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# Researching Finnish early childhood teachers' pedagogical work using Layder's research map: Suomalaisen varhaiskasvatuksen opettajan pedagogisen työn tutkimimen Layderin tutkimuskartan avulla

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# Researching Finnish early childhood teachers' pedagogical work using Layder's research map

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## Abstract

This study examines the experiences of early childhood teachers in their everyday pedagogical work. The data for this qualitative study consists of the diaries of early childhood teachers. Layder's (1993) research map has been used to structure the theoretical background and provide an analytical frame to categorise the data. The results show that early childhood teachers' work is complex and demanding, but they did encounter successes in their work. Certain common themes were identified on the levels of Layder's research map. These themes, which were experienced both as successes and challenges, included laws and steering documents, values and attitudes, pedagogical principles and solutions, leadership, collaborative structures, interaction, professional self-conception and skills. The challenges in the teachers' work were caused by differing professional values, a lack of discussion, and inoperative organisational structures and practices, among others.

## Introduction

Pedagogical work in early childhood education and care (ECEC) has become more challenging because of the complexity caused by the increased diversity of families and children, complicated daily situations, and changes in political steering. Urban (2008) states that early childhood (EC) teachers have to address educational, social and cultural requirements. In the national policies of many countries, ECEC has been a topic of increasing interest, and many regulatory and pedagogical reforms have been undertaken to develop ECEC practices (Miller

& Cable, 2008). These tendencies can be recognised, for example, in Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Sweden (Dalli, Miller & Urban, 2012).

In the Finnish context, there have also been several reforms concerning ECEC policies and pedagogical thinking: ECEC legislation—the *Act on Early Childhood Education and Care* 36/1973 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015)—has changed and there is a new *National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education* as well as a new ECEC Curriculum (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2014; 2016) The renewed steering documents strongly emphasise participatory pedagogy. Another change in Finnish ECEC concerns leadership. The areas of responsibility for directors have expanded; the directors have more ECEC centres and types of ECEC to lead (e.g. family day care). This has created the need for distributed pedagogical leadership among EC teachers (Halttunen, 2016). These reforms reflect the new requirements in EC teachers' pedagogical work.

Due to these professional demands and reforms, it is necessary to investigate the experiences of EC teachers and identify the developmental needs in their pedagogical work. It is crucial to understand the work of EC teachers nationally and internationally, in terms of the changing and complex context of ECEC. Currently, there is little research on the daily experiences of EC teachers' work. In this study, teachers' pedagogical work is examined by investigating the teachers' successes and challenges in their everyday practices.

The conception and understanding of pedagogy and pedagogical work in the ECEC setting is variable. Definitions of ECEC pedagogy usually focus on the relationships and interactions between children and adults, and the practical, goal-oriented education activities of the educators and the educators' communities (Siraj-Blatchford, 2008). EC teachers' pedagogical work involves, for example, designing learning activities and environments, interacting with children and cooperation with adults (Kangas, Ojala & Venninen, 2015; Siraj-Blatchford,

2008). Earlier studies prove that EC teachers experience their work as being fragmentary, and they have many different roles and tasks during the day (Karila & Kinos, 2012; Ohi, 2014).

The approach of the study is social constructivism (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Layder's (1993) research map has been used to structure the theoretical background and analyse the teachers' experiences of their pedagogical work. The theoretical part of this article describes the work of the EC teachers, using Layder's research map levels, and the results section reveals how teachers experience their work according to these levels. The data for this qualitative study consists of EC teachers' diaries (*n* = 38).

The remainder of this article is arranged as follows: the next section introduces the concept of ECEC pedagogy, the third section describes Layder's research map, and the fourth section introduces how the EC teachers' pedagogical work is structured, according to Layder's research map. The methodology is described in the fifth section, the results are presented in the sixth section, and the discussion and conclusions follow in the seventh and eighth sections.

## Conception of ECEC pedagogy

In this study, we aim to understand EC teachers' pedagogical work. Therefore, a common understanding of the concept of ECEC pedagogy is essential. Pedagogy can be determined broadly. As Alexander (2000, p. 540) states, 'pedagogy connects the apparently self-contained act of teaching with culture, structure and mechanisms of social control'.

