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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS' PROFESSIONAL LEARNING THROUGH SHARED PRACTICES

Anitta Melasalmi



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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined the professional learning of early childhood educators as a shared practice in their communities. In this study, professional learning in multi-professional early childhood education (ECE) practices is considered an intertwined and relational phenomenon constructed through shared knowledge, identity and agency. The theoretical framework of the dissertation is based on the sociocultural theory and research traditions which emphasise how humans shape their environment while simultaneously are shaped by it and that language plays a central role in the construction of reality. This article-based doctoral dissertation is grounded in three publications within a related set of research questions. The data were collected in Finnish ECE contexts between 2014 – 2016 using interviews and stimulated-recall interviews. Qualitative content and thematic analysis methods were used to analyse the data.

Study I examined the shared professional knowledge of two kindergarten teachers and how they implemented this into their daily ECE practices. The results showed that the teachers' professional knowledge was related to the awareness of their professional selves and to their professional tasks. The results also revealed that their professional knowledge was predominantly shared through discussions in team meetings, in the form of practical negotiations which were related to planning the future practices. Teacher learning emerged from their practices and was focused on the children's behaviours and learning. These individual learning situations, what was learned and why, mostly appeared to remain implicit in the team.

Study II examined the kindergarten teachers' discoveries of their shared professional teacher identities and how it influenced their professional beliefs and practices. The results showed that the teachers' shared professional identities were formed by their commitment, tasks, feedback and agency. When their identity formations seemed positive, the teachers expressed feelings of well-being, cohesion,

job motivation, heightened collective efficacy and self-efficacy. In addition to positive identity processes, the study revealed that the teachers' professional identities were challenged as they tried to identify, struggle and cope with the roles and the positions available to them.

Study III examined the phenomenon of shared agency in three early childhood work teams. The study revealed that the team members' discussions of their actions and dispositions mirrored their interdependent understandings and affected how they responded engaging with one another, while simultaneously directed their shared agency towards past, present or future challenges. Each team's shared agency appeared to exhibit a specific space which produced a certain level of shared agency. Two of the teams showed high levels of shared agency characterized by positive personal and professional dispositions with strong engagement for future oriented challenges.

Taken together, the three studies revealed how kindergarten teachers' professional identity, knowledge, and agency are experienced and negotiated in complex and socially shared acts of teaching and caring. The findings illustrate that the quality of the teacher's participation plays a crucial role in how teachers understand, identify and positions themselves in ECE. By being fully accepted to participate, it became possible, and even necessary, for the teachers to change, little by little, their community's collective understanding of ECE practices and find their potential for shared agency. Sometimes these relational interactions were tense and re-shaped interdependencies in the teams, thus affecting the teachers' professional identities and agency. In hectic real-life contexts, reflecting and sharing professional learning appeared to be challenging and the lack of authentic collegial and critical feedback constrained professional learning. The workplace culture and work habits influenced how the educators, as a team, understood their collective orientation in ECE practices. The collective orientation indicated the level of agency and affected professional outcomes. This dissertation argues that shared professional learning provides an essential tool for sustaining the quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC). Furthermore, the results indicate the need to change daily practices to include more shared work with appropriate tools. More focused evaluation forms would also support the development of innovative (and quality) practices. Based on the findings of this dissertation, in order to provide quality ECE, it is important to support educators in their challenging work. In particular, it is important to consider the policy decisions that are conducive to ensuring the pedagogical quality of ECE practices and collaborative learning in communities. These decisions should result in more balanced and equal practices for children and families, providing personnel with greater agency and the capacity to build learning communities. This change requires collaborative teacher leadership to share the work of practical knowledge creation in multi-professional communities and should be facilitated by clarifying and

transforming the professional tasks and responsibilities of ECE staff. These changes need to be supported by space and time for shared inquiry and reflection. Teacher education should support kindergarten teachers' professional identities by providing collaborative learning experiences during practicums, thus assuring joint and collegial mentoring relationships. This will ensure better opportunities for pre-service teachers and ECE staff to learn from each other. Moreover, besides supporting the processes of local learning communities, teacher education has the broader task of developing more equal opportunities with on-going professional development within in-service training.

Keywords: professional learning in communities, situated learning, shared professional knowledge, identity, agency, early childhood education and care, early childhood teacher education

TURUN YLIOPISTO

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Oppimisen, opetuksen ja oppimisympäristöjen tutkimuksen tohtoriohjelma

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Väitöskirjassa tutkittiin varhaiskasvattajien ammatillista oppimista jaettuna toimintana ja käytäntönä. Tässä tutkimuksessa ammatillinen oppiminen varhaiskasvatuksen moniammatillisessa toiminnassa nähdään yhteen kietoutuvana ja vuorovaikutuksellisenä ilmiönä, joka rakentuu jaetusta tiedosta, identiteetistä sekä toimijuudesta. Väitöskirjan yleinen teoreettinen viitekehys perustuu sosiokulttuuriseen teoriaan ja tutkimustraditioon, jonka mukaan ihmiset muokkaavat elinympäristöään tullen samanaikaisesti sen muokkaamaksi. Keskeisessä roolissa todellisuuden rakentajana pidetään puhuttua kieltä. Tämä artikkelipohjainen väitöskirja perustuu kolmeen julkaisuun ja niihin liittyviin tutkimuskysymyksiin. Osa-tutkimusten aineistot on kerätty sekä haastatteluin että video-stimuloituin haastatteluin Suomalaisen varhaiskasvatuksen kontekstissa vuosien 2014 – 2016 aikana. Aineiston analyysi toteutettiin laadullisen sisällönanalyysin ja temaattisen analyysin menetelmin.

Tutkimus I tarkasteli kahden lastentarhanopettajan jaettua ammatillista tietoa ja sitä, miten jaettu ammatillinen tietämys ilmeni varhaiskasvatuksen jokapäiväisissä toiminnoissa. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat että lastentarhanopettajien ammatillinen tietämys liittyi ammatilliseen minään ja ammatillisiin tehtäviin. Tutkimuksen tuloksista ilmeni myös, että opettajien ammatillinen tietämys oli lähinnä jaettu tiimikokousten aikana liittyen neuvotteluihin tulevien toimintojen järjestämiseksi. Opettajien tietoisuus ammatillisesta oppimisestaan kohosi heidän omasta toiminnastaan, joka oli keskittynyt lasten käyttäytymiseen ja oppimiseen. Nämä yksilölliset oppimistilanteet ja sisällöt, mitä ja miksi opettajat olivat oppineet, näyttivät tiimissä jäävään lähinnä julkilausumattomiksi.

Tutkimus II tarkasteli kuinka lastentarhanopettajien havainnot heidän neuvotelluista, jaetuista ammatillisista opettaja identiteeteistään vaikuttivat heidän ammatillisiin käsityksiin ja käytäntöihin. Tulokset osoittivat työhön sitoutumisen, palautteen, ammatillisten kasvatustehtävien ja toimijuuden olevan osatekijöitä, jot-

ka määrittivät opettajien ammatillisten identiteettien rakentumista. Positiivinen ammatillisen identiteetin kehittämisprosessi tuotti kokemuksia hyvinvoinnista, yhteenkuuluvuudesta, työmotivaatiosta sekä kollektiivisia että yksilöllisiä pystyvyyden kokemuksia. Positiivisten kehittämisprosessien lisäksi opettajien ammatillinen identiteettiprosessi näyttäytyi haasteellisena heidän koettaessaan samastua, taistella ja selviytyä tarjolla olevissa ammatillisista rooleissa ja asemissa.

