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Working as early childhood centre directors and deputies – perspectives from Australia, Finland and Norway¹

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English Abstract

This research is based in early childhood centres in Australia, Finland and Norway, considered the leadership work of centre Directors and Deputy Directors. Theoretically, this study is situated within the global landscape of neoliberalism that Sims (2017) describes as forcing the reshaping of early childhood policy in numerous OECD countries. Essentially qualitative in design, this exploratory study uses data gathered via a short background survey questionnaire, content analysis of job description statements, and a follow up interview with each participant. Findings indicate that there are differences within and across the three countries in the way these jobs are structured. It appears that the expectations of each role and how participants engage in leadership are framed by their centre contexts. In Australia, leaders of centres achieving an excellent quality rating tend to focus on relationship work when making leadership decisions. In Finland, Directors and Deputy Directors are expected to collaborate as partners when overseeing the work of 2-3 centres and other services. In Norway, there has been a redistribution of work where Deputy Directors have a co-responsibility in leadership enactment. When taken together, these findings illuminate new insights on how Directors experience leadership when Deputies are part of the leadership team in early childhood settings.

German Abstract

Dieser Forschungsbereich Bericht basiert auf Kindertageseinrichtungen in Australien, Finnland und Norwegen und befasst sich mit der Arbeit von Einrichtungsleitungen und stellvertretenden Leitungskräften. Theoretisch ist die Studie angesiedelt in der globalen Landschaft des Neoliberalismus, den Sims als richtungsgebend für die Neuausrichtung der frühkindlichen Bildung in zahlreichen OECD-Ländern beschreibt. Grundsätzlich qualitativ im Design nutzt diese Studie Daten, die in einem kurzen Fragebogen für Hintergrundinformationen, einer Inhaltsanalyse von Stellenbeschreibungen und einer anschließenden Befragung aller Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer gesammelt wurden. Die Ergebnisse zeigen Unterschiede innerhalb und zwischen den drei Ländern in der Strukturierung der Stellen. Es scheint, dass die Erwartungen an jede Rolle und die Art und Weise, wie die Teilnehmerinnen und Teil-

1 This article has been object of double blind peer reviews.

nehmer ihre Leitungsrolle ausfüllen, durch den Kontext ihrer jeweiligen Einrichtung gerahmt sind. In Australien tendieren Leitungen, die eine exzellente Qualität erzielen, dazu, bei Leitungsentscheidungen den Fokus auf Beziehungsarbeit zu legen. In Finnland wird von Leitungskräfte und stellvertretenden Leitungskräften erwartet, dass sie partnerschaftlich zusammenarbeiten wenn sie für 2-3 Kitas sowie andere Einrichtungen zuständig sind. In Norwegen gab es eine Neuverteilung der Arbeit in der Weise, dass stellvertretende Leitungen eine Mitverantwortung in der Leitungsarbeit tragen. Insgesamt erlauben die Ergebnisse neue Einblicke, wie Leitungskräfte ihre Leitungsaufgaben erfahren, wenn Stellvertretungen ein Teil des Leitungsteams in Kitas sind.

Finnish Abstract

Tämä tutkimus, joka tarkasteli päiväkodin johtajien ja apulaisjohtajien johtajuutta, on toteutettu Australiassa, Suomessa ja Norjassa. Teoreettisesti tutkimus sijoittuu uusliberalistiseen ajatteluun, jonka Sims (2017) kuvaa laajenevasti muokkaavan varhaiskasvatuksen toimintatapoja useissa OECD maissa. Tutkimus on luonteeltaan laadullinen tutkimus ja sen aineistona on osallistujien lyhyt taustakysely, työnkuvien sisällönanalyysi ja yksilöhaastattelut. Tulosten mukaan erilaisuutta työn rakenteissa on sekä kunkin maan sisällä että maiden välillä. Tutkimuksessa havaittiin, että odotukset jokaisen roolista ja siitä, kuinka henkilöt osallistuvat johtajuuteen muovautuvat päiväkotikontekstissa. Australiassa johtajat hyvän laatuarvion saaneissa päiväkodeissa näyttävät toteuttavan yhteistoimijuutta päätöksiä tehtäessä. Suomessa johtajien ja apulaisjohtajien odotetaan toimivan yhteistyössä johtaessaan 2-3 päivähoitoyksikköä. Norjassa on tehty työn uudelleenjärjestelyä, jolloin apulaisjohtajat ovat johtajan rinnalla vastuullisia johtajuuden toteuttamisesta. Yhteenvetona voi todeta näiden tulosten tuovan esille uusia näkökulmia siitä, miten johtajat kokevat johtajuutensa, kun apulaisjohtajat ovat osa johtajuustiimiä varhaiskasvatuksen yksiköissä.

