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EFL Teacher Education in Finland: Manifestations of professional agency in teacher educators' work

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Abstract

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher educators play a key role in the development of university-based teacher education and the preparation of preservice EFL teachers. However, the professional agency of EFL teacher educators in developing their work remains understudied. Employing a Vygotskian sociocultural theoretical perspective, this research considers the individual and collective professional agency of eight EFL teacher educators at two Finnish universities. Findings demonstrate that individual professional agency is enacted in the expression of professional identity, development of professional relationships, and in offering and receiving professional assistance. Findings also demonstrate that collective agency occurs in the shared development of routine practices, the transformation of EFL education, and in responding to shifts in power dynamics. These findings affirm the roles of identity and relational agency in enacting professional agency as well as affirm the object-oriented nature of EFL teacher educators' collective agency.

Keywords: Finnish teacher education, EFL teacher education, teacher educator, professional agency, collective agency, sociocultural approach

Introduction

The development of teacher education relies on the professional practices of teacher educators (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Snoek, Swennen, & van der Klink, 2010). With increased mobility and migration globally, language teacher education has been tasked with responding to economic and cultural pressures for students to be adept in multilingual communication, especially in English. Yet in most countries, slow and contested responses to the need for teacher education reform mean that many teacher-training institutions struggle to prepare teachers to meet growing demands (Luke, 2004; Murray, Swennen, & Kosnik, 2019). The need for widespread multilingual competence has placed pressure on teacher educators to further their own professional development in order to not only prepare student-teachers, but also participate and engage in educational reforms.

The professional development of teacher educators requires agency to actively conceptualize and implement the cultivation of practice and scholarship (Loughran, 2014). Further, the development of teacher education is not the task of isolated teacher educators, but rather teacher educators must work collectively to develop and transform teacher education within specific political and social frameworks of various national contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Swennen & van der Klink, 2008). However, further research on the practices and professional development of teacher educators is needed (Knight et al., 2014). In language teacher education, much research remains focused on pre-service or in-service teacher development and there remains a need for a greater consideration of teacher educators' work (Johnson & Golombek, 2018). Johnson and Golombek (2018) propose the adoption of a Vygotskian perspective, focusing on context and emphasizing the identity, agency and dialectical aspects of teacher education.

The work of EFL teacher educators reaches beyond pedagogical interactions with student-teachers. Teacher educators are engaged not only in generating research and knowledge about language education, but also in the administrative work of sustaining and improving university programs of teacher education. Therefore, to understand the relevance of EFL teacher education on the development of language teaching, it is necessary to understand the professional practice of EFL teacher educators holistically within the contexts of their professional communities. To understand "what it is that teacher educators are attempting to accomplish" (Johnson, 2016, p. 131) through their teaching practices, it is necessary to consider how teacher educators enact professional agency throughout their work.

Theoretical Framework

Present Understandings of Professional Agency

Professional agency is one key aspect of understanding the work of teacher educators, both as individuals and as collectives (Hökkä, 2012). Recently, the field of language education has seen a movement toward considerations of teacher agency (Miller, Kayi-Aydar, Varghese, & Vitanova, 2018). This shift has been attributed in part to the incorporation of theoretical frames such as sociocultural theory, which emphasize relational and contextual factors in language learning and teaching (Ahearn, 2001; Duranti, 2001). Agency can be understood a *mediated* phenomenon which occurs in social practice (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011; Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2015). In language education, teacher agency may be understood as occurring between the teacher and the student, between the teacher and her colleagues, and between the teacher and the wider administrative and social environment (Pappa et al., 2017). Hence, the emergence of agency is directed to specific individuals or institutions and under specific conditions. In the context of

university-based teacher education, teacher agency is given an expansive interpretation that accommodates teachers' agency not only in pedagogical practice, but also in research and administrative work. However, given the limited literature on language teacher educators, we draw on literature from the often separated fields of language teaching and teacher training, as we contend that the professional practices of language teacher educators are informed by both.

Empirical research in educational sciences has revealed key insights about the ways agency may be achieved. Research has demonstrated the connection between agency and the transformation of the self, others or the structure (Rainio, 2008). Studies of teachers have demonstrated that teachers enact agency in negotiating professional identity (Pappa et al., 2017; Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016), that is, their self-understanding as professional subjects, and that the act of positioning their identity in reference to the work community can impact language teachers' professional agency (Kayi-Aydar, 2015). Similarly, studies in teacher education have shown that collective agency may develop through the creation of collective identity (Hökkä, Vähäsantanen, & Mahlakaarto, 2017). This implies an ethical and relational aspect to agency. For example, when multiple individuals each bring their own subjectivity to bear in the interpretation of an object (e.g. a problem, disagreement, goal, practice), this interpretation is expanded (Anne Edwards, 2007). In a recursive process, the expanded object can "work back" on the subjectivity of the teachers, offering the possibility to expand the individuals' subjectivities and their interpretations of one another. In this way, relational agency is developed by coming together in 'object-oriented' activity (Anne Edwards, 2007). This relational aspect can be seen in collective choice and action.