Watkins and Mortimore (1999, p. 3) argue that pedagogy is the operation of professional consideration, or 'any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance learning in another'. The curriculum can be connected to pedagogical thinking (Mortimore, 1999). Pedagogy can also be defined as 'the science and principles of teaching children based on the characteristics of children as learners' (Robins & Callan, 2009, p. 149). The essential

phenomena of ECEC pedagogy are the interaction and relationships, both between children and between children and adults (Siraj-Blatchford, 2008; Urban, 2008). According to this meaning, pedagogy is something built on one's personal thinking, and connected to professional competence.

While we agree with all the mentioned concepts, we still offer some concrete additions to the definitions, to reflect the specific approach of ECEC. In this study, we understand ECEC pedagogy as a curriculum-based, planned, goal-oriented, interactive and reflective institutional activity. ECEC pedagogy emphasises children's activity, play and participation, and it is implemented in cooperation with parents and experts (Alila & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2018).

## Layder's research map as a tool examining EC teachers' pedagogical work

The pedagogical work of EC teachers is complex and versatile (Karila & Kinos, 2012; Urban, 2008). In this study, we use the Layder's (1993) research map with the purpose of categorising and clarifying the teachers' pedagogical work. By using the map in this study, it is possible to parse and summarise the teachers' successful and challenging experiences to enable a deeper understanding of their work. In addition, by using Layder's map, we aim to find the connections between the levels and phenomena that are common among them. Layder's (1993) research map has been used to explore and specify research issues in several social research studies (e.g. McEvoy, 2000; Vaininen, 2011). It is a useful tool to clarify and focus on research issues, and target the development project but not the research method. The levels of Layder's research map are context, setting, situated activity, and the self. Each level has its own history, but each historical aspect is also connected to the other levels (see Figure 1).

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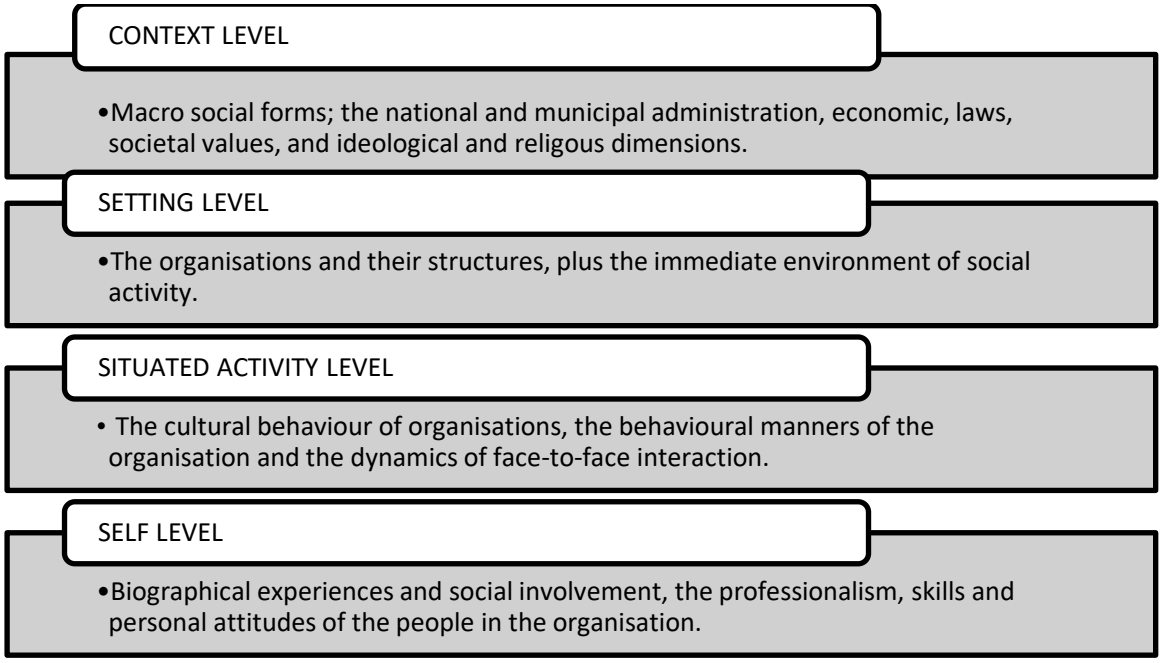



Figure 1. Layder's (1993) research map

## EC teachers' pedagogical work according to Layder's research map levels

In the following sections, Finnish EC teachers' pedagogical work is described and examined using Layder's (1993) levels of context, setting, situated activity and self. According to Layder's map, on the level of context—the first level—are the societal values, laws and steering from administrative level. Finnish ECEC is guided by national education policy. The main goals of Finnish ECEC are the promotion of personal wellbeing, development, learning and equality (Finnish National board of Education, 2016). ECEC services are provided mainly by municipalities (76 per cent), but private ECEC services are also available (NIHW, 2014).

