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COLLECTIVE AGENCY-PROMOTING LEADERSHIP IN FINNISH TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Globally, there is a political and social consensus that teacher education is a key priority for the 21st century. However, studies have so far paid little attention to a crucial issue, namely leadership in teacher education. This chapter contributes to discussion on transforming teacher education practices by focusing on leadership practices in a particular Finnish teacher education department. Adopting a subject-centered socio-cultural approach, we elaborate the main challenges, insights, and lessons learned, as perceived by the four leaders of the department, in efforts to move towards more innovative and collaborative practices. We argue that teacher education leaders

currently require competencies to support professional agency, and to lead the identity work of their staff. In addition, leaders need the resources to build collective leadership practices while renegotiating their own professional identities. Overall, we highlight the importance of what we term *collective agency-promoting leadership* in developing teacher education practices.

INTRODUCTION: IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP IN TEACHER EDUCATION

In the globalized word there is a political, societal, and educational understanding that the teaching profession and teacher education are key priorities in confronting the demands of the 21st century (Niemi 2008; Murray and Harrison 2008). There is also a global consensus that teacher education must be transformed to meet the challenges of complex modern societies. At the same time, many countries are struggling with challenges in developing teacher education programs, practices, structures, and policies (Madalinska-Michalak et al. 2012).

The challenges have led to continuous restructuring, and to the introduction of a *new public management* culture in teacher education organisations (Murray et al. 2009; Hökkä and Vähäsantanen 2014). The changes have involved a greater accountability culture; thus there have been more external assessments, with more monitoring of teacher education organisations, individual teacher educators, and teacher education leaders. At the same time, many teacher education organisations, especially in universities, have struggled to promote evidence- or research-based teacher education. At the individual level these trends have caused many teacher educators to experience challenges in renegotiating their

professional identities and roles, with particular difficulties in moving from a teacher-identity towards a researcher-identity. The combining of these two roles seems to be a continuing source of tension in teacher education (Murray et al. 2009; Robinson and McMillan 2006).

The challenges in teacher education have been widely discussed, and research on teacher education has expanded. So far, most studies have addressed *policy level issues* (for example university vs. school based teacher education), *organizational issues* (that is, how to develop practices, programs, structures, and cultures), or *individual teacher educator development* (encompassing professional learning, professional identities, competencies, and pedagogical knowledge) as key factors in developing teacher education. Recent studies have also indicated that changes in teacher education occur slowly (for example, Peck et al. 2009), and that it is the issues of teacher educator identity and agency that have become most salient (for example, Hökkä and Eteläpelto 2014; Murray and Harrison 2008).

One aspect that has been somewhat neglected is the actual meaning of *leadership*, and the role of leaders in teacher education – even if in school and university contexts the issue has received considerable attention (for example, Bolden et al. 2008; Spillane and Healey 2010). Since the landscape of teacher education has dramatically changed, one can argue that the leading of teacher education organisations must also change. Thus, in the present chapter, we shall contribute to discussion on reforming teacher education by focusing on leadership practices in one Finnish teacher education department which has successfully transformed its practices. Conducted within the framework of a subject-centered

socio-cultural approach (Eteläpelto et al. 2013; 2014), the study reported here elaborated pitfalls and insights applicable to moving teacher education in a more innovative and collaborative direction. The focus was on a group of four teacher education leaders who were striving to build shared leadership practices, and thus to develop teacher education practices and culture.

THEORETICAL OUTLINES – PROMOTING SHARED LEADERSHIP PRACTICES THROUGH AGENCY

In leadership studies there has been a move from a 'heroic' understanding of leadership towards notions of shared leadership practices and multi-leader approaches. The concept of shared leadership can be seen as a conceptual umbrella that includes leadership models such as co-leadership (leadership divided between two people), distributed leadership (with leadership distributed broadly, but with some persons following rather than leading), and collective leadership (with leadership shared by all the persons in the group) (Offermann and Scuderi 2007).