For teachers, agency can manifest as individual's transformative behavior, such as innovations to practice (Eteläpelto, 2017). The connection between agency and personal change or transformation can take many forms, including adaptation and accommodation, in which the individual enacts agency in adjusting to the social environment (Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 2003). By adopting an adaptive orientation, individuals "critically shape their own responsiveness" to the environment as they engage in agentic action (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971). A perhaps intuitive recognition of professional agency would be in positive transformation and development of shared work practices. Such agency has been demonstrated in research on Finnish teacher education as teacher educators' ability to influence the objectives and implementation of curriculum development (Hökkä, Eteläpelto, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2010; Hökkä, Rasku-Puttonen, & Eteläpelto, 2008). However, agency within an organization manifests not only in positive motions toward change, but also in actions of resistance or maintaining the status quo in response to organizational change (Pyhältö, Pietarinen, & Soini, 2012; Vähäsantanen, 2015).

Agency is enacted in the space between continuity and change, involving the individual as much as the surround. Such change implies movement, in the form of resistance or support, sustaining and re-orienting the self in one's work. Thus is it not only individual change, but the dynamic nature of the surrounding context that will lead to varying individual interpretations of the role of agency in work (Eteläpelto, 2017). In the negotiation of shared worlds, activity requires the use of tools to coordinate participants' actions and to construct mutual understandings (Wells & Claxton, 2002). The enactment of agency may thus be object-oriented in a movement toward the transformation of the object of shared or individual action (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). Drawing on these understandings, the next section elaborates the conceptualization of agency from a sociocultural perspective.

Sociocultural Approach to Professional Agency

This study is informed by the sociocultural approach. The sociocultural approach recognizes the interplay between professional subjects and the social environment of the workplace, emphasizing the socially mediated nature of participation within cultural contexts (Hökkä et al., 2008). According to sociocultural theory, action is a mediated phenomenon occurring through subjective meaning-making of lived experiences that are negotiated and (re)interpreted within cultural, institutional and historical conditions (Vygotsky, 1997; Wertsch, 2007).

Historically, studies in on agency in language learning and teaching have historically drawn from the Western tradition of humanistic psychology, stressing the capacity for free will in

determining and acting in accordance with one's need for growth and development (Roberts, 2016). In the humanist tradition, self-knowledge, acting for one's own benefit, and congruence between inward desire and external action are key to the conceptualization of agency (Davies, 1991). While approaches to agency from humanist psychology have generally interpreted agency as a property, characteristic, or innate capacity to exercise free will in response to, or against, structural constraints (Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993), the sociocultural approach foregrounds the fluid nature of human interaction at multiple overlapping levels (e.g., between individuals, groups, society). Thus, in the sociocultural conceptualization, agency is neither a characteristic nor a property of individuals, but rather is an enactment of individuals and groups within a particular context (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015). Agency is understood in terms of the mediated, relational encounters and material affordances which delimit the social participation of diverse actors. These enactments are dialogic in nature, bounded by contextualized understandings and localized negotiations of meaning (Ahearn, 2001; Vitanova, 2005). Thus, agency is a temporally bound and relational achievement (Biesta & Tedder, 2006; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Priestley et al., 2015).

Professional agency is here understood as the practice of exerting influence, making choices, and taking stances (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013; Hökkä et al., 2017). Operationalizing agency in this way not only frames our theoretical understandings, it also becomes a tool for analysis in the present study. *Making choices* refers to enactments which inhabit the space between the individual's personal capacity, and the freedom which is afforded by the social and institutional structures. For instance, making choices can be seen in determining how to organize one's time, to orient one's space, and exercising discretion in teaching and practice. In making choices, the individual is aware that things could be otherwise and makes an intentional movement to determine her behavior. Agency as making choices that affect one's work stems from an understanding of agency as free will and purposeful action. *Taking stances* refers to the role of beliefs, convictions and values in engaging in professional practice. Taking stances that relate to one's professional work emphasizes the importance of identity in the enactment of agency. This may open the possibilities for motivations toward lifelong and lifewide action of a personal and professional nature. Further, agency as taking stances indicates the potential for congruence between belief and action. Finally, *exerting influence* implies the mobilization of political and relational power dynamics to affect workplace practice. Influence may take the form of dialogic interactions which flex structural or relational hierarchies to effect change or stabilization in the workplace. The exertion of influence is often object-oriented and based on perceived desires or needs; it captures volitional, transformative and relational aspects of agency. While conceptually separating choice, stance and influence is useful for analytical purposes, such separation does not necessarily reflect real-life teaching circumstances; these enactments of agency may dynamically prompt one another.