Introduction

This chapter is based on a small scale unfunded tri-nation study of early childhood education (ECE) centre Directors and Deputies in Australia, Finland and Norway. As a pioneering study, however, the goal was not to compare these three nations, but to ascertain insights about current developments in an area of shared interest in ECE leadership. The research aimed to understand aspects which frame the leadership of these early childhood practitioners who occupy positions of authority by virtue of their employment position and leadership status. Previous research and publications around ECE leadership influenced the design of this research. In this paper, we focus on time-based issues which framed the work expectations of centre Directors and Deputies. Ethical aspects of this study were approved by Macquarie University Human Research Ethics

Committee (Ref. No 5201600733) and equivalent authorities at the other universities were all informed of this research.

With increasing interest in leadership responsibilities, the work of Centre Directors and Deputies is evolving rapidly in each of the three countries involved in this research. In all three countries, there is limited research about the work of Deputies who work within and across clusters of centres. Likewise, there is little or no mention of the work of Deputy Directors in research focusing on Centre Directors. This lack of research does not allow for comparing our findings with the research done in other countries. Although the tradition of Deputy leadership is stronger in school education, research is also limited in that context. In a few studies focusing on Deputies, findings note a lack of training and unclear job descriptions (Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004). In addition, research related to distributed leadership rarely focuses on Deputies as a specific group further confirming a dearth of literature exploring the role of the Deputy in ECE settings.

The extent to which the distribution of leadership can influence the core pedagogical tasks and the quality of the settings is not yet fully understood in the early childhood sector in Australia, Finland and Norway. With a view to contributing to this knowledge base, this study examined the influence of context in framing the work of ECE centre Directors and Deputy Directors in Australia, Finland and Norway. Key findings in this research are used to consider implications for future research as well as professional practice from a global perspective.

Situating the Study

The neoliberal political agenda is evident in various forms across much of the western world, and its impact is being felt in public education globally (Giroux, 2015). Thus, it is useful to examine how it impacts on ECE policy development, particularly in relation to how leadership is positioned. Giroux (2015), a vocal critique of the impact of neoliberalism on civilisation, positions the marketisation of society, and especially education and social services, as responsible for:

... a ruthless quest for profits and the elevation of self-interests over the common good. The educational goal of expanding the capacity for critical thought and the outer limits of the imagination have given way to the instrumental desert of a mind-deadening audit culture. (p. 120)

This is particularly pertinent in the early childhood sector where, in the past, a focus on supporting children's developing interests and passions, encouraging imagination, critical thought and free play were long-held goals. Modern

ECE settings are increasingly characterised by curricula that specify what children have to learn along with the teaching strategies required to support their learning. These are accompanied by accountability processes that demonstrate settings are compliant to externally imposed standards designed to ensure good quality service delivery. It appears “democratic and value-based arguments seem to have disappeared from the public debate” (Vandenbroeck, 2017, p. 10). As a consequence, the work of ECE educators has moved more towards technocratic processes which “focus the educator’s gaze outwardly on the child who is to be assessed, measured then changed” (Campbell, Smith, & Alexander, 2017, p. 58). This is reflected in the ECE sector by requirements for documenting, observing and analysing children’s every emotion, expression and behaviour.

This panoptic surveillance of children is justified by the neoliberal positioning of them as human capital (Hunkin, 2017). An extensive, highly esteemed and much cited body of literature supports this position (Black et al., 2017; OECD, 2017; Penn, 2017; UNICEF Early Childhood Development Unit, 2014; World Health Organisation and UN International Children’s Emergency Fund, 2018). Additionally, Heckman’s work (2006, 2011, 2014) provides the economic rationale for investing in quality settings for young children as this investment results in improving the chances of good outcomes. Thus, this is not only an effective, but an economically viable strategy to reduce societal disadvantage. However as others argue, this positioning also continues to support the advantages claimed by the elite (Chomsky, 2016; Monbiot, 2017). This highlights a fear that children are no longer valued for who they are, with rights to learn and develop following individual strengths and inclinations. Rather early childhood education risks becoming “a mere preparation for the real learning that takes place in compulsory school” and “pedagogy risks being reduced to the development of effective methods to achieve the predefined goals” (Vandenbroeck, 2017, p. 14).