Tutkimus III tarkasteli varhaiskasvattajatiimien ymmärrystä heidän jaetusta toimijuudestaan. Tutkimuksen tulokset kuvaavat miten tiimin jäsenten ammatilliset taipumukset ja arvostukset ajatella ja toimia tietyllä tavalla (disposition) kuvastivat heidän toisistaan riippuvaista ja rakentuvaa ammatillisen toiminnan ymmärryksen luonnetta, joka vaikutti siihen millä tavoin tiimin jäsenet vastasivat toisilleen vahvistaen myös tiimin jaetun toimijuuden suuntaamista kohti mennyttä, nykyistä tai tulevia haasteita. Jokaisen tiimin jaettu toimijuus näyttäytyi tiimille ominaisena tilana, joka tuotti tietyn tasoista toimijuutta. Kaksi tiimiä osoittivat korkeaa toimijuuden tasoa jota luonnehti positiivinen, sekä persoonallinen että ammatillinen asennoituminen. Lisäksi heidän vahva osallistuminen suuntautui sekä nykyhetkeen ja tuleviin haasteisiin.

Yhteenvetona kolme tutkimusta osoittivat kuinka lastentarhanopettajien ammatillinen identiteetti, tietämys ja toimijuus ovat elettyjä ja neuvoteltuja prosesseja opettamisen ja huolenpidon sosiaalisissa ja kompleksisissa teoissa. Tulokset havainnollistavat että opettajan osallisuuden laatu vaikuttaa ratkaisevasti siihen, miten hän ymmärtää, samastuu ja asemoi itsensä vuorovaikutussuhteissa varhaiskasvatuksen konteksteissa. Täysin hyväksytyn osallisuuden myötä opettajille mahdollistui, oli jopa välttämätöntä, muuttaa yhteisesti jaettua ymmärrystä varhaiskasvatuksen käytännöistä ja löytää jaetun toimijuuden potentiaali. Nämä relationaaliset vuorovaikutussuhteet näyttäytyivät myös jännittyneinä muokaten tiimin keskinäistä riippuvaisuutta, sekä opettajan identiteettiä ja toimijuutta. Oman ammatillisen oppimisen sanoittaminen ja reflektointi näyttäytyi haastellisina opettajien kiireisen arkityön kontekstissa. Autenttisen ja kriittisen palautteen vähäisyys näyttäytyi tutkimuksessa tiimin ja yhteisön moniammatillista oppimista rajoittavana tekijänä. Kollegoiden osallistumisen lisäksi yhteisön toimintakulttuuri ja sen tavat vaikuttivat, kuinka kasvattajat tiiminä kokivat heidän yhteisen suuntautumisen (collective orientation) varhaiskasvatuksen käytännöissä. Tiimin jakama orientaatio määrittä heidän toimijuuden tasoa enemmän tai vähemmän vahvaksi, vaikuttaen myös heidän tulevaan toimintaa ja tuloksiin. Tämä väitöstutkimus esittää, että jaettu ammatillinen oppiminen on keskeinen väline sekä varhaiskasvatuksen pedagogisen laadun vahvistamisessa että ammatillisen oppivan yhteisön rakentamisessa. Lisäksi tulokset osoittavat tarvetta muuttaa jaetun arjen suunnittelun käytänteitä sisältämään lisää käytännön toteutusta tukevaa materiaalia. Kohdentuneempien arviointimenetelmien ja muotojen tulee tukea innovatiivisten (ja laadukkaiden) käytäntöjen kehittämistä. Tutkimuk-

sen tulosten pohjalta, laadukkaan varhaiskasvatuksen tarjoamiseksi, on ratkaisevan tärkeää miettiä, kuinka varhaiskasvattajia tuetaan heidän kompleksisessa ja haastavassa työssä. Erityisesti on tärkeää harkita poliittisia päätöksiä, joiden tulee edistää varhaiskasvatuksen pedagogista laatua, sekä yhteisöllistä oppimista. Kyseisten päätösten tulee tuottaa vakaita ja tasapuolisia varhaiskasvatuksen käytäntöjä lapsille ja perheille, sekä tarjota henkilöstölle mahdollisuuksia vahvempaan toimijuuteen oppivaa yhteisöä rakennettaessa. Tämänkaltaisen päämäärätietoinen muutos edellyttää yhteistyössä toteutettavaa opettajajohtajuutta, jonka tehtävänä on moniammatillisen yhteisön käytännöissä syntyvän tiedon jakaminen ja kehittäminen. Tätä tulee tukea, selkeyttämällä ja uudistamalla varhaiskasvatushenkilöstön ammatillisia tehtäviä ja vastuita, sekä mahdollistaa kasvattajille tilaa ja aikaa tutkia ja reflektoida heidän käytäntöjä ja yhteistä oppimista. Tämän lisäksi, opettajankoulutuksen tulee tukea lastentarhanopettajien ja lastentarhanopettajaopiskelijoiden ammatillisia identiteettejä, mahdollistamalla yhteistoiminnallisia oppimiskokemuksia harjoittelun aikana. Täten turvataan jaettu ja kollegiaalinen mentorointisuhde, sekä mahdollisuus lastentarhanopettaja-opiskelijalle ja varhaiskasvatushenkilöstölle oppia toisiltaan. Paikallisten oppimisyhteisöjen prosessien tukemisen lisäksi opettajankoulutuksella on laajempi tehtävä kehittää tasapuolisia ja jatkuvia täydennyskoulutusmahdollisuuksia.

Asiasanat: Ammatillinen yhteisöllinen oppiminen, situationallinen oppiminen, jaettu ammatillinen tieto, identiteetti, toimijuus, varhaiskasvatus, lastentarhanopettajakoulutus

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I would not have the strength to work in this swirl alone. Indeed, the more threads there are, the stronger the tapestry. My family, the most important roots of my *raison d'être*, you are the source of love, rest, comfort and joy. My parents, Aino and Jussi, you have been there for me through all transitions, I have always known your support, loving interest and never ending belief in me. Among other things, you have infused resilience into me. My aunt Martta, thank you for your jovial encouragement throughout the changes of our lives. My husband dear Tero, you are unbelievable, so strong and capable of seeing positive options, you have been believing in me, even in cases when I had doubts. You complete me with courage and positivity. My daughters, Rosa and Pihla, I have felt proud being your mother throughout your life choices and actions. You have grown to be loving, resilient and strong women and shown that dreams are empowering forces which carry us and pave the way to the future. To you, my family, I owe you my love and thanks, as you empower and carry one another throughout the changes which are inevitable in our lives.

Keijolassa, 8.4. 2018

Anitta Melasalmi

LIST OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

This doctoral dissertation is based on the following original publications, which are referenced in the text by their Roman numerals.

- Study I** Melasalmi, A., & Husu, J. (2016). The content and implementation of shared professional knowledge in early childhood education. *Early Years: An International Research Journal*, 36(4), 426–439. DOI: 10.1080/09575146.2016.1149692.
- Study II** Melasalmi, A., & Husu, J. (2018). A narrative examination of early childhood teachers' shared identities in teamwork. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 39(2), 90–113. DOI: 10.1080/10901027.2017.1389786.
- Study III** Melasalmi, A., & Husu, J. Shared Professional Agency in Early Childhood Education: An In-depth Study of Three Teams. Manuscript under re-review in *Teaching and Teacher Education*.

In all three studies, the first author conceived the study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation. She was responsible for the writing of the manuscripts. The second author contributed to the study conception and design, co-wrote the manuscript, and contributed to the revisions.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, early childhood education (ECE) has become an important and integral part of education around the world, and promoting professionalism in the domain of early years has become a key policy priority in many countries. In the last decade, the shift of policy focus on investment from labour towards children, their learning and education has brought more outcome expectations highlighting the meaning of ECE as education for future citizens. This international direction translates into cost savings and efficiency gains. As an investment, ECE puts the emphasis on being ready to learn from the primary school and even beyond, when society benefits from well-adjusted and productive adults contributing to economic growth (Apple, 2006). Indeed, it has been argued that the fair policy of promoting educational equity could be seen as more than just a social justice imperative, but also as an economic imperative (e.g. Apple, 2011; see also Naudeau, Kataoka, Valerio, Neuman, & Elder, 2011). Considered from this point of view, the role of education in building eligible society is involved with the concepts of a knowledge economy and learning society (Paananen, Lipponen, & Kumpulainen, 2015).