In language teacher education, the sociocultural turn has marked a shift toward a more robust consideration of the importance of social context on language teachers' work (Johnson, 2016). Johnson (2016) argues that it is no longer sufficient to think of language education simply in terms of the process of translating educational theory into practice. Rather, what is needed is a more nuanced understanding of the language teacher educator as an active agent, who engages in social practices embedded within wider material and discursive landscapes. The challenge of language teacher education, then, is to reclaim the relevance of the language teacher educator as an agent in her own practice.

Collective Agency

Broadly, collective agency refers to a group of people acting in concert to improve their own lives and to impact their local context (Ibrahim, 2006). Collective agency is fulfilled in collective action, representing an achievement that is beyond what the individual can accomplish (Ibrahim, 2006). The development of collective agency relies on the creation of processes, places and spaces for participation, and implies shared responsibility for shared practices (Hökkä, Rautiainen, Silander, & Eteläpelto, 2019). Given that individual agency also may emerge in social transactions, collective

agency is distinguished by the process of dialogic convergence through which it emerges. Further, collective agency is distinguished from individual agency as a manifestation of shared understandings and commitments to shared action. Thus, collective agency is distinct from other forms of shared work, such as cooperation, cooptation, collaboration, co-work or contrived collegiality (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

In this study, our understanding of collective agency draws on the work of Pelenc, Bazile, & Ceruti (2015), who argue that collective agency is itself a process that is conducive to collective action. Pelenc et al. (2015) identify collective agency as emerging through a series of key steps which culminate in collective action. Collective agency may originate from recognition of one's own agentic capacity, yet its development necessitates dialogue, convergence of ideals and values, the development of said ideals and values, and commitment to collective action based on shared aims. The authors' theoretical outline provides this study with both a conceptual basis for understanding collective agency as a process and an analytical lens for identifying collective agency within the participants' talk. In this way, collective agency is understood to manifest as a process beyond shared work practices, implying a dialogic interaction and commitment to shared action based on the articulation of shared values. Collective agency, thus, implicates the development of an ideational congruence that leads to shared action and the enactment of a group process for collective benefit.

Context for the Research

The context of the present study is language teacher education in Finland. Teacher education in Finland is well regarded for its research-based orientation to teacher training (Niemi, 2012; Tirri, 2014). Further, teachers in Finland express having a high degree of individual autonomy in their work (Afdal & Nerland, 2014; Paulsrud & Wermke, 2019). Teacher education programs are fully subsidized by the government and the selection process for prospective students is competitive. Pre-service teachers are divided into two categories; those who prepare to become classroom teachers and those prepare to become subject teachers. Pre-service classroom teachers may take courses in language pedagogy, as the ideal is that classroom teachers are competent to teach additional languages. Subject teachers of English must earn a Master's degree in English in addition to the completion of pedagogical studies.

The development of language teacher education in Finland has been impacted by multiple forces and education policies fostering bilingual education have received broad support from policy makers (Bergroth, 2016). As a member of the European community, language teacher education in Finland has been influenced by the Common European Frame of Reference (CEFR) (Tarnanen & Huhta, 2008). On the national level, various stakeholders have engaged in the development of language learning and teaching, including employer associations, researchers, cultural groups and teacher associations (Hildén & Kantelinen, 2012). Since 1994, the national curricular guidelines for foreign language education remain broad, allocating autonomy to the teachers (NBE, 2003, 2004)). However, these national guidelines have also been seen as persistently lacking in concrete educational policy (Hildén & Kantelinen, 2012). At the university level, the organizational response of the teacher training institutions to the national guidelines is independent. Although the ministry of education has provided qualification examinations for CLIL educators, is has come to the university-based teacher educators to respond to the oversight in teacher preparation by providing pedagogical training on alternative bilingual methodologies. These pre-service training programs are primarily, though not exclusively, for teaching in English. As such, teacher education programs shoulder the responsibility for designing pedagogical practices that will promote language education (Bergroth, 2016). Thus, it is relevant to consider how language teacher educators enact agency in the development of their work.