The qualification for professional ECEC teachers and educators is stated by law (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015). The educators in Finnish ECEC consist of two groups of workers: the first group—EC teachers—studies to bachelor's or master's degree level at university, or to bachelor's degree level at a university of applied science (polytechnic). The second group—nursery nurses—is qualified at secondary school level. These different workers cooperate in multi-professional teams (Karila, 2012).

According to the *Act on Early Childhood Education and Care* (36/1973) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2015), ECEC is required to ensure that children have the opportunity to participate in and influence matters pertaining to themselves. The *National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education* (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2014) states that the participation of children and parents is crucial. This development in participation is a result of changed perceptions and research knowledge on children's learning and development, an awareness of children's rights, and the changed relationship between children and adults (Kangas, 2016).

The setting level consists of the organisational structures and immediate environment of social activity. Karila and Kinos (2012) have acknowledged that the day of the EC teacher consists of different episodes, for example, meeting the children and parents, mealtimes, situations of pedagogical action, outdoor activities, staff meetings and administrative duties. The diversity of the episodes leads to the fragmentation of the day; occasional interactions with other adults, in particular, can cause interruptions. The discontinuity of the work produces difficulties in concentrating on one task and a feeling of not having enough time (Karila & Kinos, 2012). Rodd (2004) highlights that the experiences of time pressures may be the result of disorganised working structures.

The cultural behaviour and the behavioural manners of the organisation are placed on situated activity level. While considering pedagogy on the level of settings, we can recognise how the organisational structures determine the pedagogical practices. Stephen (2010, p. 17) states that the pedagogical work in ECEC ranges 'from the didactic interactions more typically associated with teaching, through modelling, prompting exploration, questioning, scaffolding specific skill acquisition and nurturing a child's disposition to learn'.

The typical components of a teacher's work include observing the children's activities and skills; designing learning activities and environments; and evaluating the children's development and learning. The interaction between the child and adult and with the educators' community is one of the most important areas of teachers' work (see Kangas et al., 2015). Harcourt and Jones (2016) point out that documentation is also a crucial activity in teachers' work. In addition, essential phenomena in the work of EC teachers include relational

involvement in each child's life, and professional decision-making that balances the various factors in play (Dalli, 2011).

Teachers must develop and reflect on, for example, the curriculum and their pedagogical practices (Kangas et al., 2015). One vital development objective is the enhancement of children's participation. The previous pedagogical culture was relatively adult-centred, but there is now a demand for ECEC services to reflect on pedagogical practices in relation to the current objectives of ECEC curriculum (Finnish National Agency of Education; Fonsén, 2014; Fonsén & Vlasov, 2017). Children act in small groups, which supports the teachers' opportunities to observe and listen to them, and encourage their agency. Planning practices, which take into account the children's interests and opinions, have also been considered for supporting children's participation (Kangas, 2016).

The other major change in the Finnish ECEC culture concerns the leadership. The directors have more ECEC units and types of ECEC to lead, and EC teachers have to take responsibility for team leadership and pedagogy through distributed leadership. Distributed leadership implies that the responsibility for the quality and development of the operational culture and pedagogical work should be divided among all the members of the working community (Fonsén, 2014; Heikka, Halttunen & Waniganayake, 2016; Waniganayake, 2014).

The level of the self (teachers' professionalism, skills, personal attitudes and values) and situated activity are closely connected. Teachers' pedagogical practices are framed by personal values and epistemologies, core beliefs about knowing and knowledge, and perceptions of the children (Lunn Browlee, Schraw, Walker & Ryan, 2016).

Early childhood pedagogy is implemented through the EC teachers' numerous personal and professional skills and competences (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). Karila and Nummenmaa (2001) state that EC teachers' core competences are: pedagogical knowledge, cooperation, interaction, contextual knowledge and reflective practices. Ryan and Cooper (2004) add that the teachers' enthusiasm and self-conception play an important role in successful teaching and educating.

