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# Chapter 17

## Prosociality in Shared Leadership from the Finnish Principals' Viewpoint



Takumi Yada

**Abstract** This chapter aims to explore the role of prosociality when exercising shared leadership in Finnish schools. Educational professionals work collectively to generate expertise conducive for shared leadership. Importantly, shared leadership could be deeply related to helping each other, which is referred to as prosociality. Potential development of shared leadership is achieved with help from others. However, no previous study has investigated the role of prosociality in exercising shared leadership. Therefore, research question is formed as following: How do the principals represent prosociality in shared leadership? This study explored prosociality through the lens of three aspects of prosociality: prosocial motivation, behaviour, and impact. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview from 12 Finnish principals in primary and lower secondary schools. The data were analysed with a thematic analysis in a deductive manner according to the three prosocial aspects. The findings showed that the principals acknowledge the prosocial elements that are deeply related to shared leadership. Moreover, the role of prosocial impact was highlighted by the principals.

**Keywords** Prosociality · Shared leadership · Teacher collaboration

### Introduction

Many researchers today regard educational leadership as a collective phenomenon based on relationships (Nguyen et al., 2019). This is because educational professionals understand that the challenges faced by educational organisations cannot be solved by a single leader's expertise alone (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Pearce, 2006). Hence, educational professionals work collectively to generate

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339

expertise conducive for leadership that is then shared for the common good (Avolio et al., 1996; Boreham, 2004; Pearce & Conger, 2003). Importantly, shared leadership could be deeply related to helping each other, which is referred to as prosociality.

Finland has been internationally lauded for a strong positive school culture based on collegial relationships that emphasise helping each other as a shared influence (Hargreaves et al., 2007; Yada, 2020). For example, Sahlberg (2014) states that a significant characteristic of Finnish school leadership is school improvement and development through collaboration based on helping each other. In practice, team-based leadership (based on collaboration between various teams) is adopted by many Finnish schools (Hargreaves et al., 2007). These collaborative endeavours occur because the needs of students have become more diverse and complex for many reasons (such as special needs education, social inequality, and family income disparities) and do not allow teachers to handle challenges alone. While Finnish teachers have a high degree of autonomy and trust (Väljärvi, 2012), they are required to offer their expertise as helpers and engage in collaborative endeavours to solve student and school challenges (Jäppinen & Ciussi, 2016). The Finnish national core curriculum calls for more actions from school organisations aimed at cooperation and interaction between educational professionals and stakeholders (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014).

Current international research shows that simply conducting educational operations together is not enough. For example, the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) reports that participation in collaborative processes is actually not common practice in Finland (OECD, 2019). While 30% of Finnish teachers participate in collaborative professional learning at least once a month, a considerable share (40%) of Finnish teachers reports never receiving any feedback in their schools. Moreover, a study by Park and Lee (2015) supports this issue by showing that Finnish teachers report less collaboration than in other countries (such as England, the United States, and Korea). In terms of teacher education, in large part, the focus is on teachers' expertise as an individual. For example, the Finnish teacher education system is still designed to train classroom, subject, and special needs education teachers separately (Väljärvi, 2012). Researchers warn that Finnish teachers tend to work in solitude; therefore, the idea of a cooperative and multi-professional environment is not yet fulfilled (Fornaciari, 2019).

Although Finnish schools appear to be beginning to acknowledge the importance of leadership as a shared endeavour, little attention has been paid to understanding what helping each other means in previous studies. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to understand what helping each other represents in shared leadership contexts. This study describes shared leadership as relationship-based leadership and prosociality that initiates relationships among educational professionals.

## *Shared Leadership in Schools*

A growing body of literature recognises the importance of relationship-based leadership (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Uhl-Bien, 2006), with researchers examining how reciprocal influence among organisational members can be nurtured and integrated into collectivities of leadership structures (Gronn, 2002; Muijs & Harris, 2003). Shared leadership focuses on relationships between organisational members with the presumption of a dynamic and interactive influencing process among members to achieve organisational goals (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Contrary to a presupposition that leadership is solely the preserve of individuals within a hierarchy of leaders, shared leadership is understood to be a group or organisational level feature (Avolio et al., 2009). Pearce and Conger (2003) refer to shared leadership as:

a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organisational goals or both. This influence process often involves peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence. (p. 1)

Engaging in shared leadership, organisational members develop and reinforce existing relationships that create a variety of reciprocal influences (Carson et al., 2007).