Research Questions

This study aims to explore the individual and collective professional agency of EFL teacher educators by answering the following research questions:

1. How do EFL teacher educators enact professional agency in their work?
2. How does the collective professional agency of EFL teacher educators manifest in shared work?

Research design

Participants

Eight EFL teacher educators were interviewed at two universities in Finland in the fall of 2011 and spring of 2012. These EFL teacher educators either prepared future English teachers or teachers who intended to use English as a medium of instruction (e.g., CLIL). Participants were early, mid and late career. As the university curriculum for language student-teachers in Finland is relatively flexible, the same courses are not offered to students every year, teacher educators selected for this study had been involved in preparing pre-service English teachers within the past five years. Six of the teacher educators were women and two spoke English as a mother-tongue, although all of them were fluent in English. Given the lack of diversity in teacher education, those familiar with the landscape of language teacher education in Finland could possibly identify participants using very few indicators. Therefore for ethical considerations concerning participant anonymity, the impersonal "teacher educator" was chosen over a pseudonym.

Data Collection and Analysis

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews lasting between 68-169 minutes were conducted with each of the participants r in English. Participant interviews were structured around three themes, namely general professional background, professional work and development and shared professional practice. In addition, participants were asked to make a drawing illustrating their professional communities (see Hökkä, 2012); this served to prompt descriptions of their work and development in various professional communities, but the drawings per se were not used as data. The descriptions provided by the teacher educators were both current and retrospective. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim using the Jeffersonian transcription system as a guide (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013) and revised as denaturalized transcripts (Guest & MacQueen, 2008).

Thematic Analysis

The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a way of organizing repeating ideas in the text (Patton, 2015), to capture the explicit (descriptive) or implicit (interpretive) meanings expressed within the data (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015). A detailed summary of the analysis methods is presented in Table 1; the portion of the analysis which concentrated on professional agency (see Phase Three) is elaborated in detail here. Having delineated agency as choice, stance and influence for the purpose of the analysis, the data was examined to consider both the context and the substance of agentic action. The aim was to derive the particular circumstances and purposes under which teacher educators' made choices, took stances and exerted influence.

In the first task of the analysis, enactments of professional agency were identified within the participants' talk. The entire data set (183 pages) was printed and color-coded. Highlighting was used to identify segments of text that demonstrate making choices, taking stances and exerting

influence. The texts segments were then cut apart, grouped and collated to generate shared themes. This spatial arrangement of table top categories, in which the data can be touched, aided understanding the interrelationships used in theming the data (Saldaña, 2015). Text segments at times evidenced multiple and overlapping enactments of agency (e.g., both choice and stance), and these elements were considered individually and mutually in turn.

As a second task, the primary author identified enactments of collective agency in the teacher educators' talk. Using Pelenc et al.'s (2015) description of the key turns in the development of collective agency, the interviews were re-read to identify steps in the process of the development of collective agency. These steps are: 1) public discussions and social interaction, 2) convergence of ideas, 3) development of common ideas, and 4) a choice of common goals that should be pursued through collective action. The aim of the analysis was to consider the reasons or purposes for which agentic action was pursued. While all steps were noted in the data analysis, the findings report only those descriptions in which all of the steps were identified in the participants' talk.

[insert Table 1 near here]

This paper reports a portion of the findings from a wider comparative study of the professional learning of EFL teacher educators. The data collection and analysis was conducted by the first author; the second author contributed significantly in elaborating the research context and in framing the theories of professional agency. The authors worked collaboratively to organize and synthesize the presentation the findings and discussion.

Findings

Professional Agency of EFL Teacher Educators

EFL teacher educators' professional agency manifest in three interrelated areas, namely i) expressing professional identity, ii) developing collegial relationships, and iii) offering and receiving professional assistance. The exercise of professional agency was connected to the teacher educators' perceptions of themselves as professionals. Additionally, professional agency was exercised in the dynamic interplay between teacher educators, their student-teachers and colleagues, especially in contributing to others' professional learning and practice within and beyond the local professional community. The teacher educators made pedagogical choices and took stances regarding teaching styles; orienting and positioning themselves in relation the student-teachers. Agency was enacted when the teacher educators perceived a space to engage their own expertise and to influence others.

Expressing Professional Identity

In exercising professional agency, teacher educators drew upon their professional commitments, values and motivations to take stances and make choices related to professional practice. In particular, agency took the form of participants' enactment of positionality and expressions of professional subjectivity. While identity can be understood as an inner sense of self, the participants' answers indicate that individual agency is key to enacting, expressing and negotiating that self in response to others.