The situation in Australia foreshadows directions in which other nations may move, given it is claimed educators in this country are subject to more extreme neoliberalism than anywhere else in the world (Smyth, 2017) and that this is a direction emerging in policy initiatives elsewhere (Moss & Urban, 2017; Sims, Alexander, Pedey, & Tausere-Tiko, 2018; Sims et al., 2018a; Sims & Pedey, 2015; Sims & Tiko, 2016; Sims & Tiko, 2019). In the Australian early childhood sector this is exemplified by a range of policy and legislative initiatives (see Sims, Mulhearn, Grieshaber, & Sumsion, 2015 for an overview) that shape and ultimately define practice.

The ‘technocratic-alisation’ of education arises from neoliberal-based “coercive and controlling social engineering by the state” (White & Wastell, 2017, p. 38) and it is in this context that leaders are put into a position where they become the tools used to attain the goals of the state (Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2017). In other words, leaders in early childhood are positioned, by neoliberal policy,

to act upon educators, becoming the agents responsible for shaping educator practice into the required parameters (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016). Thus, educators themselves are becoming more and more deskilled and, within early childhood settings, this situation manifests itself as de-professionalisation (Jovanovic & Fane, 2016; Sims, Forrest, Semann, & Slattery, 2014).

Contextualising ECE Leadership in Australia, Finland and Norway

In situating this study globally, it is appropriate to consider the enactment of leadership across the different national contexts. Such an examination will not only articulate the ways in which neoliberalism is performed in different contexts, it may also provide opportunities to identify the different ways in which some leaders are able to operate to create an organisational context where values, other than those foregrounded by neoliberalism, operate. The understandings of Directors and Deputy Directors operating in ECE settings, and the ways in which they work together will help shed light on some of the complexities of operating an ECE centre in a world where neoliberalism “perverts the modern ideals of justice, freedom, and political emancipation” (Giroux, 2015, p. 3), shapes individuals to become dehumanised, self-interested and lacking in empathy (Jurkiewicz & Grossman, 2012) and where organisations most likely to succeed do so by aggressively pursuing organisational goals to the detriment of individuals, communities and the environment (Jurkiewicz & Grossman, 2012). In the following section, we provide a brief overview of the contemporary ECE policy landscape in Australia, Finland and Norway to assist in contextualising the findings of this research.

Within Australia

In Australia, the role of the Educational Leader (equivalent to that sometimes identified as a ‘Pedagogical Leader’ in international literature) was established in 2012 to work with educators to ensure practice aligned with the required quality standards (Waniganayake & Sims, 2018). The creation of this position aligns with the neoliberal focus identifying leadership as a necessary tool to develop educator “discipline, order, mindless enthusiasm, conformity, and loyalty” (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016, p. 17). Thus, leaders are seen as responsible for shaping an overall culture of conformity which is supposed to ensure quality (Giroux, 2015). However, the role of the educational leader was left undefined by the government and centres determined their own job descriptions (Cumming, Sumsion, & Wong, 2013; Fleet, Soper, Semann, & Madden, 2015; Grarock & Morrissey, 2013; Sims, Waniganayake, & Hadley, 2018a). Within the neoliberal context, there is

an emphasis on compliance and the expectation that the role will shape practice towards compulsory standards.

Extant research indicates that leaders (Educational Leaders/Directors/Deputy Directors – the differentiation remains unclear in many circumstances) in the early years of implementing the *National Quality Framework* spent as much as a third of their time on compliance focused activities such as monitoring pedagogical documentation created by the educators they were supervising, and working on the compulsory accreditation standards (Garrock & Morrissey, 2013; Rouse & Spradbury, 2015; Sims et al., 2018a; Sims & Waniganayake, 2015). This research found that whilst many leaders thought they were doing relationship work with their staff, their perceptions of the way in which they performed their work did not reflect this approach. In reality, many were intensely focused on trying to understand the new requirements and teach their staff how to enact these so that their centres would receive the best possible accreditation outcome.