In the domain of education, this kind of emphasis stresses accountability and performativity, which produce pressure to concentrate on academic expectations, outcome assessment and the use of standardised intervention methods and instructions. Narrowly defined learning outcomes can lead to technicist approaches to teaching and learning (e.g. Davies, 2009). It has also been argued that an economic approach conceptualises and instrumentalises early childhood education and care (ECEC) as a stage of preparation towards formal education, known also as the concept of schoolification (e.g. Karila, 2017; Urban & Swadener, 2016; Moss, 2012; Shaughnessy & Kleyn, 2012; Garnier, 2011; see also Winther-Lindquist, 2016). Schoolification raises questions about the quality and nature of childhood: expectations related “becoming”; the expectations of the curriculum related to learning; the expectations related to privileged pedagogical practices – that is formal teaching versus holistic learning (Dalli, Barbour, Cameron, & Miller, 2017). The concern about the schoolification of early childhood education also relates to research results indicating that the concept of “education” seems to be narrowed primarily to learning alone, and that “care” is viewed as subordinate or inferior. The quality of ECEC encompasses, or should encompass, a holistic understanding of learning, upbringing, social support and care; following that quality ECEC practices require both care and education as intertwined concepts (e.g. Moss, 2017; UNESCO, 2010; Broström, 2006). Brown (2017) argues that this kind of, almost singular focus – making children ready for school – by policymakers on academic success, which is tied directly to economic success, leave little space for early

childhood educators to engage in practices that reflect what is known about how children develop and learn.

Consequently, there seems to be pressure to standardise ECEC services, and signs of erosion of the Nordic model and its key elements can be seen in recent policy debates (Karila, 2017; Paananen, Kumpulainen, & Lipponen, 2015). In general, the Nordic or Scandinavian model of ECEC is described as an integrated unit with a social-pedagogical approach (Karila, 2017; Pramling, Doverborg, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2016). Pramling et al., (2016) suggests a “third way” for early childhood education beyond the social-pedagogical and the preparation-for-school approach dichotomy. They argue the importance of not simplifying teaching and learning into the transmission and reception of information, but instead teaching to be understood as a teacher entering into children’s sensemaking process. They also argue that the third way requires the institutions of early childhood education to reconceptualise the terms, such as teaching, learning, and remembering, from their traditional meaning in school, because “these metaphors have material consequences for how we go about supporting children’s development, including how we teach” (p. 215).

Fonsén and Vlasov (2016) point out that until recently in Finland, we have had a political consensus and shared view regarding the quality of child care, in which the principles of equality and the rights of the child are taken into account. They note that economic pressure has deteriorated the ideals and decisions guiding the policies, in particular identifying the restricted unlimited subjective right for full day child care as jeopardising the equal rights of children (for social cohesion see also Karila, 2017). They also note that the decision to increase the adult-child ratio for 3 to 6 year olds is controversial when considering quality as important in individual encounters and interaction (Fonsén & Vlasov, 2016). Related to policy decisions, Onnismaa, Kalliala and Tahkokallio (2017) highlight that in the binding new National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2016), ECEC has been included as a part of the education system. Furthermore, within the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (36/1973, in latest revision 2015), the part played by pedagogy has been stressed. Based on these documents and developmental lines, it is curious that the vast majority of the ECE staff in Finland have vocational backgrounds from the fields of social or welfare occupation (Onnismaa et al., 2017; see also Karila & Eerola, Alasuutari, Kuukka, & Siippainen, 2017).

As stated above, international research and policy emphasises that supporting the professional development of the ECEC workforce is vital in promoting the quality of ECEC provision (e.g. Lindeboom & Buischool, 2013; Oberhuemer, 2005, 2013). Recently, the qualifications of the staff have been shown to be significantly related to higher quality ECEC (e.g. Manning, Garvis, Fleming, & Wong, 2017). Still, there is a lack of agreement on the definition of continuing professional development. Considering these points, this study follows Edwards and Nuttall’s (2009) suggestion to

use the expression *professional learning* instead of professional development. That is, the term professional learning is more in line with the constructivist perspective of learning and teaching, comprehending also the understanding of teachers' learning as an ongoing process. Professional learning and development consists of both natural learning experiences and conscious practices intended to benefit—either directly or indirectly—the individual, group, or organization (Day, 2012a). Furthermore, sharing the ways of thinking in one profession with those of another may lead to more creative thinking, problem-solving, and practices (Crowley, 2014).

The professionalisation of the early childhood workforce is associated with the quality of ECE services, but staff qualifications, on their own, do not predict the quality outcomes of ECEC. It is also acknowledged that the ongoing learning and development of the staff is a key to high-quality early childhood education (e.g. Lazzari, Picchio, & Musatti, 2013). At the same time, one of the best ways to promote shared professional learning and development of staff is to adopt a wider perspective than merely viewing professional development as an enhancement of an individual educator's knowledge and skills. While many observers presuppose that professional learning and development advance the knowledge, skills, dispositions and practices of early childhood educators, it is equally valid that professional learning and development enhances a community culture supportive of ongoing professional growth (Candy, 1991). The enhancement of community culture requires that educators be responsible for directing their own professional learning and development through continuous studying of their own actions and practices and reflecting their goals and outcomes with colleagues (Helm, 2007).

In Finland, well-educated staff have been viewed as the key element of ECEC services and as a vital part of successful practices. Indeed, it has been broadly assumed that quality ECEC outcomes derive from educated staff who have ongoing access to professional development opportunities (Karila, 2008). Kumpulainen and Mikkola (2015) argue that approaching learning dichotomously, as divided between informal and formal, has limitations that may lead to fragmentation, stereotyping and oversimplification. They suggest a view that regards contexts as being produced, negotiated and hybridized in social interaction, thereby creating opportunities for individuals' engagement, learning and identity (Kumpulainen & Mikkola, 2015, p. 15). Shulman (2004) proposed five principles conducive to effective teacher learning: agency or activity, reflection, collaboration or interaction, passion and community or culture. Likewise, continuous professional learning and development that is work-place-based has been found to have a clear impact on collegiality, teamwork, and inter-professional collaboration (Eurofound, 2015). Moreover, it has been argued that educators' local and practical experiences must be both respected and utilised, while the practical knowledge of educators, based on experiential learning and situated in practice – knowing-in-practice – should not be ignored (e.g. Cochran-Smith

& Lyttle, 2009; Trotter, 2006; Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002). It has also been argued that effective professional development is ongoing, active, collaborative, inquiry based, and focused on children's learning (Schleicher, 2016; Eurofound, 2015; Borko, Jacobas, & Koellner, 2010). Indeed, educators are required to be actively engaged in the shared process of changing and improving their educational practices, while professional learning and development need also to focus on educators' learning in practice, using dialogue with colleagues and parents (Eurofound, 2015). In this vein, recent literature suggest that in order to comprehend the learning of educators, the working context should also be included and examined (e.g. Opfer, 2016), although the organisational conditions have usually not been taken into account (Van Driel, Meirink, van Veen, & Zwart, 2012).

In this study professional learning is conceptualised as a continuum from pre-service teacher education to continuing in-service teacher education. This view includes an understanding that professional learning and development occurs through the lifespan of educators. In response to this, as a researcher, I hold an understanding of an important dialogic relationship between theory and practice. It may also be explicated from the beginning of this study, that the lamp under which the answers are searched illuminates the beliefs, attitudes and dispositions of educators, thereby affecting their own and shared actions as well as shared outcomes of their actions. This study responds to growing claims that shared professional learning and development constitutes a vital factor for educator development; improvement of practices and outcomes of teaching; and the collective capacity of communities.