Professional identity was especially expressed in interactions with students and colleagues. In teaching, the interviewed teacher educators described negotiating their identities in reference to changing dynamics between themselves and student-teachers over time. As Teacher Educator 5 describes,

"The older I get, the younger my students get, so now they look at me as a person of their mother's age or an aunt or something like that. So it's not only the theoretical, pedagogical ones, but it's also who I am as a person and who they are."

Teacher educators also negotiated professional identities in collegial interactions. Expressing novel or different, yet authentic, aspects of the professional identity was valued as an act of personal satisfaction within the social contexts of professional practice. The sense of shared experience and closeness to current colleagues who were former students provided an ease of shared work and discussion when co-supervising student-teachers:

"The interesting thing is that one of the supervising teachers at the normal school was actually herself a student at the normal school. And I remember her as a sort of ten-year-old! So she's been right through the system, full-circle. So she represented the change of generation […] I suppose it meant we found it easier to talk the same language since she has grown up in this system, and is now herself supervising it." (Teacher Educator 1)

Agency entailed expressing, negotiating and constructing one's identity within the professional community. In the work of positioning and situating the self in relation to student-teachers and colleagues, the participants made professional choices about how to present themselves which were relationally mediated within the social environment.

Expressing identity was further evident in descriptions of choices in pedagogical practice. Teacher Educator 1 remarks, "I enjoy teaching. It is a form of fulfillment for me, you might say. Here am I, basically very shy, and there's this stage where they allow me to perform." Such words highlight how the expression of identity is related to work satisfaction and self-fulfillment through teaching practice. Furthermore, they demonstrate the teacher educators' sense of professional identity as dynamic and context-dependent, and the teacher educators' intentional self-positioning. Teacher Educator 8 reflectively comments on the connection between identity and professional practice: "I was able to contribute in a more open way, in a more mature way, more authentic way. Getting in touch with my own inner life, my own inner child as the metaphor goes. I was able to kind of begin a new kind of professional life." Describing professional identity in terms of transformation and re-interpretation in relation to one's work suggests that the processes of individual development depend on spaces for the enactment of stances and choices toward collegial interaction.

Developing Professional Relationships

Closely connected to professional identity is the theme of proactively developing relationships with colleagues, students and other professionals. These relationships developed around personal friendships and respect for colleagues' professional expertise. The participants chose to foster personal connections, including friendship, with respect for the professional capacity of others. Agency was enacted in reference to the participants' interpretations of others' positionality. The most satisfying work projects were often accomplished in meaningful collegial relationships, with successful shared work being based on social dynamics. In this way, agency manifest in choices about how to, and who to, engage in collaborative practice or joint projects and from whom to solicit advice. As Teacher Educator 3 explains, "We do a lot of collaborative teaching. For example [my colleague], one of my dear, dear colleagues, actually, organized a course and she recruited a few of us to act as teachers." Teacher Educator 4 adds that "it's probably been more about chemistry than about anything else." The social dynamics went beyond mere expertise; rather, individual professional agency seemed to be predicated on a sense of friendship and mutual valuing of one another's expertise.

In addition to accomplishing projects, the enactment of agency through professional relationships affected the desire to work long-term with colleagues. The participants' choice of research and teaching companions was intentional and aided professional practice development. Esteemed colleagues were selected based on their interest in a certain topic and suitability determined by years of experience on similar research projects. Yet, the relationships developed were further informed by a sense of safety and unwavering support, about which Teacher Educator 5 remarks:

"I know there are some people, some friends and colleagues, I know they are always ready to step in and they are always, they have sort of very good innovations in mind [...] I have this feeling that I'm really safe with working with my colleagues and they are kind of a safety net, or something like that."

The words the participants used to describe the professional relationships imply that agency is an intentional movement toward esteemed others who are recognized for their value as both experts in the field and colleagues at the workplace. Developing professional friendships as part of their professional development indicates the importance of a supportive collegial culture based on trust and openness (Kohonen, 2003). Moreover, it points to intellectual affinity as well as emotional intentionality based on satisfying affective well-being at work. These relationships help impart knowledge at the same time they affirm and support one's professional identity. Offering and seeking support, recognizing competencies in oneself and others and responding to others in ongoing interactions within social settings are capacities central to relational agency (Edwards & D'arcy, 2004; Edwards, 2005, 2007, 2015). Exercising individual professional agency to develop professional relationships may encourage professional learning, facilitate sharing expertise and affirm meaning in one's work. However, while indicating autonomy and determination, selecting certain colleagues over others for collaboration could be problematized, as this selection may segregate clusters of collaborating colleagues and limit the negotiation of one's understandings and competencies at work.