This shift towards shared leadership has involved a movement towards leadership being viewed as a real-world phenomenon that encompasses the interpersonal and situational dynamics of hybrid leadership practices – practices applicable to both individual leaders and holistic leadership units (Gronn 2009). In terms of the units of analysis, this approach has underlined the importance of studying micro-level activities in leadership processes (Chreim 2015; Gronn 2002). Gronn (2009) has put forward the notion of *leadership configurations* as an approach to studying the interpersonal, situational, and hybrid phenomenon of

leadership practices. By focusing on leadership configurations it is possible to analyse the kinds of ambiguous leadership spaces that emerge in everyday work practices – which may often involve conflicts, changed relationships, ambiguous roles, or power struggles. In a comparative case analysis covering acquisition contexts, Chreim (2015) found four different types of emergent leadership configurations: (a) distributed leadership (referring to the conjoint agency of the leaders), (b) distributed leaderlessness (that is, a lack of leadership practices), (c) overlapping leadership (meaning duplication of the role and agency of leaders, which was found to lead to tensions), and (d) non-distributed leadership (meaning corporate leader control and hierarchical authority). The distributed leadership configuration was characterized as including strong leadership skills on the part of the leaders. It also manifested conjoint agency, with successful devolution of authority among different leaders.

In the discussion of distributed leadership, recent studies have raised questions concerning *professional agency* within workplace practices. Thus, in a recent review on distributed leadership, Tian et al. (2015) have highlighted the importance of research on leadership agency, and, in particular, on what agency actually means in distributed learning practices. They conclude that a combination of distributed leadership theories and professional agency theories could help in understanding how leadership practices may be enhanced in multifaceted educational contexts. Along similar lines, advocates of shared leadership emphasize the importance of conjoint or collective agency (Chreim 2015; Gronn 2015). Agency,

and particularly collective agency, is seen as a crucial prerequisite for constructing

distributed leadership configurations.

The concept of agency has also recently gained attention in other fields. In

workplace studies in particular, the concept has been fruitful in understanding the

need for innovation and transformation in the workplace. In current theoretical

discussion, professional agency refers to professional actors (employees and

leaders) who can exercise control over, or have an effect on their work and work

environment (Eteläpelto et al. 2013; Goller and Paloniemi 2017). Professional

agency is seen as crucial at a time of changes within societies and workplaces, and

further, as underlining the importance of innovations and continuous learning.

Agency can be manifested individually or collectively. Collective agency refers to

what is manifested when a group of people share and pursue a common interest in

order to improve their own lives and to affect larger contexts, for example by

transforming structures and cultures (Hökkä et al. 2017; Pantic and Florian 2015).

Collective agency can be manifested in terms of a group of employees' collective

initiatives to develop new work practices, or to arrive at a new shared

understanding of themselves as a professional group amid external challenges.

In this study our starting point in understanding professional agency was a

subject-centered socio-cultural approach, which made it possible to address both

socio-cultural conditions and professional subjects (Eteläpelto et al. 2013). In such

an approach, professional agency is seen as manifested in and resourced by a

relational interaction between social conditions (including certain cultural and

material resources and constraints) and individual subjects with their professional

identities and competencies. We see professional agency as manifested and practised when professional subjects and/or communities make choices, take stances, and have an influence on their work and/or professional identities. This means that professional agency is closely intertwined with subjects´ professional identities, competencies, knowledge, and experience, but that it is always temporally realised within socio-cultural conditions. The latter encompass resources and constraints such as material and physical conditions, cultures, power relations, and discursive structures (Eteläpelto et al. 2013). Agency is seen as related to professional identity, in accordance with the need for continuous identity renegotiation amid changing work conditions (Buchanan 2015; Vähäsantanen 2015). This approach also stresses the importance of agency for the transformation of work practices and cultures.

In teacher education, recent challenging conditions have forced teacher educators – and particularly teacher education leaders – to reshape their professional identities and roles. Leaders are thus required to practise active agency in adapting to new issues affecting their work and themselves. They are required to understand the changes and new demands placed on them, to negotiate their professional identities and orientations towards these changes, and to find new solutions (Hökkä and Vähäsantanen 2014; Tian et al. 2015). This is certainly the case in Finland. Hence, in this chapter we shall examine leadership configurations in Finnish teacher education, focusing particularly on the issue of professional agency and shared leadership.

