

However, during shadowing, there were observed tensions between cultural-discursive practices, material-economic structures and social-political relationships, as the following example describes:

> *Example 8.* In one of the groups, one staff member is out sick, and so the small group activity planned for that day doesn't take place, and so the children don't know what to do. The director observes this and tries to help her staff re-structure the activity. [...] She offers to participate with the staff in planning it. However, she states her perspective clearly. [...] The situation in this group is a chaotic one. The director argues that this group's planning needs to be greatly improved. The situation is emotional for both the director and staff. At the end of the discussion, the ECE teacher starts crying and shadowing ends. (Shadowing, Director 2)

As the example shows, after Director 2 had observed poorly functioning pedagogical situations due to a lack of staff and adequate planning, she acted on them and started pedagogical discussions with her staff. This example also highlights social-political relationships. While power relationships between the parties exist, it is also a question of accountability – trusting staff members to do their jobs properly.

Social-political arrangements in pedagogical leadership

Social-political arrangements were fundamental for pedagogical leadership practice. For instance, Director 1 emphasized the importance of local and national guidance in addition to legislation, and the implementation of the national curriculum framework. Social-political aspects are emphasized in pedagogical leadership practice because the decisions on topics that have arisen and affected both staff and development originate from municipal or national guidelines and ECE legislation. Director 2 highlighted her role and responsibilities as a leader along with her tasks within the larger administration. Further, the administrative organization formed the basis of social-political structuring and power relationships in the municipalities:

> *Example 9.* If the daily leadership, being present, remains too few, it shows quickly in staff members' level of well-being, how learning environment is maintained and how parents are informed. And very soon, you'll be getting negative feedback [because of all the difficulties]. I think leadership can be enforced in many ways. […] I consider [an area of] personnel administration issues, which are closely connected with pedagogical leadership. […] I'm also tasked with developing practices, collaborating with networks, updating data files and such. Then there is pedagogical leadership or everyday administration… that I'm present [in practice] alongside [my staff members], I'm accessible and can respond to issues [with staff] daily, I have to collaborate closely with parents as well. (Interview, Director 2)

Director 2 describes her role as a leader who focuses on the multilevel and interconnected elements of the organizational structure and the relationships existing within this network. She could be characterized as being a liaison who promotes dialogue between the different parties operating within the ECE network. These structures form the basis of and enable pedagogical leadership practices.

The power relationships between the center's directors and educators were not always evident, for example, when the directors outlined the process' more collaborative nature. The results indicate that the practice of pedagogical leadership is realized in distributed relationships between municipality ECE stakeholders and how these relationships are supported by the strategic and comprehensive implementation of leadership. Directors 1 and 3 emphasized the significance of relationship within the municipality, including relationships

with the municipality's leaders and how they affect the ECE members along with realizing the importance of the ECE mission itself.

Director 1 highlighted the support provided by ECE leaders in the municipality as crucial for sound pedagogical leadership practice in ECE centers. Conversely, Director 2 referred to a bi-directional relationship between the municipality's leadership structures and the staff, as their messages are transmitted both ways. All the directors stressed the importance of staff members' relationships during both the interviews and shadowing. Teachers' responsibility for curriculum work as well as pedagogical development and leadership of their staff teams were also considered important.

Discussion and conclusions

The present study has aimed to explore, through the lens of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2013), how cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements both enable and constrain the pedagogical leadership of three ECE directors, constituting leadership-as-practice (see Raelin, 2020). According to previous research (Gibbs, 2020, p. 303), practice architecture arrangements "create the conditions for the emergence and development of effective leadership."

The findings have revealed that regarding cultural-discursive arrangements, ECE directors emphasized in their pedagogical leadership the value of enabling joint pedagogical discussions with educators. Two kinds of discussions were emphasised firstly, directors discussing with pedagogical teams of teachers at the center level, and secondly, teachers leading discussions in their educators' team in the child groups. Through these joint discussions, the directors enacted pedagogical leadership in practice and took care that the aims and principles of national and local ECE curriculum and goals (i.e. social-political arrangements) were implemented in daily pedagogical practice (see Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011). This distribution of pedagogical leadership in the centers necessitated teachers and directors playing an active role (Kahila et al., 2020). Furthermore, as Heikka et al. (2021) found in their study, pedagogical discussions were a means to raise employees' awareness of the pedagogical principles they were implementing and to empower them. The cultural-discursive arrangement was reflected in each director's thinking about responsibilities as they stressed the independence of the staff in making pedagogical decisions. However, the lack of effectiveness in discussions, directors' adopting authoritative roles and directors' avoidance of taking responsibility in certain situations were factors considered to constrain cultural-discursive practices.