Offering and Receiving Professional Assistance

Professional agency was exercised in the dynamic interplay between the teacher educators, student-teachers and colleagues, especially in reference to shared learning and practice. Agency was enacted when the teacher educators perceived a space to engage their own expertise and influence others through their own professional competencies.

"I teach them, we do, as I said this kind of dialogic teaching… it's very intense and it's very rewarding. And I also understand teaching that it's - when you are teaching, you are learning a lot. So that it's very educating to work so close to a group of young people. Very talented ones… I feel that it's kind of a human growth. I see every person teaches you something, and it's a very, very, very rewarding experience. Yes. And young people are so, so wonderful people." (Teacher Educator 5)

Individual professional agency was expressed in contributing to colleagues' professional learning by offering and receiving advice. Furthermore, it was seen in seeking learning opportunities from other professionals at conferences and wider national and international networks. Teacher educators enacted agency in soliciting those who were perceived to be knowledgeable in their fields. For example, describing instances of professional satisfaction in shared writing of research, Teacher Educator 2 remarks:

"I can also see that I actually had something a bit different to offer them… I was seeing things in a different way and asking questions that they wouldn't have asked. And I can actually now see that in some of their research… Which for me kind of validates my experience. That it's not just me being in my own little place and having a very nice interesting, kind of stimulating kind of time, but actually it is of value to somebody other than just myself."

This bidirectional influence in academic thinking articulates the reciprocal nature of professional assistance and, by extension, professional agency. The reciprocal nature of their work was emphasized by the participants in tandem with teaching as also learning and validation of their work and perspectives as valuable to collegial interactions for the development of teaching practice and research. As such, teacher educators sought opportunities for dialogue, creative brainstorming and shared action from colleagues in various professional communities.

"I know there are some people, some friends and colleagues, I know they are always ready to step in and they are always, the have sort of very good innovations in mind. [...] I have this feeling that I'm really safe with working with my colleagues and they are kind of a safe net, or something like that." (Teacher Educator 7)

"We talk things over. [...] It's wonderful. I think, you know, we all have our own contributions to bring forward." (Teacher Educator 6)

Ideally, teacher educators suggested that collaborative work should be a practice of mutual resourcing and shared development of mutual benefit to the individuals involved. At the same time, the teacher educators' conceptualizations of themselves as a potential resource for others' professional development was a meaningful aspect of enacting agency through offering and receiving assistance.

EFL Teacher Educators' Collective Agency

All of the teacher educators in this study described a diverse range of experiences enacting collective agency. However, the duration and perceived impact of the teacher educators' collective agency varied. The EFL teacher educators' descriptions of collective agency include intentional, dialogic and participatory elements. Through discussion, teacher educators became sustainers and beneficiaries of collective action within various professional communities. Three forms of collective agency were identified among the EFL teacher educators: i) working on daily research and teaching, ii) transforming language education, and iii) resisting and consolidating power.

Working on daily research and teaching

Collective agency most commonly manifest in the routine practices of teaching, research and administration. Collective action resulted in the modification and adjustment of the language teacher education coursework, curriculum and shared pedagogical practices. In meetings and discussions, EFL teacher educators maintained a shared commitment to the expressed aims of language teacher education. This was evidenced in daily routines, shared values concerning the formative nature of teacher education, and "quite good discussions [...] develop[ing] language curriculums, and what is good language teaching, and very philosophical things" (Teacher Educator 6).

Participants realized collective agency working with their colleagues to maintain and incrementally improve the arrangements of routines for the benefit of student-teachers. For instance, they engaged in mutually-supported co-teaching, in which two EFL teacher educators would be in a classroom together providing joint instruction to the student-teachers. The most illustrative example of this is Teacher Educator 7's, who explains:

"We have one course where everyone teaches, so we have planned it together... there is nothing special I could say about it. It's kind of a routine. [...] Yes, and it has been a wonderful collaboration together and I've learned a lot [...] In those seminars [...] we try to be very informal so that people would be free to talk about their problems, and he and I we always make coffee beforehand and we talk over coffee."