In terms of professionalism and identity, teachers have to play many roles: they are educators, communicators, leaders, pastoral care providers, administrators and advocates (Ohi, 2014). Karila and Kinos (2012) have also paid attention to roles, especially different roles, being used in many contexts at the same time. These contexts include child care, education and teaching, and counselling.

Due to these challenges, plus the complexity and demand for this profession, it is necessary to investigate the EC teachers' experiences in changing ECEC work. Furthermore, it is important to determine which features give teachers satisfaction in their work.

## Methodology

### The context of the study and research questions

The conducting approach of this study is a socio-constructivist theory. The reality is socially constructed and the knowledge 'must analyse in process in which this occurs' (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The context of this study was a voluntary 15-ECTS further training course for EC teachers, funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education and implemented at the University of Tampere. This course ran from 2015 to 2016 and was provided free of charge to participants. The objective of this course was to strengthen the EC teachers' understanding of ECEC pedagogy, both theoretically and practically.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the EC teachers' experiences of their everyday work. We address the following research questions:

1. What kind of successes do the EC teachers experience in their pedagogical work?
2. What kind of challenges do the EC teachers experience in their pedagogical work?

### Participants and data collection

The data for this qualitative study consists of diaries collected from EC teachers who participated in the further training course. The participants were 38 EC teachers (two men and 36 women) whose average age was 35 years. Their work experience ranged from two to 30 years (average 11 years). Ethical scientific practice was used in the data collection and analysis, according to University of Tampere's (2017) ethical guidelines. Permission to use the diaries for research purposes was obtained from every informant. In addition, the participants

were told that submitting their diaries as research data was voluntary, and a guarantee of anonymity was given. The participants' names have been changed in the quotes of this article. Data credibility and trustworthiness were considered in the process by utilising the researchers' inductive approach to open coding and reflection on the EC teachers' diaries (see Ryan & Bernard, 2000). The results of this study were also discussed with the informants to enhance the validity.

The EC teachers were asked to write diaries (*n* = 38) about everyday successful and challenging experiences in their daily pedagogical work over the course of one week between 4 and 17 September 2015.

The participants were given the following guidelines for their diary writings:

1) Write down the successful experiences in your daily pedagogical work over one week, And mention:

- what kind of practices worked well and were satisfactory
- what kind of tasks in your pedagogical work succeeded?

2) Write down the challenging experiences in your pedagogical work over one week, and mention:

- what kind of practices did not work and produced negative feelings
- what kind of tasks in your pedagogical work did not succeed?

Entries ranged from one to five pages, and the total data amounted to 114 pages. The method produces 'mirror data', which can be considered reliable in making visible and identifying the current organisational culture (Engeström, 1998).

### Data analysis

The data was analysed using two-step qualitative content analysis. Content analysis is an appropriate method for categorising qualitative data from a systematic perspective. In the

content analysis, it is possible to consider the meaning-making process and human viewpoints. This makes it possible to focus on the essential core of the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

In this study, the process of analysis proceeded as follows. First, the diaries were analysed according to Layder's research map—i.e. on the levels of the context, setting, situated activity and self. During the analysis, the setting and situated activity levels were linked because they were closely connected to each other. On the setting level, the organisational structural component (e.g. collaborative structures and interaction) was identified, while the practices connected to these structures are described on the situated activity level.

Second, the EC teachers' experiences were analysed by content analysis and divided into different sub-themes within Layder's research map levels. This process started by reading and reducing the data, and identifying codes for the analysis. The codes were found by selecting expressions related to specific sub-themes.

## Findings

From the teachers' diaries, eight sub-themes were analysed with Layder's research map. The sub-themes include both successful and challenging issues experienced in the teachers' work. The sub-themes analysed from the diaries are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The main themes of the EC teachers' experiences

| | |
|---|---|
| **1) Context level** | Laws and steering documents of ECEC |
| | Values and attitudes of ECEC |
| **2) Setting level and 3) Situated activity level** | Pedagogical principles and solutions in the pedagogical work |
| | Leadership in ECEC |
| | Collaborative structures and interaction in ECEC communities |
| | Organisational structures in ECEC communities |
| **4) Level of the self** | Teachers' professional self-conception |
| | Teachers' professional skills |

Below, we first describe the EC teachers' successful experiences and then consider the teachers' challenging experiences. The findings have been enhanced with quotes from the original diary texts, to provide a deeper understanding of the essential findings.