Shared leadership develops in circumstances where diverse individuals with different expertise engage in collaborative efforts to achieve a shared purpose, since professional workers with skills and knowledge are willing to show initiative with regard to leadership and responsibilities (Denis et al., 2012). In educational contexts, shared leadership can take place in various forms (Crowther et al., 2009). For example, Spillane (2006) suggests that shared leadership emerges from three fundamental arrangements: division of labour, co-performance, and parallel performance. He points out that more than one of these can take place concurrently when certain leadership endeavours are made. The optimal combination of arrangements in an educational organisation differs depending on various organisational aspects, such as its history, culture, members' age distribution, size, homogeneity, cohesiveness, motivation, morale, or turnover (Lindahl, 2008).

Based on the notion that equal participation leads to better educational outcomes (rather than a traditional top-down bureaucratic structure), collaborative endeavours have been widely studied (Somech, 2010). For example, researchers have long argued that participative decision-making may be related to school improvement indicators, such as organisational members' job performance, job satisfaction, and turnover (Cotton et al., 1988; Miller & Monge, 1986). However, because of the nature of shared leadership, several barriers may impede the conduct of shared leadership. First, organisational members may oppose sharing leadership if they are unable to preserve their cultural context (Lindahl, 2008). Second, since educational leaders consider themselves conclusively responsible for what happens in their school, it would be difficult for them to adopt shared leadership where accountability may be diffused (Lindahl, 2008; Yukl & Lepsinger, 2007). Third, shared leadership

needs time for organisational members to interact through ongoing processes (Little, 1988). Such barriers could arise in the form of conflict between formal classroom responsibilities and indefinable continuous interactions, which would distress organisational members (Lindahl, 2008). Consequently, it is important to develop a context in which all educational professionals with diverse expertise are expected to provide leadership (Lindahl, 2008). However, understanding of what initiates these relationships is insufficient. One possible approach to exploring this issue is through the concept of prosociality.

## *Prosociality*

Prosociality is important for developing a systemic organisational approach in which members participate in a shared endeavour (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Grant, 2007; Hu & Liden, 2015). Prosociality (whereby the welfare of others is considered in social interactions) involves motivation, behaviours, and experiences that benefit others irrespective of positional roles, making a difference in others' lives (Bolino & Grant, 2016; Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989). Prosociality is strongly related to relational aspects of leadership. For example, shared decision-making requires prosocial behaviour such as listening to the voice of others (Shields, 2004), and collaboration is encouraged by prosocial motivation, which refers to a will to help others (Hu & Liden, 2015).

Because prosociality focuses on relationships with others, prosociality among employees is critical when job architecture is based on these relationships (Grant, 2007). Educational professionals ultimately aim to enhance the welfare of their students. To achieve this aim, educational professionals learn together and share responsibilities, thereby helping and benefitting others (Jäppinen et al., 2015). In this sense, educational organisations are relational since they promote the mutual benefit of colleagues by collaborating with other professionals instead of only concentrating on helping students. Organisational researchers argue that employees who regard their work as a calling believe their prosocial efforts make the world better, while employees with other values often do not (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). For example, educational administrators in higher education report feeling fulfilled when engaging in leadership endeavours and receiving feedback from peers (Uusiautti, 2013).

Indeed, many researchers have explored prosocial elements of educational leadership under various terms or concepts, such as empathy, caring, servant leadership, and organisational citizenship behaviour (Al-Mahdy et al., 2016; Frick et al., 2012; Louis et al., 2016; Stewart, 2012; Yada & Jäppinen, 2019). Moreover, other phenomena (such as participation in shared decision-making processes, offering induction, mentoring, and coaching, and providing appropriate appraisal and feedback) can be considered to be prosocial (Bolino & Grant, 2016). Because indefinable interactions should occur among educational professionals when enacting shared

leadership beyond that exercised by principals (Hallinger & Heck, 2010), educational professionals expand their perspective beyond the formal requirements of their role by participating in the leadership process (Senge, 1993).