Thus, the study is positioned – based on the assumption that the cultural ECE contexts have effects on the outcome of shared professional learning and development of educators – to examine the professional learning and development of early childhood educators as a shared endeavour in the working context. In this study, I investigate the daily practices, perceptions and experiences of early childhood educators while they learn together from their own and the practices of others striving to support the development of children. Informed by sociocultural theories this study focuses on understanding educators' shared knowledge, identities and agency in interpreting and implementing shared educational practices. By taking a sociocultural perspective, the knowledge of educators becomes both internal and external, that is, between minds, and thus situated in local practices (Bruner, 1996). However, early childhood educators' subjectivity, including also their professional identities, are constructed and shaped through discourses in which they actively engage and negotiate and in which they are positioned (Osgood, 2006, see also 2012). And for this process to shape their identities and practices and to construct new knowledge, in other words, learn, they need agency.

The words of Nuthall (1996) mirror the complexity of early childhood work and more broadly the aim of the study:

Those aspects of our culture and daily life with which we are most familiar are likely to be those we have the greatest difficulty perceiving. That is the nature of culture. Human consciousness is designed to deal only with the problematic and the exceptional. If this were not also true of our awareness of classroom life, there would be little reason to carry out research on learning (p. 209).

In this chapter I will first explicate the focus and aim of the study, while the last section of this chapter presents my theoretical perspective and understanding to examine educators' professional learning and development in work.

1.1 Focus and rationale for the study

As the researcher in this study, I am interested in the nature of the shared professional learning and development of early childhood educators, particularly focusing on the shared processes in which they engage. Hence, this study investigated the shared professional learning of early childhood educators in their daily practices and working contexts, and views learning not only as an individual's internal cognitive process but also as a socially shared process. In this context, I view learners as members of communities who develop shared knowledge, practices and conventions with respect to their goals and values. Thus, the focus is on shared, multiprofessional ECEC practices taking place both in preschool and in early childhood contexts. In the study I use the term "multiprofessional" referring to: (i) daily work in day care centres shared between kindergarten teachers holding differing levels of educational backgrounds and nursery nurses; and (ii) collaboration of early childhood educators with professionals in other public sectors. In this dissertation I use the terms *teacher* and *educator* interchangeably. The reason for this is that in the first two sub-studies the participants were kindergarten teachers, but in the third study the educational backgrounds of the participants varied from nursery nurses to kindergarten teachers. Due to the general aim of this study the decision to use both terms interchangeably mirrors the shared context and way of working in the team.

For this study, I defined shared learning as a daily process of constructing a knowledge of practice, that is: learning from children, from participation in professional communities and particularly early childhood teamwork and from one's own and shared practices. The team of educators constructs a context, a microcommunity, wherein their professional knowledge, identity and agency become shared through intentional actions, routine practices, implicit gestures, dialogue and negotiations. Within this perception of shared learning, the study embraces a view of learning as a social process; it is about identity and "becoming", about "how learning changes who we are", creating "personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities"

(Wenger, 1998, p. 5). Attempting to understand the professional learning of educators from a situative perspective means making an attempt to understand the complex social community that shapes learning, including teachers, colleagues, children and curricula and the cultural environment that they share (Greeno, 2006). As noted by Eteläpelto and Collin (2004), viewing learning basically as an issue of social attribution does not mean that the role of the individual learner constructing his or her individual identity should be neglected. Recent research suggests that the educator-child interactions are more influential than participation in early education programs and the structural features of programs (Pakarinen et al., 2017). And, as Winther-Lindquist (2016) emphasised, by regarding development as a culturally mediated process taking place through engagement in activities, autonomy and self-determination develop, not as the result of a natural maturation but instead through everyday practices. Early childhood educators' child-centered beliefs – such as attitudes about how children learn, what they need to learn and the manner in which educators may direct their learning – have been connected with educators' professional teaching practices and consequent child outcomes (e.g. Hur, Jeon, & Buettner, 2016).

The decisions about how to best support children's development as expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child place new responsibilities on the adult community, particularly in recognition that the process of "growing up" is relative, not absolute (Woodhead, 2006). In the same breath, this study notes that the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood and Care (2016) not only creates new demands to alter the status of children, but it changes the status of adults: by changing the way we think about ourselves and our shared professional actions. In other words, how the operational cultures embrace children's ownership of their learning and promoting children's transversal competencies as a learning community where children and personnel learn together and from each other. Furthermore, related to the above mentioned relational nature of children's ownership and operational culture, Lipponen, Kumpulainen and Paananen (2017) emphasise the difference between understanding a particular child's perspective and children's perspective. They state that this transition in ECE has placed the focus of understanding on the child as a subject: children's perspective is always expressed in their own words, thoughts and images (Lipponen et al., 2017). Lipponen et al. (2017) argue that taking children's perspectives has consequences for curriculum practices by encouraging educators to construct a more analytical interpretation of children's interests and to view children as active agents. They also argue that this awareness and understanding has further consequences for ECEC teacher education: that is, there is a need to change the dispositions and understandings from the dominant developmental orientation toward understanding early childhood more broadly, within which includes understanding children's interests and lifeworlds (Lipponen et al., 2017, p. 1275).

The Finnish ECEC is seen as an entity, delivering both ECEC to children, and day care services for their families. Children are legally entitled to early childhood education and care services after a nine-month parental leave period, until the child starts school, generally at the age of seven. However, Finnish ECEC is divided into two parts: ECEC mainly for children 0–5 years and pre-primary education for six-year-old children. Publicly subsidised early childhood services (0–5 years) are affordable for families (Plantenga & Remery, 2009), though mandatory pre-primary education is free of charge. Childcare-leave and home-care benefits are available, thus, almost all children under one year of age and 70% under the age of two years are taken care of at home. The participation in ECEC services increases at the age of two years (52%) and continues to grow approximately to 80% for five year olds (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015). In Finland, ECEC takes place mainly within the public ECEC services in day care centres, family day care or in group family day care units. Public ECEC services are chosen by most of the families (92%) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015), and the image of ECEC is very positive (Plantenga & Remery, 2009).

In Finland, early childhood education and care is regulated within a diverse number of acts and degrees, within which are stipulated, for example, that ECEC is a universal right for the child, staff qualifications, regulations on educational goals, staff-child ratio and client fees in ECEC services (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 36/1973; National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2016; Basic Education Act, 628/1998; National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education, 2014). The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2016) provides a more general description of the implementation of ECEC while defining the educational goals and learning areas for 0–5 year-old children. The National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (2014) outlines the objectives and contents of pre-primary education for 6-year-olds before the compulsory basic education begins. Both curricula describe broad principles leaving more detailed planning and implementation to local curricula and teachers.

The administration of ECEC in Finland is under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Culture and provided mainly by municipalities. The Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for both the development of ECEC and the implementation of national policy in the form of the National Core Curriculum for ECEC. Local municipalities are responsible for making their local curricula based on the National Core Curricula. The involvement encourages the staff in drafting, implementing and evaluating their local and unit-specific curricula (Lipponen et al., 2017). These kinds of curricula development allow educators to take into account their professional knowledge and judgment, specific contexts and needs of the children (Korkeamäki & Dreher, 2012). The planning in ECEC is child-centred.

Moreover the broad aim of teaching practices is to support a child's positive self-image as a learner. In ECEC, children have the right to learn by playing and enjoying what they are learning. Assessment of children's learning is ongoing and holistic without standardised testing. Thus, instead of focusing on the content of the learning, the development of transversal competences is affected by the approaches and pedagogical practices that are used, the way learning environments are used, and how children's learning and well-being are supported (The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2016, pp. 21–22). As Lipponen et al. (2017) note, in Finnish ECEC the assessment is focused on implementation of the curriculum rather than a child's outcomes.