## EC teachers' successful experiences

Several successful and positive experiences of the teachers' pedagogical work can be found in the diaries, on the whole. However, on the context level, only five of the 38 participants reported successful experiences in their diaries. Appreciation of childhood was experienced as being an important value in Finnish society. In addition, the teachers found that the National Core Curricula for ECEC and Pre-primary were supportive, and enabled the qualitative implementation of ECEC work. For instance, Julia's diary entry on 7 September 2015 states: 'The new curricula give clear [guide]lines of how to work pedagogically with children'.

On the setting level, all of the 38 participants reported successful experiences that appear on the situated activity. Pedagogical principles and solutions were mentioned as being significant in teachers' work. The annual pedagogical plan, the rich learning environment and guidance

of play were considered as meaningful practices. Functional pedagogical solutions—for example, promoting children's participation—were found to be important professional practices. Small group work enables children's participation and gives teachers the opportunity to observe each child individually:

> *For me, a meaningful aspect of my work is working with the children in small groups. Small groups enable interaction with the children, allowing me to listen to their ideas, and let them plan and do things together* (Laura, 15 September 2015).

Leadership arrangements were discussed as being significant for adequate pedagogy on the setting level, and the arrangements have obvious effects on the successful experiences on the situated activity level. EC teachers thought that professional leadership should be distributed, and be pedagogical. Furthermore, they stated that competent leadership supports the work of EC teachers. On 9 September 2015, Mary's diary entry shows: 'I discussed the challenges of our group with the director. She suggested that we could have some extra educators during group activities'.

On the setting level, the collaborative and interaction structures of the work community were found to be essential elements concerning the EC teachers' work. These structures, which were identified on the situated activity level, include professional discussions, efficient meeting practices and good teamwork. The features of good teamwork were considered to be effective information practices, flexibility, shared expertise and open interaction. In addition, cooperation with experts (e.g. special needs teachers) and parents was considered a positive practice, as indicated by Helen in her 14 September 2015 entry: 'I think that we managed to organise an informative parents evening for new families'.

Also on the setting level, the organisational structures of the work were seen to play an important role in EC teachers' pleasant work. It was considered successful when there were

no unpleasant surprises (such as unscheduled meetings or a lack of staff) during the day. On the situated activity level, the clear responsibilities concerning the daily routines were seen as good practice. Sarah's 8 September 2015 entry says: 'We have made a team agreement, and each of us know[s] what to do during the day'.

On the level of the self, social involvement, and sharing the same professional values and pedagogical principles was considered very important. Leniency and humanity were considered meaningful values in the teachers' work. Furthermore, rewarding experiences included the teachers' professional self-conception and commitment to the work. Teachers' found job satisfaction and confirmation of the right choice of profession when they were working with the children. They felt joy when the children participated, learned and were enthusiastic. In addition, leisurely and fun interaction, and discussions with the children were reported to be satisfying. As Sofia's 16 September 2015 diary entry indicates: 'Instructing the child group activities—getting the whole group enthusiastic about and involved in the action, even those who usually do not participate'.

Ten of the 38 teachers mentioned professional skills as being satisfactory features of their work. Creating professional pedagogical ideas, knowing different pedagogical methods, and having the opportunity to use special skills and take on some special responsibilities were considered rewarding. Sensitivity—especially concerning the children's suggestions—was considered a very important pedagogical skill. Development expertise and ability to influence were seen to enhance the success of pedagogical practices. The curriculum work and the forming of new EC educators' teams were even reported to be fascinating. Nina mentioned in her 6 September 2015 entry: 'A new ECEC centre and a new team. It is wonderful to notice how the new team starts to develop pedagogical work'.

### EC teachers' challenging experiences

In terms of the context level, only six of the 38 participants reported challenging experiences in their diaries. These teachers wrote that they found the status of ECEC to be low. Furthermore, two of the 38 teachers stated that the legislative requirements limit ECEC resources, and one teacher questioned whether the government had the expertise to decide on ECEC issues. Linda, in her 5 September 2015 entry, wrote: 'The new legislation makes the children's groups larger; it is worrying'.