Bolino and Grant (2016) identify three dimensions of prosociality that are connected but distinct: prosocial motivation, behaviour, and impact. Prosocial motivation is derived from the social aspect of work in terms of how behaviour can promote benefits for others (Grant, 2007; Hu & Liden, 2015). Whereas traditional types of motivation—such as intrinsic and extrinsic (Deci & Ryan, 2002)—are focused on self or task, prosocial motivation focuses on the relationship with others and the motive to help others or make an effort from concern for others (Grant, 2008). Thus, prosocial motivation can provide a foundation when developing leadership as a shared endeavour (Denis et al., 2012).

Prosocial behaviour refers to the helpful actions of professionals directed towards individuals, the group, or the entire organisation to promote the welfare of others (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). Behaviour in educational leadership contexts is often not labelled as prosocial (Yada & Jäppinen, 2019). However, researchers have identified various types of behaviour that are consistent with the definition of prosocial behaviour aimed to benefit others (Bolino & Grant, 2016). For example, some prosocial behaviours that are related to educational effectiveness, such as induction (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), mentoring (Waaland, 2016), organisational citizenship behaviour (Belogolovsky & Somech, 2010), and knowledge sharing (Edge, 2013) occur in educational organisations. These behaviours can be role-prescribed or extra-role (George & Bettenhausen, 1990); therefore, performing prosocial behaviour may be part of or may not be paid work (Organ, 1997).

Prosocial impact is concerned with the experience of making a positive difference in the lives of others (Grant, 2007; Grant & Sonnentag, 2010). Until now, little attention has been given to prosocial impact (Bolino & Grant, 2016). Compared to the similar concept of meaningfulness, which describes a sense that one's job is generally worthwhile whether it benefits others (Bolino & Grant, 2016), prosocial impact is different as it stems from a relationship with the other. Researchers recognise that educational organisations are service institutions where educational professionals can recognise their work benefits others through relationships with various stakeholders (Bright, 2008; Grant & Campbell, 2007; Yada et al., 2020; Yada & Jäppinen, 2019).

In brief, prosocial motivation refers to a *willingness* to help others, while prosocial behaviour refers to *actions* aimed at benefitting others, and prosocial impact represents *experiences* of the positive difference one's own actions make on other's lives. It is assumed that knowledgeable others play a critical role in the development of learning, where those others support, discuss, and provide a model to encourage the learner's understanding and performance (Marsh & Farrell, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, potential development and learning in shared leadership contexts can be achieved with help from others (Yada, 2020).

## Research Questions

The aim of this study is to explore the role of prosociality when experiencing shared leadership in educational contexts. Therefore, a research question is formed as following: How do the principals represent prosociality in shared leadership?

## Method

### *Participants*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 comprehensive school principals in Finland from 2016 to 2018. Because the aim of the study was to understand prosociality in shared leadership contexts, the interview questions involved questions about shared leadership. This study utilised a purposeful sampling method using criterion to select principals who describe information-rich cases that include the intensity of phenomena—although not extremely (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002). A member of the National Principal Association recommended interviewees who were experienced and demonstrating shared leadership quality. Some keywords (such as collaboration and working together) were indicated to the recommender to help to identify the kind of principals who were considered to realise shared leadership.

First, face-to-face meetings were conducted with the principals who agreed to participate. Among 12 principals, 5 males and 7 females were from comprehensive schools in Finland. The average age of the principals was 52.00 ( $SD = 9.05$ ), their average years of teaching experience were 12.67 ( $SD = 4.61$ ), and the average years in a principal position were 12.67 ( $SD = 4.70$ ). Six principals were from small schools (201–400 students), four were from medium schools (401–700 students), and two were from big schools (701–900 students). The average interview length was 53 min (varying between 30 and 84 min).