In all the ECE centers, a manifestation of material-economic arrangements, the distribution of tasks and responsibilities between the director and teams of educators, was central in enacting pedagogical leadership. Therefore, in practice, pedagogical leadership

was structured as a layered entity. In accordance with previous research, (see Heikka, 2014; Heikka et al., 2023), the directors had the main responsibility of leading pedagogical practices, professional development, and curriculum implementation. However, all the directors relied on the teachers assuming the responsibility of leading pedagogy and practices of their teams of educators (Heikka et al., 2021; Kahila et al., 2020); they, in turn, all had their duties and responsibilities outlined in their team agreements. In line with previous studies (Rönnermann et al., 2017), the directors highlighted the significance of trusting employees to perform their pedagogical duties as agreed upon. The structures of pedagogical leadership, e.g., annual, and weekly pedagogical plans and meetings, and organizing the planning, assessment, and development (PAD) time, supported and facilitated the division of tasks and joint discussions among the staff members.

However, the variety and prioritization of tasks challenged and sometimes hindered directors' material-economic arrangements. At times, other tasks forced the directors to take time away from their pedagogical leadership responsibilities; or they sometimes had difficulty focusing on pedagogical leadership e.g., by jumping from one task to another, which could lead to performing their work in a fragmented way. Furthermore, the directors all stressed the point that when enacting pedagogical leadership, it is imperative to take care of staff members' well-being, pedagogical competence, and commitment while upholding the quality of early childhood education and well-being of children (Ahtiainen et al., 2021; Bøe et al., 2022; Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011). However, in practice during shadowing, the ECE directors' principles and values with respect to pedagogical leadership were not always clearly visible. Therefore, more attention needs to be paid to transferring discourses of pedagogical leadership into practice.

The material-economic aspects of pedagogical leadership were associated with cultural-discursive practices, as the directors highlighted the importance of having discussions with their staff on strategy, curricula, and pedagogy (Corrick & Reed, 2019; Stremmel, 2019). In practice, these were interconnected; they depended on the workplace organization and human resources management within both center and municipality. These included the organization of schedules, distribution of tasks among staff members and allowance of enough time for teachers for planning, assessment, and development. Making team agreements was a central means in each unit to ensure that everyone's roles and responsibilities were clear, as directors are responsible for creating structures for communication and learning (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011).

However, during shadowing, it became evident that the staff members needed support from the ECE directors, not only to make team agreements but also to act according to the agreements made. This challenged the ECE directors' pedagogical leadership in practice. For example, they all emphasized their interaction skills and leadership qualities; but as disagreements or malfunctions in pedagogical practices arose, the ECE directors' leadership skills were tested. Consequently, a tension between their sayings and doings was

observed on several occasions. Directors 1 and 2 recognized that it was at times their task as a director to give final approval and make things happen. Cultural-discursive arrangements and leadership philosophy relate to social-political arrangements and power in the relationships between the directors and staff (see Kemmis et al., 2013).

The results suggest the social-political arrangements were fundamental for directing pedagogical leadership practice through being associated with the material-economic and cultural-discursive arrangements of leadership practice, as Figure 1 illustrates. The social-political aspects of pedagogical leadership were based on the municipality's organizational structure, and this structure organized the units' daily pedagogical leadership practices. At the same time, the existing power relationships are manifested in this structure as well as in the daily practices (see Gibbs, 2022). Furthermore, the municipal strategy of the ECE guided pedagogical leadership and ECE evaluation (EDUFI, 2022).

Social-political
- National legislation and steering
- National and local relations and organization of pedagogical leadership
- Municipality's ECE strategy
- Structures of pedagogical leadership in ECE centers

Material-economic
- Organization of human resources and management
- Organization of staff training
- Organization of time for curriculum work
- Professional skills of center directors and staff

Cultural-discursive
- Joint pedagogical discussions
- Values, aims and principles of the director on pedagogical leadership
- Well-being and atmosphere among the staff

Figure 1. Cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements of pedagogical leadership.

Social-political considerations were manifested as the directors stressed the importance of national guidance, legislation, and the implementation of the national curriculum framework (EDUFI, 2022). This in turn was related to the material-economic arrangements since it required organizing time for discussions and providing continuing education for staff members. The national guidance combined material-economic and social-political aspects as well as cultural-discursive arrangements in leadership practice; pedagogical development aligned with legislation and national curriculum demands for a wide range of leadership functions in centers. At the same time, the ECE curriculum is also part of a material-economic structure, as the pedagogical practices are arranged

based on this curriculum. If the director and educators studied the curriculum together, the cultural-discursive dimension would be present through their discussions, thereby enabling pedagogical leadership (see Figure 1). However, the lack (or low quality) of these discussions could constrain pedagogical leadership. Also, Ahtiainen et al. (2021) concluded in their study that the ability to interpret a curriculum and guide its implementation demands that knowledgeable leaders organize pedagogical discussions and knowledge.

The social-political arrangements and material-economic arrangements were also reflected in the way that the directors distributed tasks related to pedagogical leadership to their staff members. For instance, ECE teachers' responsibility was emphasized in curriculum work and pedagogical development in staff teams, which is in line with previous studies of pedagogical leadership (Heikka et al., 2021).

To conclude, the present study contributes to the literature by producing insights on pedagogical leadership in ECE through the lens of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2013). The results highlight the interconnections and relationships between cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements and how they in practice shape, enable, and at times constrain the enactment of pedagogical leadership. Although the limitation of the study is that it only studies the phenomenon through three participating directors, it nevertheless produces an in-depth description of the conditions affecting the practices of pedagogical leadership.

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