The Finnish ECEC is facing changes in legislation, in the governance and steering of services, however, the qualification requirements of ECEC staff are still defined by the Act on Qualification Requirements for Social Welfare Personnel 272/2005. Preparations for the second phase of the law reform (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 36/1973) are in the making, including the competence requirements for ECEC staff. The staff at Finnish day care centres is multiprofessional, thus the professional qualifications of personnel working with children vary. Kindergarten teachers have a bachelor's or master's degree in education (university-based training, specialising in early childhood education with 180 or 120 credits). Special Education Teachers, following a qualification as kindergarten teacher with two years' work experience, have 1-year postgraduate university training in special needs education (180 + 60 credits). In addition to that, the bachelor's degree in social sciences (including 60 credits of studies on early childhood education and social pedagogy) provides also a possibility to work as a kindergarten teacher. Practical nurses or nursery nurses are required to have a degree in the field of social welfare and healthcare services (Act on Qualification Requirement for Social Welfare Professionals 272/2005).

Currently, at least one-third of the staff working with children ages 0–5 should meet the kindergarten teacher qualifications (including a bachelor's degree in social sciences as an equivalent). Personnel working in pre-primary education (with 6-year-old pre-schoolers) are required to have either a bachelor's degree or a master's degree in education (including a bachelor's in social sciences with an additional pedagogical course). Also primary school teachers with a master's degree may also work as a teacher in pre-primary education. In 2014 there were 15,180 kindergarten teachers and 24,842 nurses working in the public ECEC sector, and the average age of kindergarten teachers was 42 years (Valtiovarainministeriö, 2016). At the moment, the majority of the staff are professionals with a social or health care degree: kindergarten teachers with a university degree in the pedagogy of ECE comprise the smallest occupational group (Alila et al., 2014). Moreover, it has been argued that, instead of clarifying the expertise and responsibilities as the foundation of shared

practices, in the multiprofessional working culture of Finnish ECEC the pedagogical expertise is not often recognized, appreciated or implemented (Onnisma & Kalliala, 2010).

The basic training in pre-service education lays the foundation for a teacher's professional knowledge and competence. However, on-going access to in-service training is essential for developing educators' professional competence while supporting their life-long learning. Based on the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 36/1973, 27§, municipalities are obliged to provide ECE personnel with sufficient opportunities to update their professional knowledge and competence (depending on the basic training, degree of complexity and description of the work practices). This provision applies to both permanent and temporary ECE personnel. In 2006, based on government decision regarding continuing professional education, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Publications of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2006:6) recommended that 3 to 10 days each year is an adequate amount time for in-service training.

In 2017, the Ministry of Education and Culture launched a national survey regarding of ECE staff and the ways in which the activities supporting children's learning and development are implemented (Eskelinen & Hjelt, 2017). The survey was answered by 13,290 (24%) of Finnish ECE personnel. According to the survey, more than half of the respondents, working within immediate education work in ECEC, were granted less than three in-service training days per year and almost one fifth (18%) of the respondents had received no in-service training during year 2016. Continuing professional education is part of systematic in-service training based on evaluation of professional expertise in cooperation with the personnel that develop community, team and individual training and development plans (Publications of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2006:6). However, according to a 2017 national survey (Eskelinen & Hjelt), this varies between municipalities, and one-third (29%) of the respondents noted that their individual training and development plan was not implemented. The highly desired areas of in-service training were related to the new curriculum for ECEC (2016), in particular such as child participation, pedagogical documentation and transversal competence. Moreover, 31% of the respondents considered retraining within the next 10 years due to the low wage level of the field, low appreciation of educators, work strain and responsibility, limited prospects of career advancement, unclear job descriptions and limited opportunities to affect the structure of one's work (Eskelinen & Hjelt, 2017).

Similar results for the respondents' desires for re-training and changing their profession have been reported. Perho and Korhonen (2012) argued that professional demands have grown faster than both the public's appreciation of the kindergarten teacher profession and the ECEC resources. Kinon and Laakkonen (2005)

pose the question, related to men kindergarten teachers, if the ECE is capable of offering enough pedagogical challenges in order to maintain the motivation of working in field. Traditionally, the options of furthering one's kindergarten teacher career are related to either undergoing additional education while staying on the field of ECE (e.g. early childhood special education teacher) or obtaining a degree in a more general field of teaching (e.g. special education teacher or teacher in primary education). Currently this situation may change, since, in the new outline of the government for the Act on ECEC, it is suggested that it is possible to complement one's degree (Bachelor of Education) after qualifying for a teaching position. Furthermore, it is also suggested that the leader of day care centre should have a master of education degree. (Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle varhaiskasvatuslaiksi ja eräiksi siihen liittyviksi laeiksi, luonnos lausuntokierrokselle 6.2.2018.) At the moment participation in continuing professional development training in ECE does not automatically ensure the possibility to be recognized related to career advancement. However, certain courses (for example such as in leadership or in language support) are appreciated in cases a kindergarten teacher is applying for the vacancy of a centre head or a vacancy of a coordinator for services for immigrant children (Onnismaa, 2017).

1.2 The aims of the study

The general aim of this thesis is to study the shared daily work of early childhood educators (ECEs) in order to understand the complex nature of these educators' daily practices, in which they construct a shared professional learning and development within their cultural contexts and environments. The more practical objectives of the study are to examine how this socially shared work and learning affect the educators' practices in the areas of professional knowledge, identity and agency. The thesis comprises three articles, combining them into one. All of the articles are empirical studies based upon collected data addressing the specific research questions related to professional learning and development of ECEs during their practices and careers, which are studied in this dissertation. Professional learning and development is understood to be manifested as shared in daily practices when educators examine their knowledge of practice and collaborate with their colleagues in the community while negotiating about their professional knowledge, identities and agencies. This shared professional learning and development was addressed through three interwoven frames, which were shared by the educators: (i) knowledge practices; (ii) professional identities; and (iii) relational agency. Table 1 presents the research aims and related, specific, research questions.

Table 1. The research aims and explicated research questions within the articles.

Aim of the study	Article	Explicated research questions
<i>Study I</i>		
The aim of the study was to investigate the nature and implementation of the shared professional knowledge of early childhood teachers' in their daily practices.	<i>The Content and Implementation of Shared Professional Knowledge in Early Childhood Education</i>	What constitutes the shared professional knowledge of early childhood teachers? How is shared professional knowledge implemented in early childhood practice?
<i>Study II</i>		
The aim of the study was to gain a holistic understanding of the experiences and perceptions of educators affecting their continuously negotiated, thus, shared professional identities.	<i>A narrative examination of early childhood teachers' shared identities in teamwork</i>	What constitutes the two early childhood teachers' shared professional identities? How do the shared identities of these two teachers affect their professional practices and beliefs?
<i>Study III</i>		
The aim of the study was to analyse the theoretical features of shared agency in early childhood team work in order to identify the characteristics affecting agentic team work	<i>Shared Professional Agency in Early Childhood Education: An In-depth Study of Three Teams</i>	How are dispositional, relational and temporal features of shared agency manifested in ECE teamwork? What characterises the investigated teams in their shared agency?

1.3 Sociocultural lens for professional learning and development

In recent decades, research focusing on the processes of teaching, learning and cognitive development has been engaged transformatively through the emergence of a theoretical approach, generally called “sociocultural”, “socio-historical” (Wertsch, del Rio, & Alvarez, 1995), “cultural-historical” (e.g. Daniels, 2005; Poehner, 2008; Wells & Claxton, 2002), and also known as “cultural-historical activity” theory (van Oers, Elbers, van der veer & Wardekker, 2008). Vygotsky’s (1920s–1930s) scientific writings are commonly thought to be the main source of the sociocultural perspective, though he did not left a fully coherent and systematically elaborated theory (van der Veer, 2008). Not surprisingly, sociocultural research is not a unified field, but Vygotskian cultural-historical psychology, often called sociocultural theory, offers a general approach to researchers studying the complexities of communication, thinking and learning as related processes shaped by culture. In this study I will use the general term sociocultural theory to refer to, despite the differences, the shared view

of human action as mediated by language and symbolic systems within a particular cultural context.