According to the EF English Proficiency Index (2020), Finland was listed third with very high English proficiency. In addition, all principals spoke fluent English; therefore, the interviews were conducted in English.

### *Data Analysis*

Data were coded and organised in a deductive manner to describe categories that best matched each of the original themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process was supported by using qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti 8.0), which helped the researchers organise text passages from multiple text documents.

Interview data were manually transcribed by the researcher before conducting the analysis. First, the data were deductively coded according to the prosocial elements that were identified in the previous review studies (Bolino & Grant, 2016; Yada & Jäppinen, 2019). The prosocial elements include, for example, caring, empathy, altruism, agreeableness, mentoring, organisational citizenship behaviour, meaningfulness, and servant leadership (Yada & Jäppinen, 2019). If no code was identified in the previous studies, codes were inductively generated. In this phase, 63% of the quotations (306/485) were labelled with the deductive codes. Second, the codes were placed into the three prosocial themes: motivation, behaviour, and impact (Bolino & Grant, 2016). There were some codes that were difficult to fit in any themes. Finally, the codes within the themes were grouped to form subthemes to represent each theme. During the analysis phase, the researcher paid attention not only to fitting the codes into the original themes but to seeking alternative explanations identified and checked against each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## Findings

The present study aims to understand what helping each other represents in shared leadership contexts with the research question: How do the principals represent prosociality in shared leadership? For answering the question, the findings are shown according to each aspect of prosociality, including prosocial motivation, behaviour, and impact. Each prosocial aspect has subthemes that explain how the principals acknowledge prosociality. In this section, excerpts from the data are presented to retain principals' voices and to assist readers in understanding the analysis according to the prosocial aspects. The participants' names were anonymised using an acronym ('P' and a number referring to the particular interviewed principal).

### *Prosocial Motivation*

From the analysis, the theme of prosocial motivation comprised three subthemes: organisational and professional commitment, enjoyable attitude, and caring for others.

**Organisational and Professional Commitment** When the prosocial motivation of educational professionals was discussed, the principals pointed to several commitments they felt are related to prosocial motivation. One principal described this as understanding and engaging in the values and goals of the collective: 'The most important thing is how to understand the meaning of the team's main work and main targets and how we value that we are working and developing certain areas in this school, understand, take, and commit it' (P7). Educational professionals make



an organisational commitment to the team or school to realise organisational or team goals. In addition to organisational commitment, the principals stated that educational professionals felt a calling for their profession as a prosocial motivation when they work together. This point was demonstrated by one principal's response:

I think it's something inside. It's not that you get paid. To be able to work as a teacher, you need to be one that children want. I think even though somebody says that it's an old fashion way to say that teachers have their strong will to become a teacher, I think there is a part of it. I feel this is my job and this is something I like to do, something I am good at, and something I develop by myself all the time all the way. (P8)

**Enjoyable Attitude** Another aspect of prosocial motivation that educational professionals may experience refers to their innate pleasure when they work together or for the benefit of others. Of course, communication among educational professionals may include some difficulties, such as misunderstanding, conflict, and tough negotiation. However, principals pointed out working together is enjoyable despite these difficulties:

It's fun to work together. I think it's more fun because working just by yourself is no way. I think everybody who wants to be school staff, they want to be together, want to work together. The feeling of fun is certainly one of the benefits. (P8)

Moreover, there is an agreement among principals that educational professionals are interested in each other when they are motivated to help others. They understand that prosocial motivation leads to the development of their own expertise since they can receive more than they give in return for collaboration or sharing. This inquiring emotion seems to be fundamental to collaboration or sharing of expertise between educational professionals, as demonstrated by a principal's words:

We are interested in what we are doing in groups. We are motivated in that way. That's why it's very important that people are voluntarily growing through the teams the feeling that they want to share, they want to help, they want to work together harder inside. (P7)

It is reasonable to understand these inquiring and enjoyable emotions are experienced differently and individually. Thus, principals consistently stated that motivation to help others could not be forced, as the following discussion between the interviewer and participant indicates: 'Where does prosocial motivation come from?' (I). 'Good question, I think it should be coming from internal things. You don't feel you must do it. But you enjoy doing it' (P4).