TEACHER EDUCATION IN FINLAND

There is a national consensus in Finland that academically educated teachers are the key to high quality teaching and good learning outcomes. Legislation provides the main guidelines for education, but teacher education belongs within the university system. The universities are autonomous, and departments and faculties of education make their own decisions, in the main, about education (including the curriculum, teaching content, and pedagogical methods). The Ministry of Education and Culture supervises teacher education, but focuses mainly on regulating the overall numbers of teacher students to be admitted (according to their calculations of the future numbers of qualified teachers of different subjects required).

Despite this freedom, the culture of teacher education departments throughout Finland is fairly similar. All universities place an emphasis on teachers' pedagogical thinking, their readiness to make use of research, their willingness to reflect on the theory and practice of teaching and learning, and their career-long professional development (Silander and Välijärvi 2013). Teacher education is research-based; thus the aim is that the teacher's professional outlook should be founded on sound scientific knowledge, and that teachers should have the capacity to broaden and deepen their competence as life-long learners, through exploration and critical reflection throughout their career (Niemi 2012).

RESEARCH TASK AND QUESTIONS

In the study reported here, the focus was on teacher education leaders' inside perspectives on the resources and obstacles that had been critical in transforming

practices in a particular teacher education department, and in moving the department towards a more shared leadership configuration. Seeking a retrospective view, we framed the following question: *What were the most critical issues in building shared leadership within the teacher education department?*

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The context of the study

This study was connected to a larger research project (Proagent), which aims to understand how professional agency is practised, and how it can be promoted through multi-level interventions in education and health care organisations (Vähäsantanen et al. 2016). In this project, the main idea has been that in order to develop and transform practices and individual learning, there is a need to enhance learning at individual, work community, and organizational levels.

The present study was implemented as a case-study (using purposeful sampling) at the Department of Teacher Education of the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. During recent years, this institution has developed its organisational culture and leadership practices towards a more collaborative model, transforming work practices to place more emphasis on research-based teaching. The organization comprises about 80 employees (including teachers, researchers, professors, and other academic staff) and is situated within a large multidisciplinary university. The university was recently ranked among the top universities in the world in educational sciences (QS World University Rankings 2014).

The Department of Teacher Education is the oldest teacher education unit in Finland (established 1863). This long tradition has both strengths and weaknesses. When teacher education became more academically-oriented in the 1970s, education was formulated in a new way, but socio-cultural practices continued to follow the old traditions. Indeed, in the early 2000s, twenty years after the earlier reforms, teacher education in the Department was still fairly similar to what it had always been, characterized by an abundance of contact lessons, limited attention to research (with a lack of - or only small - research groups), and minimal co-operation between researchers and educators in the various subject groups. The situation generated considerable tension, and the culture in the department had elements of conflict and competition (Hökkä 2012). Leadership practices, too, were tense. Leaders in the department were often perceived as targets for complaints by staff members. Moreover, organisational change (involving changes in practices, as applied to implementing education programmes and conducting research) was seen as hard to achieve.

All in all, it can be said that in the teacher education department in question, the problems were recognized, as was demonstrated also by several studies (for example, Hökkä 2012: Nikkola et al. 2008; Rautiainen at al. 2010). There was a real desire to make a change and to build a new kind of teacher education based on collaborative culture. The main concern now was what to do, and how to find solutions to these problems within the department and among the educators.

Leadership practices in the department

The Department of Teacher Education has had four leaders since 2005: the head, the vice head, the research leader and the pedagogical leader. However, between 2005 and 2009, those in post, as teachers and also as researchers, were working as individuals rather than as a team. In 2009 all the leaders of the department were changed. At this point, the new people selected stressed that the members of the leading team should share a similar vision concerning the development of teacher education (as an alternative to merely representing a certain group); thus, the new leaders gradually started to share their experiences of their work. This sharing resulted from their own ideals, and also from negative experiences of the work, which they had found oppressive and exhausting.