Teacher educators described a sense that the routines of English language education are jointly sustained and developed over time with other colleagues. These shared professional practices become systematic in nature and further shared aims and objectives of supporting the teacher-students' professional learning:

"We would find that over the years we developed a nice system, based on providing positive motivation for the students, encouraging them. And I suppose if that was cooperation, enough

mutually supporting each other in order to boost the self-image of the teacher-student, then that worked very well." (Teacher Educator 1)

When cooperation between colleagues was satisfactory, it was not only in the sense of individually providing learning support for the student-teacher, but also that the colleagues provided mutual support in order to achieve the shared goal of positively reinforcing student-teachers' professional identity development.

Transforming Language Education

EFL teacher educators engaged in the shared work of reshaping, informing or reforming language teaching practices or policies at the level of the university, schools and society. In working together to transform the routines of English education, the teacher educators collectively engendered substantive changes related to the structures, purposes and practices of language teaching. Expressing her regret for the precarious position of foreign languages other than English, Teacher Educator 3 remarks that:

"There are some big challenges ahead and one of them is the position of other languages. [...] It needs a totally new kind of thinking about when and how to teach other languages. And it's something this department certainly has a lot of expertise in, and we are I think a national authority in language education policy issues here. That's an issue because it has some major implications as to the shape that language teaching as a profession in Finland [...] We made some suggestions a few years ago, but [...] none of them were adopted as an official policy. They were not meant to be adopted as official policy, or something like – they were suggestions, really."

The participants drew together professional authority on issues of language education, creating novel language education programs, research projects, educational interventions, and publications aimed at informing and innovating language education locally, nationally and internationally. Together, these teacher educators jointly identified difficulties in language teaching and attempted to solve them through collaborative action. Evident results of such action were "a unity and a project group" with "excellent people working in several schools", having "a quick start and like a snowball effect. Doing something, getting the results, publishing and then going into places" (Teacher Educator 8).

By linking networks and cooperating with academics and school teachers, the teacher educators developed shared projects around common areas of interest in the development of language teaching. Teacher Educator 5 notes:

"I think we think alike in certain things even though we come from different areas and I think we work very well together and we have very similar ideas of how the research of our department should be developed. We are really trying to design a profile for our studies having, if not a school, a way of thinking of what people like us [...] should be doing in the society and within the educational context."

The desire to shape, form, guide and have a say in the ongoing transformation of language teaching nationally was described as something which was shared work with a social impact.

Resisting and Consolidating Power

In addition to a shared sense of responsibility for collective action, collective agency manifested as resistance and consolidation of power among connected groups of professionals. For instance, collective resistance to structural powers (e.g. the ministry or university administration) was exercised in response to perceived potential threats to the autonomy of the professional community. The interviewed teacher educators responded to tensions among the government, the university structure, and the university teaching staff concerning the possible jeopardy of language education at some universities.

"Languages are taught at every university. A people of 5 million doesn't need that, so they are going to at some point, the government probably is going to give up some of the language departments at some universities. And so obviously then we want to sort of try and influence that we are pretty powerful, we are pretty big, and we are quite, you know, you can't abolish us." (Teacher Educator 4)

Teacher educators came together with colleagues to create organized infrastructures and networks of professional practice that intended to strengthen the networks of expertise in language education in the face of potential university reform. In harnessing their agency collectively, collective action manifest a sense of solidarity in the coalition of expertise in language teaching. Initiatives of resistance created stronger, more clearly defined collegial networks in order to develop, for example, joint research projects between colleagues. In addition, this type of collective labor created opportunities for individual teacher educators to examine and orient their professional decision-making in relation to the goals of the collective action. As Teacher Educator 2 explains, she is "primarily [...] present there", because she "so fervently believe[s] that in this project, when they are so involved in education, education people should be along in the project."

The teacher educators' sense of their own capacity to influence others, especially in the sense of providing a valuable perspective for the development of shared projects, becomes a point for the teacher educators' own engagement in shared projects, in both leadership and followership positions. Movement between individual and collective agency was also evidenced in the teacher educators' talk relating to their own contributions to shared work, in a sense of growth beyond oneself and lasting contribution to the development of teacher education. "And then you have the feeling that, okay, you've added a new dimension to this university" (Teacher Educator 1). In several instances, the teacher educators' collective action was sustained over a period of years, developing into institutional reorganization and pedagogical movements in the local and national development of language teaching and teacher training. The development of these projects helped consolidate their power, but also position themselves amidst wider international trends and European initiatives. Further, it indicates that language education, in the form of the development of language teaching and policy, is central to the EFL teacher educators' collective agency.