**Caring for Others** Another aspect of prosocial motivation comes from care for others. Surprisingly, many principals referred to stories from novice or new teachers in their schools, who felt that they were cared for and were consequently energised. One principal remarked:

Generally, if any new teachers come into the staffroom and start their work here, when I ask these new teachers afterwards, 'How do the staff welcome you?' It has been always the same answer that the other teachers have been amazing. Everybody says, 'Hey, just ask helping out when you need it.' So, I would say that it works quite nicely. They help a lot. (P5)

Educational professionals may want to care for novice or new teachers more than familiar colleagues since they may not have enough information about the school and seem vulnerable. In terms of communication among familiar colleagues, it was important for educational professionals to consciously be empathic to others to make communication effective. When asked why careful communication is considered effective, one principal replied:

We have all different personalities with different strengths and different ideas. When you bring all your ideas together, it's important, of course, to be able to bring your ideas, but you have to be able to listen to the others' ideas, how the others understand the topic. I think it's a kind of the same thing, what we do in classrooms with children and what we do with adults in a community as well here in the school. (P8)

### *Prosocial Behaviour*

The principals reported in the interviews how educational professionals engage in behaviour that benefits others. This behaviour was characterised by three subthemes: offering own expertise, supporting with simple action, and engaging in teamwork.

**Offering Own Expertise** Educational professionals have individually different but widely varying expertise, through which they make complementary relationships to achieve educational goals. One principal emphasised the importance of providing prosocial actions using their own expertise since the whole educational enterprise may stop if no expertise is offered, as is manifested in the following comment:

She took quite a lot of responsibilities for computer things. And she was very good, if we had to make, for instance, new school, we had to make it very present place, she had the eye and she had the ability to do it, so she could do. I was just very relieved. I did not have that. I did not have an interest, but not have the ability to do it. I couldn't see them, for instance, colours. And she did that. (P1)

Providing one's own knowledge and skills does not only work as complementary but also offers the opportunity for mutual learning among educational professionals. In shared leadership contexts, they learn from each other by sharing their own knowledge and skills that could benefit others' expertise. When asked to describe prosocial behaviour among educational professionals, one principal replied:

Somebody has special skills. He or she would share with the others in the [in-house] training sessions that everybody can get benefits from because everybody can get it. Or somebody goes to some outside training sessions, so they would train everybody in this school. (P5)

However, this does not mean that educational professionals just copy other's knowledge and skills as others do. The principal continued that prosocial behaviour could be a starting point to generate synergy:

I gave materials, then the teachers say okay. They put it all together in a new way. So, they did not imitate what I have done in previous schools. But they made it their own. It was very nice to see that they didn't just try to copy, but they actually took in that information and they thought about it and discussed what we are gonna do. It was wonderful. (P5)

Thus, in shared leadership contexts, educational professionals do not confine their expertise to themselves. They are open to sharing their expertise to help others and advance issues. One principal pointed out that taking prosocial actions with their own expertise leads to leadership:

I think all kinds of organization members have something to help others with, some kinds of leadership skills. Because leadership does not belong to me, everyone has some kinds of leadership skills. We, adults, are all some kinds of leaders in our school. (P6)

**Supporting with a Simple Action** Principals noticed that there is a lot of behaviour that simply helps others. This kind of simple helping behaviour makes following organisational communication smooth since educational professionals understand they can build reciprocal relationships. For example, a simple action to help others was substituting. A principal described there are various moments that require others' help as a substitute:

So, for instance, this is a big school, I have a staff about 50, and every now and then, or not, almost constantly somebody needs to go somewhere. They need to do whatever they have, have to take care of their kids, because of the doctor, just want a vacation, whatever. Then, I said to them that you know yes, if you need a time out, I'll give you time out if you then can find somebody to substitute for you. And they very willingly, say, 'Hey, I can do it'. (P5)

This example shows how helping as a substitute reflects the organisation where individuals can easily ask help from someone.