Initially, there were no fixed objectives, and no aims to develop the department towards any particular organization or leadership model (for example, team leadership). This 'simple' initiative was merely a matter of finding ways to reduce the individualistic culture, and to move towards more collaborative and research-focused procedures. Although the precise direction of the development was not yet clear to the four new leaders, they shared the same overall vision, that is, that teacher education should be collaborative and research-based.

Data collection and analysis

The main data for this study consisted of video-taped group discussions, in which the four leaders of the teacher education department recalled their shared leadership histories and the most critical events in the department in the years 2009–2013. The group discussion covered four main themes (1) How the shared

leadership culture was established, (2) The most important resources and obstacles in transforming leadership practices, (3) How the leadership practices supported or obstructed the agency of the staff, (4) The most important changes in teacher education practices and culture.

The data were analysed via qualitative approaches, applying qualitative content analysis (Saldana 2013) and utilising researcher-triangulation (Hastings 2010). As a first step in the analysis, the data (verbatim transcriptions) were transferred to the AtlasTi program. This stage involved coding the critical incidents and transforming actions that occurred during the period in question, as referred to in the leaders' talk. As a subsequent step the codes were grouped into three meta-categories forming the three categories of critical issues in building shared leadership. This process of analysis was iterative in the sense that it included elaborations and conversations between the researchers throughout the analytical process.

FINDINGS

In the following sub-sections, we shall illustrate the most critical issues in building shared leadership practices. These fall into three categories: (a) creating collective leadership practices; (b) enhancing the agency of staff; and (c) building leaders' collective agency.

Creating collective leadership practices

One of the most important insights was the leaders' desire to move from an individual "leadership burden" to *collective leading practices*. When the four leaders started their work in 2009 and discovered a shared desire to work collaboratively, they decided to work towards new structures and new practices (for example, regular Monday meetings). Having the same vision, that is, of developing teacher education as a whole rather than representing different groups, helped to create an atmosphere of trust and emotional support. It also gave a sense of safety in addressing difficult issues, including critical voices and tense relationships.

At the same time, the leaders were challenged to critically re-negotiate their own leader identities, both individually and as a group. Thus, they became familiar with their own defensive practices. They also found that they needed scaffolding actions (for example, external coaching support) to re-negotiate their collective leader-identity as a group. The new kind of leadership culture that emerged promoted new creative practices, and made possible structural transformation within the department including a regular 'teaching-free Tuesday' plus informal meetings between leaders and subject groups. The entire process involved continuous discussions among leaders, and group evaluations. Shared meetings and informal conversations with all the staff provided other important sources of feedback. Figure 1 below provides a summary of the most important new collective leadership practices.
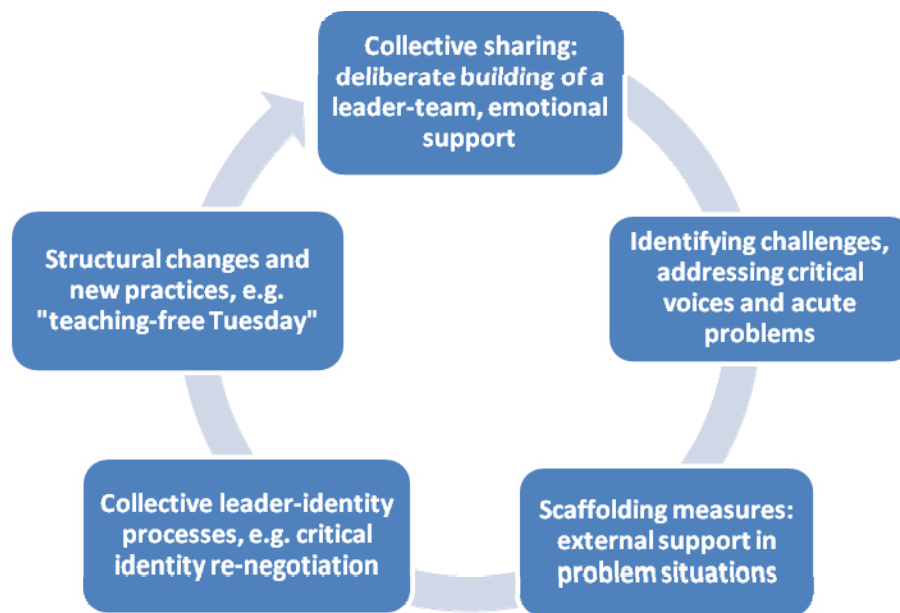
Figure 1. New collective leadership practices