Wertsch (2010, 1993, 1985) highlights three general themes running throughout Vygotsky's writings, which have characterized much of the writings of contemporary researchers. The *first theme* claims that genetic or developmental analysis provides the foundation for understanding human mental functioning. The vital factor regarding development is social interactions, distributed between active agents (Wertsch, 2010), and mediated by semiotic systems, most importantly by language (e.g. Cole & Wertsch, 1996). The early years' ontogenesis was approached as the development of two lines of interactions – natural and the cultural – viewing the qualitative transformation of mental (cognitive) functioning resulting from this interaction (Wertsch, 2010, p. 231). In other words, an individual's cognitive development cannot be understood without reference to the social environment in which he or she is embedded (Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Wertsch, 1993). Thus, learning or knowledge construction is social, mediated by speech and other symbol systems (Vygotsky, 1978) and best developed through participation in social practices (e.g. Säljö & Grönholm, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991). This major theme holds that human behaviour can be understood only by examining the development or history of behavior; in other words, in order to understand the individual, we must also understand the cultural-historical context in which the individual resides.

The *second theme* claims that human mental functioning, such as learning, is a mediated process: mental development consists of the interweaving of the biological development and the appropriation of the cultural/ideal/material heritage that exists in the present, enabling people to interact with one another and the physical world (e.g. Vygotsky & Kozulin, 1986). Humans are understood to utilise and create cultural artefacts, allowing each individual to regulate and control his or her developmental processes, learning and behaviour, which take place through participation in contexts, such as institutional bodies, workplaces, peer group interaction, and family life (Lantolf, Thorne, & Poehner, 2015, p. 207). In order to understand learning, it is vital to examine and identify how individual(s) use mediational tools in learning situations (Wertsch, 1993). Vygotsky identified three kinds of mediators: (i) material tools such as anything that human beings have invented to master nature – “presuppose collective use, interpersonal communication, and symbolic representation”; (ii) psychological tools, such as casting lots or counting fingers that mediate humans' own psychological processes between the human mind and the abstract world; and (iii) other human beings (Kozulin, 1998, p. 62). Some of these tools have also been transformed, and are known as symbolic tools (cultural artefacts), such as numbers, signs, music, and language. Cultural tools are not simply neutral, thus, the social and political contextual aspects must be taken account (Wertsch, 2010).

The *third theme* concerns the social origins of individual mental functioning. As to mediation through another individual, Vygotsky suggested two possible approaches: cultural development appears in two planes, first between people (interpsychological), and then inside the individual (intrapsychological); the second approach focuses on the role of the other individual as *a mediator of meaning* (Kozulin & Preisseisen, 1995, p. 69). The double function of language was emphasised: as enabling individuals to socially coordinate their actions with others through meaning; and through the internalised communication as mediating intellectual activity through the discourse of inner speech. In other words, the construction of meaning is also mediated by social relationship, that is, the circumstances in which the development occurs with an emphasis on the concept of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) (Moll, 2001, p. 114). The basic idea of ZPD underlines that the path to learning is a shift from social interaction as other-regulated to self-regulated as internalised independent performance (Wertsch, 1984). Scaffolding is associated with interaction in the ZPD: a process where an adult or more capable peer assists – through encouragement, focusing, demonstrating, remaindering, and suggesting – an individual to carry out a task which is slightly beyond his or her capabilities. Assisted learning facilitates the individual's self-supported competence, which is possible only through having established a successful performance (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). This socially interactive dimension of the learning process never actually disappears; even on an intrapsychological plane, the meanings remain basically quasi-social and socio-cultural in nature (Wertsch, 1993).

The sociocultural perspective towards identity and agency

In spite of Vygotsky's approach regarding the development of mental functioning, he offered no specific guidelines for comprehending the problems of identity formation (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 84). However, this view of socially and culturally mediated activity provides the basis for understanding the development of human consciousness, within which internalisation is viewed as part of human consciousness emerging out of social life, in the form of cognitive development to gradually attain an ability to mediate one's own thinking (Wertsch & Stone, 1985; see also Karpov & Haywood, 1998). In this context, intramental functioning is social, because it retains the function of social interaction, with a particular focus on the individual level as being inherently dialogic (Wertsch, 1998; see also Valsiner & van der Veer, 2005). By focusing on mediated action, individualism and reductionism can be avoided, because mediated actions entail two central elements: an agent and cultural tools (Wertsch, 1998; see also Holland & Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 2001; Engeström, 1999). Wardekker (2008, p. 158) points out that mental tools can only function adequately if one becomes integrated into one's identity, that is, able to see oneself as able and willing to use those tools. He also asserts that

identity is not a solid, and mature; “rather it is in constant development as long as a person is learning” (p. 158).

Lave and Wenger (1991) perceived identities as relations between persons, their place and participation and argued that “identity, knowing [learning], and social membership entail one another” (p. 53). Thus, identity and practice are linked through the negotiation of the self and constitute ways of being a person in that context (Wenger, 1998, 2010; Bredo; 1994; Wertsch, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990, 2003). Not only that, but “the negotiation of meaning is a fundamentally temporal process, and one must understand practice in its temporal dimension” (Wenger, 1998, p. 86; see also; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 2001; Holland & Lave, 2000). Within the socioculturally oriented research tradition (Lantolf & Thorn, 2006; Stsetsenko & Arievitch, 1997), agency and agentic behavior is viewed both as evolving processes that are situated both historically and contextually, and their nature as relational, complex, transforming and socially distributed or shared (e.g. Edwards & Daniels, 2012; Edwards, 2007; Chaiklin & Lave, 1993; Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993; Rogoff, 1990). Peoples’ actions are either constrained or enhanced by: (i) the cultural tools available in their environments; and (ii) practices as historically formed, imbued with knowledge and shaped by values and purposes of the institutions (Edwards & Daniels, 2012). Since identities and agencies are changing constructions, drawing both on personal and social effort and contribution, learning enhances personal and social transformations (e.g. Bredo, 1994; Edwards, 2005a; Newell & Simon, 1972; Wenger, 1998). In other words, learning embraces the transformation of identity and agency. However, there are different opinions within the sociocultural approach regarding how the social and the individual exist, plus there are also different conceptions on the nature and existence of agency. This is true particularly in the earlier literature, constituting the period between 1980 and 2000, when the role of individual agency was explicitly rejected by the voices of mainstream authors within the sociocultural school (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013).

Social constructivist theory of learning

“Learning is a change in state, which alters how we act on the world, and in turn change it by our actions” (Edwards, 2005a, p. 50). When learning is defined as a change in state, it acquires attributes that have been connected with behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism. Brown (2009) argues, that despite the lack of consensus in education, a certain general categorisation of approaches to learning and teaching in the education literature falls into one of either two camps: *objectivism* or *constructivism*. Behavioural learning theories (objectivist epistemological tradition) explain learning in terms of observable, measurable behaviors (Good & Brophy, 1990), placing the responsibility for learning on teachers (Jones, 2002). Cognitive

learning theories (pragmatist epistemological tradition) place the emphasis on learners' information processing as a central cause of learning (Schunk, 2016). Over the past few decades, a constructivist discourse (interpretivist epistemological tradition) has become a major orienting framework explaining how knowledge is produced, as well as how students learn (Sfard, 1998; MacKinnon & Scarff-Seatter, 1997). From a constructivist perspective, learning is conceived as the construction of meaning: (i) a self-regulatory process of struggling between prior models of the world and discrepant new insights (Palmer, 2005); and (ii) teaching as facilitation of the learning process (Brown, 2009; Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999; Mayer, 1999; Fosnot, 1996).

However, constructivism is neither a single nor a unified theory. Vadeboncoeur (1997) asserted that constructivism consists of two themes: (i) Piagetian, cognitive constructivism, with an emphasis on education for individual cognitive development; (ii) and Vygotskian social constructivism with an emphasis both on education for social transformation, and a learner's embeddedness in sociocultural practices of teaching and learning. The principles of social constructivist theory include: (i) individuals learn from new experiences on the basis of prior knowledge; (ii) and new, constructed knowledge is situated, and learning is socially mediated and acquired within learning communities (Powell & Kalina, 2009; Kiraly, 2000; Scheurman, 1995). Constructivist teaching places great demands on the teacher's subject matter understanding and pedagogical skills (Windschitl, 1999). As a descriptive theory of learning, not a description of learning, constructivism does not translate directly into teaching (Richardson & Placier, 2001), thus, social constructivist educators generally have more to say about learning than about teaching: they are accustomed to focusing on epistemological rather than pedagogical issues and tend to feel uncomfortable talking about social constructivist teaching and teaching methods (Brophy, 2006, p. 530).