Discussion

This study explores how individual and collective agency is enacted in EFL teacher educators' professional practice. The findings confirm that individual agency is strongly socially mediated (Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2015), as the teacher educators' choices, stances and influence in expressing their identities in interactions with colleagues and students and to develop relationships with colleagues. Further, the findings suggest that the connection between identity and agency is bi-directional. Agency manifests not only in the negotiation the teacher educators' own identity; agency is also enacted as a response to the identities of others in a movement toward developing and sustaining relationships. The evidence that professional agency is enacted in expressing professional identity and also in developing professional relationships suggests the overlap between identity agency and relational agency (see also Edwards, 2007; Hökkä et al., 2017). Thus, a holistic view of teacher's work needs to take into account the socio-emotional and relational aspects of professional work and learning (Uitto, Lutovac, Jokikokko, & Kaasila, 2018). Further, the enactment of agency as a movement toward developing professional friendships as part of their professional development indicates the importance of a supportive collegial culture based on trust and openness (Kohonen, 2003).

Agency is contextualized, resourced, and constrained. In the case of expressing identity or the enactment of collective agency, the forums within which agency is enacted (e.g., the lecture hall, departmental meetings), depend on the affordance of agency. The enactment of collective agency is related to the institutional structures, the wider social and political environment, as well as discourses relevant to language education. Finland being a small country, the impact that these

teacher educators have had on the development of EFL teacher education, their relational agency and their professional agency could be considered from the perspective of structure affording such agency. Particular aspects of the Finnish context may be relevant in interpreting the findings; for example, the culture of trust and professional autonomy and the tradition of intensive cooperation between the national and local levels in Finnish education (Kuiper & Berkvens, 2013; Pollari, Salo, & Koski, 2018). The interviewed teacher educators have a degree of freedom due to national legislation governing the organization and methods of language teacher education. Thus, teacher educators are able to respond to what they perceive to be the needs of students and teachers, and also to think from a broader theoretical perspective about the development of language education and then exercise agency, at least in some cases and to some extent, to take collective action to respond to these needs.

The development of professional agency can play a dual role in the development of both personal well-being and organizational innovation (Eteläpelto, 2017). The findings of the present study suggest that individual agency tends more toward enactments for the sake of professional and personal well-being and development, while the enactment of collective agency tends toward broader innovations which may impact the wider organization. This study is small scale and we aim here only to elaborate enactments of agency. As such, we do not consider barriers or constraints to professional agency. Further empirical study of the relationship between institutional structure and professional and collective agency of EFL teacher educators in various national and institutional education contexts is needed. For example, research could explore how teacher educators have responded pedagogically through individual and collective agency in the local implementation of the 2016 curriculum renewal. Moreover, future research could consider the ways in which discipline-specific practices of language education many impact the teacher educators' agency, which was beyond the scope of this paper. Despite the limitations, this study highlights the ways that EFL teachers can be active agents in their own professional development as well as in the development of language education.

Conclusions

This study draws attention to the enactment of professional agency of EFL teacher educators. We here present several implications which can be drawn from these findings. First, EFL teacher educators' agency as relational implies the importance of students and colleagues in mediating professional agency. Further, professional agency is mediated by possibilities to express and develop one's professional identity. This indicates that the development of language teacher education through the agency of EFL teacher educators is not simply a matter of extrapolating, articulating or identifying appropriate pedagogical practices that exist as methods apart from the teachers themselves. Rather, the practices are intimately tied to the interests, expertise, and commitments (that is, professional identity) that teacher educators are able to express and negotiate with students and colleagues within their professional communities.

Second, the findings of this research indicate a need to see the collective agency of EFL teacher educators not only as mediated, but also as object-oriented. While collective agency has been understood in Vygotskian terms of mediation, the findings suggest that the strengthening of competence and expertise should further be considered in relation, for example, to the work of Leont'ev, who drew attention to the cultural construction of the objects of collective activity (Edwards, 2007, p. 3). Collective agency may emerge as a product of the routine, transformative or resistant responses, indicating that both opportunities as well as threats may become sites for the development of collective agency. Relational agency represents an inclination toward the value of others and could be understood to foreground collective agency. It further suggests that collective agency draws first on the individual agency and must be realized through a dialogic process of interaction before reaching a consensus upon shared action. The teacher educators in this study indicated their intention to advance language policy agendas as part of their collective agency. This finding suggests a need to consider teacher engagement with language policy not only at the

level of practices and beliefs (Hult, 2018), but also at the level of shared discourse and collective action.

Finally, the teacher educators in this study expressed a sense of being able to exercise a broad scope of agency in their work. It is worth further considering why this may be so. While the focus of this study was on language teacher educators, the conclusions drawn on the basis of the findings could inform teacher trainers of not only foreign language teachers, but also other subjects.

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