Enhancing the professional agency of staff

One of the first needs was to support the professional agency of the teacher educators. The critical issues here included (a) creating processes, places, and spaces for participation, for taking stances, and for influencing shared issues (including leadership practices), (b) being sensitive to and giving spaces for emotional processing (including socio-emotional support), (c) trusting and supporting people who wanted to take responsibility in shared practices (for example, in arriving at a curriculum), and (d) taking critical comments seriously, and acting on them. These are discussed further below.

Supporting the staff's influence on shared issues included furthering staff participation in such a way that people were able to take stances and influence

policies. The aim was to get the staff as a whole to be involved, at different levels. Thus there was to be scope for influence on the curriculum, on leadership principles and on leadership practices. Another issue seen as crucial in supporting the professional agency of staff was that *leaders should show sensitivity and provide emotional support*. Leadership competence was seen as involving the ability to act with appreciation and to give support, especially in challenging situations such as dealing with negative student-feedback, or resolving conflicts between employees.

The third prominent issue involved *giving trust and responsibility* to those who wanted to develop shared practices (regarding, for example, the curriculum). This trust was not seen as dependent on a person's job title, years of service, or hierarchical position; rather it was a matter of the person's enthusiasm, will, and commitment. In the extract below two leaders (A and C) describe how curriculum responsibilities were negotiated:

> Leader A: '*it was not any kind of official position or anything like ' I have the longest teaching career' or 'I am a professor' or anything like that … I think it was interesting in hierarchical terms that within that process the young women* [other leaders nod assent] *who didn't even have a full contract took charge. I think [it was] how they took on responsibility, without asking permission or asking 'do I have the mandate?' or 'how many hours do I have in my working plan?' … but all this just happened very smoothly and naturally and our community did not question it at all.*
>
> Leader C: *Yes, yes … it was amazing to realise that this was possible.*'

The fourth crucial aspect in supporting professional agency was *taking seriously the constructive comments, complaints, and criticisms voiced by staff*. This meant that criticisms, for example of leadership practices or shared practices, were always taken seriously. Representations of this kind always led to constructive actions. Forums (embedded, for example, in department meetings, in addition to less official 'coffee break' conversations) were created to process critical issues. It was seen as essential that difficult issues were not swept under the carpet, and that leaders always entered into shared conversations. In the extract below, the leaders describe a situation where they had had critical feedback from staff; this led them to organize three coffee meetings with everyone concerned to discuss issues connected to leadership:

> Leader C: '*It was kind of a situation where if we didn't sort it out we couldn't continue as leaders. It was a kind of a no-confidence vote* [Leader A: *yes*] *… and it was the kind of feedback that we really NEEDED to hear (emphasis in the original), otherwise our leadership wouldn't function in terms of leading* [Leader B: *yes*], *because it was striking right at the heart of our collective leadership, [along the lines of] 'It isn't such a good thing that you are such a close-knit leader group.*
>
> Leader A: *Yes it sort of came at us out of the blue, and indirectly it was aimed at one of us, but Leader D brought it up in front of all of us, and didn't think, 'Ok, I'm being trashed here,' rather 'This is now OUR shared problem (emphasis in the original).' And then we decided*

to arrange with the staff to have these three coffee meetings, each

with a theme connected to leading.'

Building leaders' collective agency

In efforts to create good leadership practices it was vital to build up the leaders'

own collegial practices. In this chapter we use the concept of *collective agency* to

refer to the mutual development of these leadership practices and this culture.

The findings revealed three important issues that supported this development of

collective leadership practices through collective agency. One involved a shift

from accidental 'leading in corridors' to *clearly structured and shared leadership*

practice, with regular meetings, and with *designated times and spaces for*

collaborative work. Leaders described the previous 'accidental' leading culture

thus: '*It was a kind of loose leading; we sometimes occasionally met in corridors*

and shared a word or two. There wasn't any kind of true structure.'