Related to curriculum, Powell (1996) notes that if educators holding objectivist world views are to create constructivist and culturally sensitive classroom curricula, they must learn to value students' experiences, expressions of their understandings and misconceptions. This requires a shift in teaching perspectives from teacher-as-authority to teacher-as-facilitator of meaning and to teacher-as-negotiator of the curriculum (Powell, 1996, p. 382; see also Sawyer, 2005; Richardson & Placier, 2001). Based on earlier research, Kuhn et al. (1995) stated that conceptual change (i.e., theory change) will be more difficult to accomplish if it crosses an individual's ontological categories, involves radical restructuring or violates entrenched beliefs (p. 7).

Professional learning and development of teachers

The perspectives on learning to teach have changed over the last few decades from: (i) *process-product perspective*, focused on changes in the educator's pedagogical

actions; and (ii) a *cognitive perspective*, focused on changes in the educator's knowledge; to (iii) a *situative and sociocultural perspective*, within which "the teacher is seen as always socially, culturally, and historically situated" (Russ, Sherin, & Sherin, 2016, p. 391). Among educators, learning in work can happen both deliberately and spontaneously, resulting in individual learning outcomes as well as shared understandings (Doornbos, Bolhuis, & Simons, 2004). Professional learning can also take place as formally arranged courses, though the problems – to embed learned in the workplace – are notorious (Knight, Tait, & Yorke, 2006). Therefore, most experts within the teacher learning field consider moving to professional learning approaches that are more aligned with constructivist and situative theories, grounded in teaching practices and involving the formation of professional learning communities (Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010; see also Hord, 2009; Niesz, 2007). This shift stresses both the participation metaphor and situated learning theory (cf. Sfard, 1998; see also Chen & Hong, 2016). Situative theory refers to the argument by theoretical frameworks that knowledge, thinking and learning are situated in (social) experiences and dialogue, including the participants, the culture and physical context (Durning & Artino, 2011; see also Kwakman, 2003; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Situative learning has been conceptualised as changes in participation in communities of practice (CoPs) (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991), and participation as a catalyst for cognitive development (e.g. Borko et al., 2005; Nunes, 1992). According to Wenger (1998), learning can be viewed as an event on a trajectory through which one gives meaning to one's engagement in practice, thus, in trajectories, identity incorporate the past and the future during the process of negotiating the present (Wenger, 2010, p. 134). Shared practice creates boundaries (Wenger, 2010), and moving from one community to another can be a process of transformation: the boundary space represents considerable learning about one's identity and the context (Wenger, 1998), during which the individual may face a reconfiguration of the relation between competence and experience, which is an important aspect of learning (Wenger, 2010).

The concept of a *professional learning community* (PLC) has attracted a great interest among educators and researches (Bezzina, 2006), though the term has been widely used with various contents (e.g. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2016; Westheimer, 2008). Owen (2014) distinguished CoPs and *teacher* PLCs by claiming that CoPs are not specifically focused on teachers. DuFour et al. (2016) define PLCs as "an ongoing process, in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry" (p. 10). The key to improved learning of students is continuous, situated learning of educators, which requires active engagement (DuFour et al., 2016) and an ethic of interpersonal caring (Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). It has also been argued that critical collegueship (Mercier, Boudry, Paglieri, & Trouche, 2017; Westheimer, 2008; Mercer & Littleton, 2007) is needed in order to address the "hard questions" about classroom practice in order to actively seek to change teach-

ers' practice (Harris & Jones, 2010, p. 174). The implementation of the PLC process requires cultural change, which is undeniably difficult (DuFour & Fullan, 2013) because it requires changes in long-held assumptions, beliefs, expectations and habits representing the norms in the organisation.

However, research shows that participation in a PLC has an impact leading to changes in: teaching practice; results in the form of increased student learning; teaching culture and school improvement (Vescio, 2008; Andrews & Lewis, 2008; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Smith, 2007; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Taken together, researchers have noted that questions remain that need to be further studied, in order to understand the complex phenomenon of professional development in the workplace. It has been argued that the CoPs approach stresses participation as a prerequisite for individual (and communal) learning, and claims that knowledge and expertise are primarily present in the interactions of CoPs (Eteläpelto & Collin, 2004). In the view of Eteläpelto and Collin (2004), the situated cognition approach may enhance perception, which reduces professional expertise to sheer workplace discourse without contemplating the learning history of the participants. Hara (2009) concludes with a similar view, asserting that CoPs provide an environment fostering informal learning but relatively little attention has been paid to the process of identity formation. Pantić (2015) argues, that despite the fact that teachers are called to act as agents of change, there is little clarity about the nature of change that is expected, and even less research evidence about the ways teacher agency operates in a community. Recent research shows that engagement in purposeful workplace learning depends on, in addition to being well situated in the context and culture of the workplace, personal and work biographies; prior learning; personal and work situation; dispositions; and a readiness to learn at the particular time and place (e.g. Evans, 2009).

2 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING THROUGH SHARED PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

In this chapter I examine first the interdependent nature of the essential concepts of the study, namely identity, agency, and learning. Furthermore, the text will illuminate the social aspects of these concepts. I also examine shared professional learning from within the terms of the concepts of construction, participation and acquisition. Taking on these perspectives allows us to view educators in several ways: as active agents making sense and interpreting their experiences through their individual and shared existing knowledge and beliefs; as agents engaging in shared daily practices in their working context; and as agents actively acquiring new knowledge or skills. Specifically, this chapter elaborates on shared professional learning and development from three complementary and interrelated perspectives, namely, professional knowledge, professional identity and professional agency. My understanding of using this concept of development is that it includes change and improvement in one's practice as a learning process, which involves building upon and changing prior beliefs and actions regarding teaching. This study continues the holistic perception of professional learning and development as a collective responsibility and endeavour necessary to improve teaching and caring in early childhood education.

Without a doubt, the concept of professional development is complex, even debatable, though often used (e.g. Day & Sachs, 2004; Evans, 2002; Berliner, 2001). While some researchers, such as Berliner (2001) and Karila (1997) have used the concept of expertise, according Kelchterman (2004), the professional development of teachers implies learning by the teachers, and the outcomes of their learning emerge in changes in individual professional practices but also in the participants' thinking about the how and why of that practice (p. 220). There is a growing consensus – grounded in research evidence that teachers' approaches to teaching directly impact student learning (e.g. Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999) – that at the core of professional development is always the understanding of the focus of the development: to benefit children's growth (e.g. Avalos, 2011; Whitcomb, Borko, & Liston, 2009). The research literature contains several views regarding the most essential components of professional development that are critical to increasing teacher knowledge and skills, improving practices and supporting student achievement. This study follows the perception of Wilson and Berne (1999) regarding teacher professional learning. In their opinion, the researcher of teacher learning and professional development should pay attention to communities of learning, active teachers acquiring knowledge and critical collegueship. Not only that, but effective teach-

ing is associated with the professional learning opportunities of educators, while research on effective professional development shines the light on the importance of collaborative and collegial learning environments (e.g. Knapp, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Pérez, Anand, Speroni, Parrish, Esra, Socías, & Gubbins, 2007). Besides shared knowledge and agency, the study examines the shared professional identities of early childhood teachers, because a teacher's thinking is reflected in his or her "personal interpretative framework" (Kelchtermans, 2004), which in particular involves the teacher's continuing professional identity development.