Principals agreed that listening also benefits others although this seems to be passive behaviour. One principal pointed to the importance of listening that encourages shared leadership by stating, 'It's helpful to find one hour for one group and just sit down and share what is going on' (P4). Listening to others plays a role in initiating the leadership process. Another principal pointed out that educational professionals are engaged in actively listening to others' voice to create synergy, as is illustrated in the subsequent comment:

I think it is important in teams they have all different personalities with different strengths and different ideas. So, that's why I would like to form different kinds of teams. Then, I think that the idea is that one plus one is more than two. When you bring all your ideas together, it's important, of course, to be able to bring your ideas, but you have to be able to listen to the others' ideas, how the others understand the topic. I think it's a kind of the same thing, what we do in classrooms with children and what we do with adults in a community as well here in the school. (P8)

Making a decision in the school particularly requires active listening in a discussion. One principal is very sensitive to listening to others in shared leadership contexts:

To listen when we discuss so that I am able to listen to what others have said so that I am not just pushing my own point of view even though it would be the best idea. But still, we need to be able to listen to [what] others [are] saying. (P10)

These actions are simple but very important to make the school community work smoothly.

**Engaging in Teamwork** Because educational professionals recognise that the issues around them are becoming more diverse and complex, their work style is also changing towards greater teamwork, as demonstrated by one principal who stated that educational professionals 'are rapidly planning and working more and more together' (P8). Examples of engaging in teamwork include giving feedback and advice and sharing information and workload to help others. In the interviews, teams were recognised as a place that generates relationships between educational professionals who are working together. In terms of shared leadership, engaging in teamwork leads to helping others, as is echoed in the following comment:

I feel that a very important thing is the relationships between individuals. Teachers working together building relationships together and we support them in very many ways. And then we have, first, each class as one group, as classroom teachers, subject teachers, and special education teachers form their own class group. Then, we have different teams based on different themes. And then all teachers together in this school. I think that we have to first build up relationships all about the relationships between people here. When we trust each other, it is the social way to do. (P12)

One important point the principals stated is that teamwork does not necessarily require certain deliberate behaviour, such as team teaching. Although educational professionals do not have any specific intention to help others, getting together and sharing information and problems can lead to some ideas and solutions, thereby leading to the benefit for others. The following comment illustrates a spontaneous benefitting behaviour:

Once a month, we have mentoring groups. So, there are five teachers together in one group, and it's like serving what's going on, and might be some topics that we have, but the most important thing is that they can share what is going on in their life and their work. And also, as I said, they can learn from each other, and the main thing is to help. (P4)

To elicit opinion, ideas, information, or even problems, an open atmosphere is required. One principal considered encouraging an atmosphere in the school where one could easily seek help as a prosocial endeavour:

The atmosphere would be open, welcoming, and helpful. Those are the main things. I also go back to the words, security and safety. You feel safe, then it's easier to be open to others. So, open, welcoming, and helpful are the words that describe the atmosphere. (P9)

### ***Prosocial Impact***

During the interviews, the principals noticed that in many moments of school life as educational professionals, they recognise that they are helping others. Here, three subthemes were identified concerning the moments where prosocial impact was recognised: seeing students' development, receiving colleagues' gratitude, and receiving parents' and communities' appreciation.

**Seeing Students' Development** Because the ultimate goal of schools is to enhance students' development, seeing the growth of the students makes educational professionals realise how they benefit students. Opportunities to see students' development energises and fulfils educational professionals with the experience of prosociality, as one principal explained:

Everything is done for the students. That's why we are here. Therefore, the very motivating fact was seeing young people developing I can't say any smaller facts which motivate me because I think it was the entity that motivated. (P1)

Opportunities to help students mostly occur indirectly, since educational endeavours take time to come to fruition. Educational professionals experience the students' outcomes or the atmosphere in class as indirect feedback related to their educational contributions, as echoed in the following comment:

That is what I always ask once a year in the developmental talk: 'What is the most important thing in your work, and what makes you happy or gives you something?' I think almost every teacher, they like to be with children and when they see them growing and learning, maybe the most rewarding things. [...] From students, you can see the feedback, but it's not direct, but you can see what happens and if they are happy or everything is going well. If it's good feedback for your work, you have organised it well. (P4)

Moreover, indirect feedback about students' achievement also comes from colleagues. For example, one principal explained that educational professionals realise their successful contribution to students by the feedback from the other team members:

The first one is a success. If the team managed to do something very well and all other people hear their good work, we say, 'That's great. You have done a great thing'. If the thing is that we all get so many good things and our work is, you make achievements which help students learn, we applaud. That's very important, success and feedback [for] that. All the time we give feedback. (P7)

**Receiving Feedback and Gratitude from Colleagues** Opportunities for educational professionals to realise that they are benefitting colleagues come not only from direct teaching in classes but also from working with other educational professionals. In a situation where educational professionals share responsibilities to apply effective education for students, they work together with colleagues to enhance student development. One teacher explained: 'When you see your [teacher] group is working well and you see your good impact on group members' (P4). When educational professionals help other colleagues with their expertise (or even just a simple action), they receive feedback from others. The recognition of receiving feedback reinforces the feeling of helping others, as one principal added:

Our teachers' group and staff, they can also encourage each other and say 'well done' if there is something we do together. And as I said, it is important to try to encourage each other and to reward it by saying, 'well-done, it was a good work'. Of course, it's impossible no one can see every good thing. But it's something I try to always remember to give good feedback and also to reward like this. (P4)

In addition to feedback from other colleagues, feedback from principals also helps educational professionals to notice their impact on others. Principals emphasised the importance of providing feedback as a form of gratitude so that others could realise that their behaviour is worthwhile. This is reflected in the following extended quote:

Usually, it's in the staffroom, and many times in [a web-platform], I send, 'Thanks for this and this.... and I will share this with all teachers'. Then, for example, today in a staff meeting where it is all teachers and assistants, I was going to start with thanking people who arrange an excellent seminar in February to all sixty of us a week ago on Friday and Saturday. [...] We have had so good time, so good time talking about this culture and how to help cooperation between the teachers and assistants to get students better. I think almost every time when I open my mouth, I start with 'Thanks'. I think it's very important for all of us. (P11)

When educational professionals shared their responsibility to develop students, principals thank them for their contributions in engaging with school goals. This gratitude makes educational professionals realise that they are not just individually developing students but engaging in shared educational endeavours to benefit others.

Moreover, in the interviews, principals noticed that everyday life consists of many small things that are not usually listed as official tasks. Even though prosocial behaviour is small and not formally recognised, educational professionals could receive prosocial impact in daily life. One principal explained the moments when someone is needed:

There are things, so-called, we call them free time actions, for example, just make coffee for others. We have one teacher who makes very good coffee. She really makes good coffee, and if there was no coffee, we cannot go on. (P1)

**Getting Feedback from Parents** Principals stated that parents are the people who make educational professionals realise their contribution to the students. Because seeing the growth of their children makes parents happy, educational professionals recognise their contribution to the students by communicating with parents. One principal illustrated this point:

In the Christmas and spring celebrations we have at school, we worked together a lot to make it something really special. It's always different and children have plays and do singing. And it's always like we have done it together. After we had the celebrations, we were relieved and so happy because the children and parents were so pleased. This is something which was a huge task [during the preparation], but we succeeded, and we did it well and it went well. (P8)

It is reasonable to say that when parents see the growth of their children, they appreciate the education provided by the school, thereby making educational professionals fulfilled. Moreover, positive comments and reactions from parents and local people have a role in educational professionals experiencing the way they are creating a future through their education. One principal explained:

The school has a very societal approach to education as a whole. It was by no means confined within the walls of the school. But we saw the school as a part of the local community, in fact, a part of Finnish society. So, we want to experiment with a new thing as we have a strong feeling of creating a future. (P2)

In this sense, prosocial behaviour was perceived not just by the students but the whole society. By developing their students, educational professionals feel that they are benefitting social welfare.

