



## Brief

# Pedagogical Leadership for the Staff, the Activities and the Organisation – a Practice-based Study with ECE Centre Directors

Pia Nordin<sup>1\*</sup>, Mikaela Svanbäck-Laaksonen<sup>1</sup> & Mia Heikkilä<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Åbo Akademi University, Finland

<sup>2</sup>Åbo Akademi University, Finland, Stockholm University, Sweden

\*Contact corresponding author: Pia Nordin, e-mail: pia.nordin@abo.fi

Fundamental structural and content-related changes have taken place in early childhood education for a longer time both nationally and internationally (Ahtiainen et al., 2021; Nihlfors et al., 2023; Pascal, 2019; Ranta et al., 2021). Early childhood education in Finland has been part of the education system since 2013 and the policy document has undergone major revisions (Ranta et al., 2021). Previous research (Fonsén, 2014; Fonsén et al., 2022; Heikka et al., 2020; Vlasov, 2018) and national evaluation (Siippainen et al., 2021) show that the content of pedagogical leadership in early childhood education needs to be clarified.

The aim of the study is to analyse ECE centre directors' descriptions of what pedagogical leadership involves and how it is implemented in early childhood education in Swedish-speaking parts of Finland. The following research question has been formulated *What does pedagogical leadership in early childhood education mean?*

The study is based on a qualitative method with an abductive approach. The empirical data collection consists of semi-structured interviews, which have been conducted with 13 respondents. The theoretical framework of the study is based on the theory of practice architecture (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). The data has been analysed through content analysis. Furthermore, the concepts, said, done and related, based on the theory of practice architecture have been used in the analysis (Rönnerman, 2018). In the results, three themes emerge as essential in pedagogical leadership. The theme areas are to guide the staff, to lead the pedagogical activities and to create holistic frameworks. The results are described

in terms of what is said about pedagogical leadership, how pedagogical leadership is done and how pedagogical leadership is related based on the theory of practice architecture.

The results indicate a practice that is in a challenging phase with staff shortages, but at the same time a dynamic phase with creative new thinking about pedagogy. Based on the themes formed in the analysis and interpretation process, pedagogical leadership in early childhood education means that ECE centre directors operate between supporting the staff's professionalism, developing the pedagogical activities in the children's group and constructing a holistic framework for the organisation. Since pedagogical leadership is very complex, it is important that ECE centre directors reflect on their pedagogical leadership to clarify what it means in their own practice. According to the results of the study, leaders need to balance between creating visions and goals for the organisation while being sensitive to the staff and the group of children in their own context.

**Keywords:** *pedagogical leadership; ECE centre director; the theory of practice architecture*