Within this process, the four leaders had to negotiate a flexible distribution

of work and to agree that although they all had their own responsibilities, these

were not strict or stable but rather porous and negotiable. They also needed to

learn to deal with dissenting opinions. Through negotiation, they were able to build

trust and a supportive atmosphere in their group. This trust offered a safety-net for

everyday leadership practices, and also for the processing of emotional issues. It

was mentioned that the group offered strength and protection, and reduced the

fear of being 'shot down' by the staff, for example in departmental meetings. The

group also offered the kind of support that made possible deliberate discussion of

difficult issues, including deeply unpleasant matters such as tense relationships and

critical feedback from students. The leaders commented on collective leadership

and on the sense of agency connected to it in the following terms:

> Leader B: *'In terms of agency it is kind of concrete, I mean the*
>
> *emotion is totally different, and you can somehow behave through*
>
> *common sense* [others nod assent] *and if you yourself freeze up you*
>
> *can trust that some other person will take the lead and continue. And*
>
> *also the kind of repeating of things afterwards … I mean wallowing in*
>
> *emotions doesn't happen anymore* [others nod assent] *so you can*
>
> *respond neutrally. Those feelings can kind of immediately …* [makes
>
> gesture of sweeping away with the hand], *so that those powerful*
>
> *tensions do not arise. We have deliberately agreed that … right? That*
>
> [Others: *yes, yes,* nodding assent] *we'll support each other.'*

Collective agency thus empowered the leaders to address problems and tense

situations, such as criticism of the leaders themselves, tensions between

employees, and negative feedback from students - and to do so in an active

manner.

Another central issue in building collective agency was creating a *shared*

understanding of the socio-material conditions that regulate and structure teacher

education. This included understanding and reacting to policy-level and upper-level

strategy regulations, plus gaining a view on economic resources and conditions. The

organisation in question had recently come under austere new public management

forms of governance (Moos, 2005) (for example, increased external assessments

plus a more performance-based salary structure), and the economic restrictions now in place were not fully understood by the staff. These factors occasionally manifested themselves in unrealistic expectations about how far desired changes to teacher education could be implemented or about the implementation of unavoidable strategic priorities. In addition, the department was going through an important strategic shift towards more intensive forms of research-based teacher education. The leaders collaboratively negotiated understanding on the new strategic alignments, creating a basis for rational action and for a future orientation. In terms of the employees' work, this meant reducing certain functions (for example, arts and craft teaching lessons) and even ending contracts altogether. Such a situation is inevitably distressing for the employees concerned and for the manager. Collective leadership offered a certain degree of support for both the staff and the leaders in this kind of emotionally burdensome situation.

The third important issue was the collective *re-negotiation of leader-identities.* Through collaborative work, the leaders had found their own professional identities to be strengthened and discovered also that their shared collective identity (that is, their sense of 'what kind of leadership team we are') had crystallized. In this renegotiation process a crucial element was the shift from externally-determined leadership roles towards a personal leadership style, and towards finding one's own leader identity. A key aspect here was each leader recognising their personal strengths and weaknesses, and having the courage to take risks and make mistakes. The leaders indicated that peer support and the chance to share sorrows and joys in the work was essential for effective leadership,

and for the renegotiation of leader identities. One important issue that arose involved making one's own leadership commitments visible. This was implemented through expressions of what leadership entailed. These were reported to the staff as a whole.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Although based on a small-scale case-study, our findings suggest that in teacher education transformations, collective leadership and the leaders' professional agency are salient. In creating collective ways of working, educational leaders need time and space to build trust and openness and the courage to take risks and to make mistakes. It is imperative that these leaders should be able to renegotiate their professional identities as leaders, and to create their personal ways of leading, recognizing their own professional strengths and weaknesses.