## Discussion

This study revealed that the Finnish principals perceived prosociality as essential in shared leadership contexts. Prosocial motivation works as a function to energise educational professionals to work not only for individual others but also collectively. Prosocial behaviour was found to be understood as actual actions that formally and informally occur in shared leadership contexts. Prosocial impact was perceived when educational professionals offer help and receive certain types of feedback. Moreover, the moments when educational professionals experienced prosocial impact were not only when they saw students' development but also when they received feedback from colleagues and parents.

Notably, when we discussed prosociality during the interviews, the principals recognised the importance of prosociality within shared leadership. For example, principals highlighted sharing and giving that is undertaken to benefit others that could be considered prosocial behaviour. This is because educational professionals recognise their work as interdependent and reciprocal and believe they are able to help others as they recognise other colleagues are prosocial and are able to offer reciprocal help when needed. These results corroborate the findings of the previous study by Hu and Liden (2015) that states when organisational members are prosocially motivated and working on tasks requiring interdependence among members, their collaboration and well-being were enhanced. Educational policy-makers can utilise the findings. For example, educational professionals' prosocial behaviour should be rewarded in order to encourage their collaboration.

One important finding here is the role of prosocial impact. In the interviews, the principals realised that when educational professionals received feedback and perceived their work was acknowledged by others, they realised their behaviour helps others, thereby leading to increased helping behaviours. This finding supports evidence from previous observations and signifies the importance of prosocial impact (e.g. Grant, 2007; Yada et al., 2020). This finding offers practical implications. Educational organisations and leaders are encouraged to make opportunities where teachers can experience that they help others. Teacher trainings should include how to make the opportunities, for example, giving positive feedback, in order teachers to acknowledge their contribution to others.

The other important finding is that shared leadership was deeply related to prosociality because organisational members are connected to each other in shared leadership contexts (Carson et al., 2007). During our interviews, principals emphasised that when the educational professionals offered help, the recipient was able to develop their understanding and learning. Because helping and assisting others among educational professionals were found to be typical prosocial

motivation and behaviours, prosociality related a person to the other and fulfilled the distance to potential development (Marsh & Farrell, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). An important practical implication from this finding is that educational professionals can learn from each other with prosociality. For example, teacher trainings are suggested to make learning environments where various educational professionals can benefit each other with their expertise to realise shared leadership.

Moreover, this study suggests how educational professionals form collective competence in shared leadership contexts. Although Finnish teachers are renowned for their autonomy and trust (Väljjarvi, 2012), the findings suggest that the educational professionals became hubs with which people are connected when they feel confident and autonomy in their actions. The principals noticed that the educational professionals who offered help felt more confident not only in terms of their expertise but also in terms of the collective. This finding contributes to the international literature on how autonomous and efficacious teachers form shared leadership by helping each other (Carson et al., 2007; Yada, 2020). As a previous meta-analysis showed that experiencing autonomy positively leads employees to be more prosocial (Donald et al., 2021), autonomy and confidence in their expertise and actions make educational professionals feel enjoy helping others, which leads to collective phenomena in shared leadership. Thus, educational professionals may collectively enhance their prosociality by their expertise and competence in shared leadership. In line with the findings, educational leaders should emphasise that educational professionals contribute to others when they utilise their expertise, thereby building collective performance required in shared leadership.

Despite these promising results, this study has several limitations and implications for future research. First, the study focused on principals as a representative of educational professionals. Therefore, this study is limited by the lack of information in terms of the other educational professionals, such as teachers. Future research could access other educational professionals as participants. Second, although a qualitative approach depicted perceptions of prosociality in shared leadership contexts, further statistical work should examine the components of prosociality in shared leadership revealed in this study. Finally, the data were collected from a variety of school levels including the primary and secondary levels. Since the structure of cooperation and the role of teachers are different between school levels, separate analysis depending on school levels should be undertaken to examine different perceptions of prosociality in future investigations.

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