Agency is a key element in professionalisation (Goodson, 2007; Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016) and unquestioning acquiescence to external imposition of definitions of quality is, in itself a form of de-professionalisation (Sims et al., 2014; Sims et al., 2018a). Leaders exemplified this acquiescence but it is important to note that in accepting this form of control, followers are also participating in their own de-professionalisation (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016). It is interesting to note that later research, undertaken after settings had been subject to the new legislative regime for some years, suggested that in selected high quality centres, leaders were less likely to focus on compliance and more likely to engage in supportive, collegial relationships with their staff (Sims, Waniganayake, & Hadley, 2018b).

Within Finland

Finland is currently in the process of making policy changes focusing on ECE. The *Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care* (EDUFI, 2016) was revised two years ago. The previous curriculum provided specific directions that educators were required to follow. The revised version has taken a different approach, requiring municipalities and ECE centres to develop their own curriculum based on the national policy. Thus the national curriculum steers the provision, implementation and development of ECE with the exception of the pre-primary sector which has its own curriculum. The roles of Directors and educators are outlined in the National Curriculum including the role of teachers as leaders. At the time of writing this article, the sector awaits the new Act for ECE which will replace the 1973 version. It is anticipated that the new Act will provide new regulations for staffing ECE settings in Finland.

Since the 1990s, in most Finnish municipalities, smaller day care units have been merged with larger ones. Whereas in the past, most Directors led one centre

and simultaneously had teaching duties with children, today most focus wholly on leadership and run a cluster of centres. Vesalainen, Cleve, & Ilves (2013), for instance, report that 60% of the Directors led at least three types of services and units. Despite this, there are still Directors who continue to hold the traditional double role of director and early childhood teacher within a centre.

The tasks of Centre Directors are also set at the municipality level. Eskelinen and Hujala (2015) and Vesalainen et al. (2013) report the main areas of leadership responsibility of a Centre Director include pedagogy, service, knowledge, human resources management and other daily operational tasks. The Centre Director has a key role in developing the organisational culture of ECE settings. Developing the organisational culture involves pedagogical leadership, development of education and care programmes, assessment of children's learning as well as ensuring good working conditions for staff and developing their vocational competence (EDUFI, 2016).

Deputy leadership is also not a new concept in the Finnish ECE context but its importance has increased (Halttunen, 2016). There are no national regulations identifying how leadership in ECE operates thus municipalities decide how Deputy Directors are appointed, what positional terms are used, whether they receive any extra salary and how their roles and responsibilities are defined. Despite municipalities potentially determining tasks and duties for Deputy Directors, job descriptions, if they exist, tend to be developed at the centre level. Often, the appointment of a Deputy Director is undertaken by the Director who tends to identify a suitable staff member from those already employed at the centre. Some municipalities have now started to open the position of Deputy Director for application by the early childhood educators of the municipality. In addition to a position of a Deputy Director, municipalities may appoint other leadership roles. As there are no set positional titles, there is a variation in the titles used.

Within Norway

In Norway, there is a similar evolution of the role of Centre Director from one of working in small centres with a few early childhood teachers and assistants, to the present day where small ECE settings are likely to be merged into larger ECE centres. This change is accompanied by a change in the role of EC Directors; in more recent times the role focuses more clearly on leadership with a larger emphasis on external tasks (Børhaug & Lotsberg, 2010). In Norway, 46% of ECE settings are public and 56% are private, with both forms being regulated under the same laws and regulations. In 2016, 91% of Directors and teacher leaders had an early childhood teacher education Bachelor degree qualification.

Norway, like Finland and Australia, has recently revised core ECE laws and regulations. There has been much debate in the media, trade unions and the ECE sector in relation to these changes and the direction in which the sector

should develop. From 2009, children's right to access ECE was introduced for children born before September 1st the year before admission. As of the autumn of 2017, children born in November were entitled to access ECE settings, enrolling in the autumn of the following year. The same year, changes to the way in which children's age was recognised enabled children to stay 6 months longer in the younger children's section. This change benefited children given the better adult:child ratios and smaller group sizes required for the younger age group.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has now adopted stricter standards for educational staff (number of children/early childhood teacher educated with at least a Bachelor's degree) with 7 children per early childhood teacher if the child is below three years and 14 children per ECE teacher if the child is more than three years old. This norm demands a minimum of 43% of early childhood teachers with a Bachelor's degree make up staff in ECE centres. From August 2018, the new early childhood teacher norm became mandatory. Simultaneously, Directors' time for leadership and management is no longer to be included in the calculation of the standards for the educational crew. The Kindergarten Act states that ECE centres shall have a Director who is a trained early childhood teacher (Kindergarten Act, 2018).