On the setting and situated activity levels, the EC teachers' experienced several challenges. Pedagogical principles and solutions were revealed in many ways. Four of the 38 participants reported that traditions and routines led activities, with pedagogy playing only a minor role. On the situated activity level, a culture of interrupting activities traditionally predominates, and children's pedagogical activities are not appreciated enough. These interruptions are mostly caused by other educators. In addition, basic care situations were considered suffering from a lack of pedagogy. For example, Julia's 5 September 2015 entry: 'When things become so routine that we do not remember their original meaning, we have drifted too far from pedagogy'.

Challenges, on the setting level, arose concerning changed leadership structures. On the situated activity level, three of the 38 EC teachers stated that the leadership was unprofessional and the director was not available for the staff: 'Our director works at many ECEC centres. Usually, we try to manage on our own' (Marcia, 17 September 2015).

Collaborative structures and interaction were also considered problematic on the setting level. These problems were experienced in terms of inoperative meeting practices. The EC teachers argued that meetings were too frequent, staff could not take part in all meetings, and decisions were not made during the meetings. Furthermore, ineffective information structures were perceived to be challenging. Because of the large amount of knowledge, the information must be shared while working with children. In terms of challenging interactions, teachers brought up a lack of discussion and negative interaction between staff members. On 14 September 2015, Anna wrote: 'I do not know my colleague very well and we had many misunderstandings during the day. I felt uptight'.

On the setting level, organisational structures, work schedules and timetables were seen as problematic. Inflexible routines and hectic schedules were seen as disruptive practices in situated activities. Some teachers felt that other work tasks (e.g. paperwork) took time away from pedagogical work: a lack of time to plan the children's pedagogical activities was seen as especially discouraging.

> *In reality, it seems that the other, 'extra' tasks—such as food orders, a variety of written assignments—take your time away from what is essential in the EC teacher's work* (Rose, 8 September 2015).

On the level of the self, differing professional perceptions were found to be problematic. This was experienced, for example, in how the values and aims were implemented in small groups. In addition, professional self-conception and identity were considered complicated because of the many roles teachers play during the day. Seven of the 38 teachers were concerned about how they would cope with this important and demanding work. They reported a lack of pedagogical skills, especially experiencing inadequacy when working with children with special needs: '[There is a] feeling of helplessness that you do not know how to help children move forward' (Laura, 5 September 2015).

A lack of commitment to common decisions was also considered a challenge in the teachers' work. Teachers were also worried about some professional issues, for example, how to evaluate pedagogical practices and improve seemingly unchangeable inoperative routines. Furthermore, the atmosphere can be chaotic due to a new team of educators or organisational problems. Teachers could also have difficulties with maintaining order in the child group, and thus interaction with children could potentially be negative: 'I lost my temper and afterwards I felt guilty. It is not professional, let alone pedagogical' (Stella, 16 September 2015).

## Discussion

The aim of the study was to investigate EC teachers' daily pedagogical work, using Layder's research map. The findings of this study indicate that the EC teacher's experiences focused on certain themes, which were experienced as both successes and challenges. The common themes on the context level were laws, steering documents, and values and attitudes. On the

setting and situated activity levels, the common issues were pedagogical principles and solutions, leadership, collaborative structures and interaction, and organisational structures. The teachers' experiences of the setting-level structures were revealed on the situated activity level. On the level of the self, professional self-conception, identity and professional skills were found to be essential features of the EC teachers' experiences. From the results, we can note that the same phenomena are identifiable at different levels, especially the connections found between the setting, situated activity and self levels. These common phenomena are reflected upon in this section.

The findings on the context level were minor in comparison to references of experiences on the other levels. Urban and Dalli (2012) have also reported that early childhood educators found actions in their immediate context—in their daily lives—to be a significant dimension of their professionalism. According to our findings, on the context level, the teachers found the appreciation of childhood in general to be positive in Finnish society, and they considered the new steering documents as supportive of teachers' pedagogical work. Dalli, Miller and Urban (2012) have stated that ECEC is 'growing up', and the valuation of ECEC is increasing in many countries. However, the present results show that a small number of teachers still considers the status of ECEC work to be low. The obvious connections between the context level and other levels were not recognised, even though political solutions on this level play a significant role when implementing ECEC pedagogy in practice (Fonsén & Vlasov, 2017).