It should be noted that in this study collective agency refers to the team of the four leaders (the head, the vice head, the research leader and the pedagogical leader) and their collective actions in leading and developing teacher education. However, at the same time this study acknowledge that leaders' collective agency is always embedded within shared leadership practices of the whole teacher education organisation. This implies that one of the main goals for leaders' collective efforts is to support agency among all the teacher educators and thus support their influence on shared issues through participation, collaboration, and common responsibility.

The findings of this study suggest that in developing leadership practices the concept of agency should be highlighted and agency-promoting practices should be enhanced. Agency-promoting leadership refers to the idea that educational organisations should be managed through communication, collaboration, and interaction; the emphasis should be on people, relationships, and learning, rather than on strong management, externally set standards or an accountability culture (Brennan and MacRuairc 2011; Hökkä and Vähäsantanen 2014). This will require educational leaders to be able to support the identity renegotiations and professional agency of their staff, and to deal with issues connected to their *own* professional identities as leaders. Furthermore, agency-promoting leadership means that leaders should have the competencies to increase collaboration, interaction, innovations, and creativity within their organisations, since all these aspects can enhance organisational transformations (Vähäsantanen et al. 2017). Such leadership practices do not evolve through policy-level instructions, or by relying on leaders' individual power. Agency-promoting leadership requires collaboration, and the deliberate building of leadership teams.

All in all, in advocating *collective agency-promoting leadership*, we see the following as crucial:

Collective leadership: Turbulent realities and constant changes are so demanding in educational contexts that it is no longer possible for individuals to exercise leadership on their own (Jäppinen 2014; Weick and Sutcliffe 2007). Indeed, our findings imply that the era of individually-based leadership is over. All in all, it appears that the need now is for collective leadership practices. Within collective

leadership, leaders have opportunities to become emotionally empowered in their

challenging work, and to become conscious, for example, of the (possibly

unproductive) defensive practices they might be drawn to adopt.

A focus on professional identities and learning: The findings of this study

suggest that it is crucial for leaders to understand the significance of professional

identities and to gain strategies for dealing with identity issues in working life

interactions. However, this does not mean that strategic leadership should be

discarded. On the contrary, teacher education organisations need crystallized

strategies if they are to build sustainable visions for the future. The pivotal issue is

that the staff should be involved in formulating strategic processes, and that their

agency in debating and resolving shared issues should be supported.

Promoting the agency of staff: It appears to be critical for leaders to

promote the professional agency of their staff. Studies have shown that the active

involvement of employees in shared issues is connected to their well-being,

enthusiasm, and overall work engagement (for example, Hakanen et al. 2006). By

promoting the agency of the staff it may be possible to discover innovative

solutions to some of the most acute problems of organisations. This can be done,

for example, by deliberately creating processes, spaces, places and times for

participation. Agency can also be enhanced by not merely giving space to critical

voices, but rather by actively working with critical representations, addressing

difficult issues head-on.

Crafting leader identities: Leading is a challenging task, based on constant

interactions and on complex relationships. Thus, it cannot be performed via

externally set role models; every leader has to find her or his individual way of leading, reconciling personal strengths and weaknesses alongside socially-set expectations and roles. The crafting and re-negotiation of a personal leader-identity is a lifelong process. Within this crafting, leaders should have the possibilities to enlarge their own identities, at the same time as they encounter and support a wide range of identities among their staff.

Emotional agency: Emotional agency implies that leaders should understand and have the capacity to consider the role of different emotions – their own and those of others – within the work. In the best case, the leaders will show sensitivity, leniency towards themselves and others, and the ability to evoke enthusiasm. Through such emotional agency, leaders can promote resources in such a way that people feel able to set limits to the most stressful aspects of their work, and to achieve a sense of meaningfulness within it.

Overall, we suggest that collective agency-promoting leadership will support transparency and trust within an organisation, leading to possibilities for sustainable structural changes and new practices. Furthermore, it can enhance the well-being of both the staff and the leaders themselves. For this to be achieved, leaders should be supported in efforts towards achieving collective leadership. This will help them in renegotiating their own professional identities, and in promoting the identity-work of their staff. We believe that in the field of teacher education, collective agency-promoting leadership will be necessary in facing up to the unpredictable – but in all probability, enormous – challenges of teaching teachers in the 21th century.

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