In Norway the National Framework Plan for ECE has recently been revised (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). Despite the huge international intrusion of neoliberalism into ECE politics in this country, the revised version of the framework plan maintains a holistic approach to learning. This approach encourages play, relationships, curiosity, and the desire for meaning making based on activities that value both children and educators in a co-constructing environment. In the new framework plan, leadership roles and responsibilities have been emphasized and clarified (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). The Norwegian Kindergarten Act (2005) states that ECE centres shall have both pedagogical and administrative leadership (Ministry of Education and Research, 2005). Leadership positions and time allocated to leadership tasks are regulated through special agreements between employee and employer (SENTRAL FORBUNDSVIS SÆRAVTALE, 2016). These requirements apply to both public and private centres and create the space in which Deputy Director positions have arisen. For example, a center with 100 children may have two full-time leadership positions: a Director and a Deputy. Centres with 45–59 children are required to have 0.6% full-time equivalent (FTE) leadership positions. Centres with more than 100 children are required to have 1.7% FTE leadership positions (Vassenden et al., 2011).

How to divide leadership responsibilities between Directors and Deputies is determined by the municipality or at the centre level. The leadership tasks formally delegated to the Deputy Director can also vary according to factors such as the organisational size, structure, the nature of decision-making and culture

of collaboration within centres. Accordingly, currently in Norway, the leadership structure and responsibilities of Directors and Deputy Directors can vary significantly between ECE centres.

Research Methods and Participants

In each country included in this research, centres did not always have a Deputy Director and usually these appointments were dependent on the size of the centre. For example, the requirements discussed above for Norway, clearly align the appointment of Deputy Directors to centre size. In contrast, neither Australia nor Finland had similar legislative guidelines requiring the appointment of Deputy Directors.

Research on early childhood leadership internationally shows the increasing complexity of the work of early childhood practitioners. Given the importance of leadership in supporting this work it is clear that this increasing complexity requires effective communication and sharing of leadership responsibilities (Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2012; Ho, 2011; McCrae, 2015; Rodd, 2013), including the enactment of leadership in guiding the pedagogical work of the centres. How this operates in the real world may be very different to how leadership is positioned in organisational discourse. As Aubrey et al. (2012) noted it is possible that “the organization was regarded as hierarchical at the strategic level and collaborative at the operational level” (p.19). There is however very little known about how Directors guide the pedagogical work and/or support and cooperate with other staff who are pedagogical leaders. Given increasing leadership responsibilities, there is an urgent need to investigate the allocation of leadership tasks between Directors and Deputies in ECE centres.

In this small scale exploratory study, an inductive approach to data collection and analysis was adopted. In each country, participants completed a short background survey questionnaire, their job description statements provided by employers were analysed and they were interviewed individually. In this paper, the findings arising from the survey data and the job description statements are used.

Krippendorff's (2013) framework was used to critically examine these statements to ascertain an initial understanding of the job expectations of each participant.

Participants were purposively selected from ECE settings recognised as high quality given the research evidence showing that highly qualified practitioners can demonstrate effective leadership (Rodd, 2013; Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). Overall, the three main inclusion criteria used in the selection of participants were:

1. Having a Diploma or Degree in early childhood;
2. Two or more years of experience working in ECE in their country; and
3. The centres where participants were employed were identified by key informants as one of good quality (centres could be either private or public).

Given these selective criteria about qualifications and experience, this study relied on convenience sampling through known professional networks in the researchers' local communities to identify suitable participants. In Australia, this identification was based on the rating posted on the public national register of the accrediting agency (a rating of either Exceeding National Quality Standards or Excellent – the top 2 rating categories possible to achieve -see <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/resources/national-registers>). In Finland and Norway, the centres selected were well known in the community for their good reputation.

The national distribution of the 17 participants in this study are specified in Table 1. Given the small sample size, for the purposes of this paper, there will be no separation between centre ownership or size in the data collected and analysed.