Our findings indicate that the different professional perceptions and values on the level of the self are experienced as challenges in the EC teachers' pedagogical work. The different professional values lead to different pedagogical practices on the situated activity level. As Johansson, Puroila and Emilson (2016) point out, educators do not have a professional language to discuss these values. Teachers need more discussion and understanding of how their values, personal epistemologies and beliefs are connected to their practices (Lunn Browlee et al., 2016). Irvine and Price (2014) concur with the idea of a professional conversational approach to support practice change. The discussion and negotiation of values and conceptions, in relation to practices, might be essential in ECEC contexts today, due to regulatory and pedagogical reforms taking place in many countries.

Our results indicate the importance of involvement and interaction in teachers' pedagogical work. On the self level, social involvement was considered meaningful, while collaborative working structures and professional discussions were considered successful on the setting level. This can be interpreted as reflection, which is significant for professional learning (see Lehrer, 2013). Urban (2008) adds that reflective conversations can make sense of uncertain situations. The opportunity for dialogue and asking critical questions creates new understandings. Woodrow (2012) notes that critical self-reflection in teams is an essential but challenging skill for ECEC professionals.

In addition, on the level of self, the teachers mentioned that the interaction and the work with children was the most satisfactory dimension in their pedagogical work. Similarly, Ohi (2014) found that EC teachers regard working with children as the best aspect of their work. However, a few teachers mentioned that the interaction with children was negative. This confirms Urban's (2008) statement of complex and demanding interaction situations in ECEC professionals' work.

The findings indicate that on the level of the self, the teachers identified several roles and different tasks during the day. In addition, the inoperative organisational structures on the setting level can lead to interruptions in children's activities on the situated activity level. Grant, Danby, Thorpe and Theobald (2016) also note that, for example, assessment and documentation take time away from work with children. The findings, concerning the fragmentary nature of EC teachers, mirror those of many earlier studies (Karila & Kinos, 2012; Ohi, 2014; Woodrow, 2012). Karila and Kinos (2012) underline that the professionalism of EC teachers and their awareness of their own actions can decrease the risk of interruptive practices.

The desire for teachers' professional development can be identified on the level of self. In addition, pedagogical development work, special responsibilities and distributed leadership on the setting and situated activity levels was experienced as rewarding. Kah Yan Loo and Agbenyega (2015) note that the ECEC field needs teachers who proactively take leadership roles. Furthermore, as Fonsén (2014) states, due to organisational changes, there is a growing demand for EC teachers to lead the quality and development of pedagogical work in ECEC centres, thus leaving the directors to concentrate on more administrative tasks. On the other

hand, the changes in the leadership structures of ECEC were reflected in the challenging experiences. As Rodd (2006) points out, disorganised leadership and working practices and the feeling of being in a hurry may be interconnected.

Still, teachers were worried about a lack of ability to change inoperative routines. Schein (1985) emphasises that operational habits are very deeply ingrained in the organisational culture. In addition, Happo, Määttä and Uusiautti (2012) have shown that a conservative societal setting in ECEC centres can hinder the development of the educators' expertise and prevent the development work.

## Study limitations

A possible limitation resulted from the data being collected during the further training program at the university. Social relationships between informants and researchers can affect the objectivity of the study (see Atkins & Wallace, 2012). The other possible limitation is that since the data was collected during a training course, the participants could be more motivated and development-oriented than EC teachers in Finland usually are.

## Conclusion

To summarise, it can be stated that despite the changes and demands, the teachers regard their work to be meaningful and rewarding. The results of the study indicate that the essential development aspects in ECEC are to raise the value of ECEC and EC teachers' work in Finnish society; clarify the roles and working focus of the ECEC professionals; and foster shared understanding and values of pedagogy among professionals. In addition, functional organisational structures, distributed leadership and interaction practices in the ECEC setting are crucial areas for development. Certain common phenomena, recognised on all levels of Layders' research map, can produce both successes and challenges in EC teachers' pedagogical work, and also affect the quality of ECEC services. It is possible to navigate towards better pedagogical work through shared reflection, negotiation, dialogue and professionalism in ECEC communities. The findings of this study can help support EC teachers and directors in analysing their work, and in uncovering development objectives in their working communities. In addition, the results can be utilised when developing the curricula and education of all ECEC professionals.

## Endnote

The new Act on Early Childhood Education and Care entered into force September 1st 2018. This research process was carried out before the new legislation.

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