Table 1. Number of participants in each country

	Directors	Deputies	Total
Australia	5	2	7
Finland	2	2	4
Norway	3	3	6
Total	10	7	17

All 17 participants were women, whose age ranged between 31 to 60 years, with at least one third falling into the bracket of being either 31-40 years or 51-60 years. All participants had achieved either a Diploma or Degree in Early Childhood Education. Centre Directors from Norway however, had additional qualifications in another discipline such as Economics and Psychology. Apart from one Centre Director in Australia who had been employed in ECE settings for just two years, all other participants had at least ten years or more experience working in the sector. The majority (n=10) had been employed in the sector for 20 years or more, with the most experienced participant being a Centre Director from Australia with an employment record of 35 years in ECE settings.

Findings

The work of the Directors and Deputies was supported differently across the three countries and also within each nation. Australia and Finland had no national policy or legislative regulations regarding the appointment of Centre Directors and Deputy Directors. In Norway, the appointment of Directors and Deputies was specified in national legislation according to child enrolments. In all three countries, there were no national regulations about the actual work responsibilities of Deputy Directors. In Finland and Norway, typically, the responsibilities of all early childhood educators, including the Deputy Directors, were defined by the municipality and in private centres by the owner. It was also possible that the municipality set the guidelines and the specific tasks were discussed and refined within centres. In Australia, these decisions were set by individual centres or by a central office if the centre was part of a group or a chain of centres. In presenting findings, the focus is on time resources allocated to these roles and on how the job descriptions described and defined the work of the Deputies.

Time resources

As it can be seen from Table 2, most Centre Directors were allocated fewer hours than the Deputies for programme planning. The Australian participants had the smallest non-contact time allowances where they could engage in curriculum and pedagogy planning. In contrast, the Directors and Deputies in Norway were allocated 30 or more hours per week for programme planning. In Finland, this allocation was depended on the Director's position and the manner in which their Deputy role interacted with their early childhood teacher role.

A Centre Director in both public and private settings in Norway was expected to work 37.5 hours a week with the same requirements operating independently of centre size. The size of the center (number of children) defined the resources allocated to the Deputy's position. Full-time appointed Centre Directors and Deputy Directors did not work directly with the children during the day. However, Directors had the main overall responsibility for pedagogical work at the centre. This did not mean however that these full-time Directors had no contact with children or staff during the day. Often these Directors, walked around the centre to, for example, say hello, give information, support staff. Being a full time Director in Norway means doing both administrative tasks and pedagogical leadership tasks as well as leading staff and working with external stakeholders.

Table 2. Weekly hours away from children allocated for programme planning

	Directors	Deputy Directors
Australia	1-2 hours = 1 1 hour = 1 NA = 3	3 hours = 1 4 hours = 1
Finland	3.45 = 1* NA = 1	3.45 hours = 2
Norway	37.5 hour = 3	30 hours = 2** 37.5 hours = 1

*Note: This director worked simultaneously as an early childhood teacher

**Note: These two Deputy Directors each held a 80% position and did not work directly with groups of children.

In Finland, the normal working week was 37.5 hours as specified in regulations. Of this time, 3.45 hours is identified nationally in the collective agreement of early childhood teachers as the required time they should have available to them for programme planning. This planning work is done at the local centre. One of the participants, a Centre Director worked simultaneously as an early childhood teacher and thus was subject to the same regulations as all teachers. The other Finnish Director worked only as a Centre Director and there was no separation as to how much of her work time was reserved for different duties. As in Norway, Directors have the main responsibility for pedagogical work of their centres. However, in Australia this pedagogical responsibility could be held by the Director, Deputy or another early childhood educator in the centre.

Table 3 presents the weekly hours reserved for the work as a Centre Director or a Deputy, reflecting a variable pattern across the three countries.

Table 3. Weekly hours allocated to do the work of a Director/Deputy Director

	Directors	Deputy Directors
Australia	25 hours = 1 7 hours = 1 NA = 3	24 hours = 1 No time = 1
Finland	37.5 hours = 1 5-8 hours = 1	4 hours = 1 No time = 1
Norway	37.5 = 3	37.5 hours = 1 30 hours = 2

Firstly, time allocated to the role of Directors in Australia is the lowest of the three countries. In contrast, Directors from Finland and Norway mainly worked full-time in this role. The Director from Finland who had direct work with children reported very little time (5-8 hours) for the work as a Director. Interestingly, there were two Deputy Directors – one each from Australia and Finland, who reported not being given any time to dedicate to these roles as their main task was to be a teacher who was responsible for a group of children. Her role as Deputy Director was enacted only when the Centre Director was absent or away from the centre.

Participants were asked to assess if the time they were given to undertake their role as Centre Director or a Deputy was sufficient.

Table 4. Adequacy of time to do the work of a Director/Deputy Director

	Totally insufficient	Usually sufficient	Somewhat sufficient	Totally sufficient
Australia				
Directors	3	-	1	-
Deputies	1	-	-	1
Finland				
Directors	1	-	-	-
Deputies			1	1
Norway				
Directors			1	2
Deputies			1	3
TOTAL	4		4	7

Note: From Australia and Finland, data from one Director each is missing

Most of the Finnish and Norwegian Directors and Deputy Directors found the time reserved for their work as the Director or Deputy Director was either totally or somewhat sufficient. In Australia, three Directors and one Deputy answered that they did not have enough time for this work. The most satisfied participants in relation to the availability of time resources were the Directors and Deputies from Norway.

Job descriptions and focus areas

In Australia, the working conditions of Centre Directors and Deputy Directors were highly variable and influenced by industrial awards and enterprise agreements which set the conditions of employment of early childhood educators. Most educators in prior to school settings in Australia work on a 38 hour week,

with one rostered day off a month. There are also a variety of job titles for these positions of leadership including Centre Director or Coordinator and they could also be identified as the nominated supervisor for the whole centre. Likewise, the Deputy Director’s role or title could also be identified as the Second-In-Charge (2IC) or Assistant Director or Co-Director. Under Australian legislation there is also a required role of a ‘nominated supervisor’. This person is the one legally responsible for compliance with the National Law and National Regulations and it is not unusual for this legal position to be filled by a teacher or educator other than the Director or Deputy.

In Australia, participants also noted that their role as Deputy Directors tended to be focused on administration tasks, with an operational and compliance focus, as reflected in the analysis of their job description statements presented in Figure 1. Their work in leading pedagogy was the second most mentioned in the job descriptions.



Figure 1. Analysis of job descriptions of Australian Deputy Directors

In Finland, job descriptions of both the Directors and Deputies in public centres were developed at the municipality level but redefined individually with the supervisors. Directors were given agency to identify the main duties and demands of the job and these varied among the Directors. Deputies’ job descriptions were similar with a list of duties. Most of the tasks of a Deputy should be done in col-

laboration with the Centre Director addressing tasks such as client service, financial issues, placing a new child at the centre, arranging annual leave for the centre staff and coordinating the duty arrangements of all centre staff. If needed, the Deputy had full responsibility to rearrange the work shifts of the staff. However, there was nothing about the relationship between the Deputy and the Director in the very detailed job description of the Centre Director of this same municipality. The Deputy Director from the private centre had several administrative tasks such as reporting to the Director about the work shifts or sick leave. The Deputy was also expected to collaborate with the Director in designing pedagogical plans for the centre. Unfortunately, the job description from the private centre was not provided so comparison is not possible. Guidelines provided by the municipality provided information on the work of Deputies. Deputies should work in a playgroup for children between 3-5 years, there should be another teacher working in the same group and their work shift should be between 7:30-16:30.

In Norway, the analysis of the job descriptions indicated that the Director and Deputy Director followed each other closely, but the wording of their responsibilities was different. With the Directors, the words “in charge of” was used and with the Deputy Directors, the words used were “contribute to”. These words make it clear that the main responsibility lies with the Director and that the Deputy Director was perceived as a support, assisting the Director. In the private centre, the main responsibility of the Director was also reinforced as leading as in this context the Director participated in the leadership team with the centre owner.

How the work was distributed depended largely on the Director’s wishes and needs, but the division of labor was developed through dialogue and cooperation with the Deputy Director. One of the Deputy Directors from Norway was working one day a week in one of the departments (groups of children) together with the room leader (teacher leader with formal leadership responsibility for her department), assistants and children. Here, she had specific tasks in relation to observing children and to guide, support and challenge staff in pedagogical work with children. She was also responsible for supervising staff so that the team worked as well as possible. Although most of the time the work of both Directors and Deputy Directors work was away from the children, they both acknowledged the importance of getting to know the children and their parents. Therefore, they often stepped out of their offices to talk to children and parents, as well as staff.

Discussion

Based on the findings of this study presented in this paper, we offer three key observations about the work of early childhood centre Directors and Deputy Directors in Australia, Finland and Norway.

i) Time resources

- Formal allocation of time resources across the three countries varied significantly.
- Only the Norwegian participants agreed there was sufficient time allocated to do the Deputy Director's work.
- Some Directors worked as teacher-Directors, whereby they had regular responsibilities for a group of children.
- Additionally, Directors in Finland also worked with playgroups and Family Day Carers.

The data demonstrated different approaches to sharing the leadership work between Directors and Deputies both within and between countries. In some situations, the data showed Directors held sole authority (leading alone). Elsewhere, there appeared to be multiple roles being performed by Directors and Deputies, with the adoption of a collaborative approach to delineating leadership responsibilities (leading together). Elements of these two approaches arising from the data are identified below.

ii) Leading alone

- Deputy Director positions were not required by regulation in Australia and Finland. In Norway leadership positions and time allocated to leadership are regulated by the size of the centre. Centres with 100+ children have Deputy Directors. Directors and Deputy Directors, who worked collaboratively.
- Deputy Directors tended to develop their role informally through negotiation with the Director. Generally, the Director held strong leadership responsibilities, delegating tasks to the Deputy as needed.
- Directors lead from a position of power and responsibility, and carried the main responsibility. The Deputy Directors stepped into this role only when the Director was away/absent from the centre.

This study included a mix of ECE settings comprising both stand-alone centres and those that were located within a cluster of ECE programmes that also included family day care and playgroups as in the case of Finland and Norway. In the case of Australia, ECE centres could belong to a group or chain of centres that were owned by a private individual or corporation. However, the small number of participants involved in this study makes it impossible to comment about the

nature of leading alone, on the basis of the structural arrangements of each setting.

iii) Leading together

- Leadership is enacted through democratic relationships between Directors and Deputy Directors
- The Director involves the Deputy in meaning making and how to improve centre practices.

It appears that across all three countries, there was a prevailing sense of collaboration within each ECE setting participating in this study. Likewise, all participants were also aware of the need to balance the pedagogical and administrative/compliance requirements of their leadership responsibilities that were being shaped by the expectations reflected in their country's national policy landscape. Overall however, given the small scale of this research, it is important to note that the generalisability of these findings are limited. In particular, only one participant from each centre was included in the study, and this means that the findings reflect one person's perspectives of the work at each organisation. Inclusion of multiple participants from one centre could provide a richer analysis of relationship dynamics between Centre Directors and their Deputies.

Conclusion

Overall, it appears that the enactment of neoliberalism in Australian early childhood may well foreshadow developments elsewhere in the world. The neoliberal positioning of leaders as the agents of compliance-driven change becomes possible when both leaders and followers accept the roles into which they are placed. As Freire (1973) wrote many years ago, we can choose to be complicit in our own oppression, or we can choose to resist. More recently Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2017, p. 2) remind us that leaders have a significant impact on the culture of an organisation and that "leaders who are ethical have improved employee physical, psychological, and job wellbeing". They define ethical leadership as consisting of a range of characteristics including transparency in decision-making and considerations of social justice, equity and fairness. Leaders in ECE have a huge responsibility to secure and support their leadership team to direct and facilitate pedagogical work with children (Bøe, 2016; Hognestad, 2016). In contexts where Directors and Deputies are leading together, they emphasize building strong teams.

The question remains – when does a centre require a Deputy Director? To what extent does this decision rely solely on structural elements of child enrolments and child:staff ratios? Other factors, apart from the purely economic ones

associated with size might need to be considered. For example, the contextual elements of the community taking into account child and family background variables, require deeper consideration in leadership enactment. Where settings work with particularly challenging communities, families and or children, should they prioritise a Deputy position to enhance capacity to offer appropriate supports?

Waniganayake and Sims (2018) suggest that in addition to this, there is a need to consider the relationship elements of leadership work. They argue that a strong focus on building supportive relationships with staff, and an ability to build on staff strengths, is likely to be reflected in high quality service delivery to children and families. In these neoliberal times where investment in good quality ECE settings is seen as the pathway to national economic well-being should ECE settings be advocating for Deputy positions to create space for relationship-focused, empowering leadership to occur? The insights gained from this research alert us to critically reflect on the impact of compliance requirements shaping the role of pedagogical leadership with care. Although formal job descriptions can provide boundaries and clarity about roles and responsibilities, the extent to which they can inhibit agency for those enacting leadership roles requires deeper exploration.

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