2.1 The interdependent nature of professional learning

In his seminal work Mead (1934) explained the notion of self as an ongoing synthesis of both internal self-definition and external, that is provided by others, definition. He separated the, I, as the awareness of one's individuality from the, Me, as the internalized attitudes of significant others. Drawing from Mead (1934) Owens and Samblanet (2013) noted that reflexivity or ability to view oneself as an object capable of being labelled, categorised and evaluated, is the key to determining one's understanding of self. Identity refers to the various self-conceptions or self-definitions that an individual ascribes to himself/herself and that others use to define him/her (e.g. Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Ibarra, 1999). Thus, the self and one's self-concept are social products as well as social forces (Owens, 2006; see also Britzman, 1993; Palmer, 2007). Meaning or self-conceptions are outcomes of agreement or disagreement; they are always a matter of contention, and to some degree they are always shared and negotiable (Jenkins & Sofos, 1996). Thus, an individual's sense of self creates his/her personal identity (including attributes, such as dispositions and abilities) and his/her social identity (including categories such as nationality, team) (Ashforth, 2001).

Social and relational identity

An individual's sense of self (identity) is profoundly influenced by the groups that he/she belongs to. According to the social identity perspective, individuals define and evaluate one selves in terms of the group to which they belong. Thus, these groups provide members with a collective self-concept – a social identity (Hogg & Abrams, 2007). Social identity refers to "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from knowledge of membership in a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). The socially constructed nature of one's identity refers that the values and expectations of significant others can influence one's desired professional self. Social influence refers to the ways in which the attitudes and opinions of one actor affect the attitudes and opinions of another actor (Martin & Hewstone, 2007). In other words,

individuals tend to desire to be perceived in ways that relate to what others expect from a competent professional (Baumeister, 1989).

Sluss & Ashforth (2007) noted that one's definition of self is influenced by interpersonal relationships that occur at three levels: the personal level, the interpersonal level (such as colleague – colleague) and the collective level. Interpersonal and collective identities are social extensions of the self, they differ in terms of one's social connections. Defining the self as a member of a group represents a collective identity orientation. Brewer and Gardner (1996) noted that *social identity* entails a depersonalized sense of self, both reflecting internalization (the norms and characteristics of the reference group) and cognitions about the self that are consistent with one's group identification. Hence, *personal self* contains aspects of the self-concept that differentiate the self from others and *relational self* (or social self) contains aspects of the self-concept that reflect assimilation to others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996, p. 83; see also Baumeister & Muraven, 1996). The social identification process entails a person's perception of oneness with or belongingness to the social group. In order for that process to be successful, one needs to cognitively reflect the understanding of the social categories while locating oneself in one of them, and affectively evaluate one's identity (Ashforth, 2001).

According to relational identity theory, two motives define the dimensional and dynamic association between individuals or groups: affiliation and autonomy. Affiliation means the degree to which one feels emotionally connection with the others. Autonomy means the degree to which one feels free from others' opinions and influence (independence to think, feel, or do without being constrained) (Shapiro, 2010). Thus, relational identity is a dynamic psychological aspect of identity that emerges from one's agentic action in the context of social relationships. According to Shapiro (2010), relational identity affects conflict behavior in three ways: it paves the way to normative expectations as limits of autonomy and affiliation; its undressed relational identity concerns may generate negative emotions and subsequent adversarial behavior; if relational identity issues are well addressed it tends to lead to positive emotions along with cooperative behavior and mutual gains (pp. 636-367).

Thus, there is a connection between identity and practice. Practice entails the negotiation of how to be a professional (Wenger, 1998), that is, as situated identity which will function in one's local context (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). Identification is the process by which individuals internalize a given identity (e.g. professional identity as teacher) to a certain extent (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). However, within the negotiated process actors can position themselves to the parts or roles they take or are given (van Langenhoven & Harré, 2003). Wenger (1998) distinguished five parallels between practice and identity: identity as negotiated experience; identity as community membership; identity as learning trajectory; identity and nexus of multimembership; and identity as a relation between the local and the global (p.

149). These characterisations mirror the various ways to view identity as shared and relational.

Intentional and intersubjective agency

According Postmes (2003) social identities are not merely individual conceptions of a group. They are also socially-shared conceptions of the defining features and boundaries of the group. Furthermore, they provide a common interpretive framework from which to comprehend and direct shared practices (Postmes, 2003). Human agents are capable of acting jointly, although the experience of being jointly engaged with others is complex. It consists of awareness of self and others and their sense of joint engagement (Seemann, 2009) as well as the intentions that serve to coordinate action and planning (Bratman, 2014). In other words, individuals have to possess an intention to do their part of the collective action. Shared intentions constitute a common ground, while an actor's thoughts and actions are substantially and rationally shaped by both individual and shared intentions (Bratman, 2014, p. 143). Hence, collective intentions require interactive knowledge, which can be gained through communication. Gilbert (2009) argued that actors share intention only when they are jointly committed to doing so; thus, they are required to express their personal readiness. In order to achieve shared goals, joint action requires joint commitment (Gilbert, 2014).

Meaning and meaning-making evolve through the use of language (Wertsch, 1998); thus they consist of inter-subjectivity, a shared understanding (e.g. Matusov, 1996). Shared activity manifests inter-subjectivity, or what Roth (2003) has called practical inter-subjectivity. Furthermore, when facing new experiences individuals not only share their colleagues' understanding, they also transform it (Billett, 2006). Being able to shape their understanding, and thus responses to problematic situations (Priestley, Edwards, Priestley, & Miller, 2012), is essential in agency. However, the ecological view of agency suggests that, despite of the capacities of the individual actors, agency depends on the interaction of the capacities and the ecological conditions. Thus, agency has a relational effect (Priestley et al., 2012, p. 196).

The relational perspective holds that, in a transaction with others, individuals derive their meaning and identity from the functional roles they hold within that transaction (Emirbayer, 1997). Relational and intentional agency are mediated by common knowledge, which is created in interactions at the intersectional boundaries of multiprofessional and inter-professional work-practices (Edwards, 2011). What matters for each actor effects the judgements that are made (Edwards, 2012). In order to be efficient, relational agency requires actors to recognize and draw on the distributed expertise of local systems, but also to contribute to it (Edwards, 2010). Kögler (2012) noted that, if actors are able to mutually exchange their perspectives

they “begin to inhabit a shared world of different perspectives within which each of them is specifically positioned and yet capable of representing the perspective of the other” (p. 52).

The collective nature of agency

Depending upon each other is becoming more and more essential and this demands that people need to utilize their collective agency. This is possible because shared beliefs allow people use collective action to have an impact on events and situations (Bandura, 2000). Theiner (2017) specifies four conditions for joint action: a shared goal; individual contribution; interdependence (each individual forms intentions believing that the others form similar intentions); and common awareness. Sharing a cognitive attribute can refer to: “sharing-with” as having some cognitive attribute in common (e.g. memories, beliefs, or values); “sharing-out” as apportioning the cognitive task (divvying the workload); and “sharing –in” as actors jointly participating in a cognitive activity as a group (requires collective intentionality) (Theiner, 2018, p. 235). Thus, the interdependence of the participants is emphasised within work practices, in particular between social and individual agency (e.g. Billett, 2006). Social cognitive theory asserts that individuals are producers of experiences; thus, they are shapers of events (Bandura, 2000). Actors can be viewed as being goal-oriented and having self-efficacy and collective efficacy to produce collective action (Bandura, 2000, 2006).

Understood broadly, agency means that actors possess the capacity to control over their lives. This involves the deliberative ability to make choices and plans, but also ability to shape one’s action, to motivate and regulate their execution (Bandura, 2001, p. 8). Collective capabilities can only be achieved through one’s engagement in a collective action (Ibrahim, 2006). According to Spicer (2011), the dimensions of collective agency involve “knowing how”, which entails taking actions with language in order to develop mastery in the use of tools (e.g. pedagogy); engagement with reform as “making one’s own” or appropriation; and relational agency, as an interpersonal dimension of mutual adaptation. These views presented above resonate with the theoretical discussion of professional agency, which emphasise that professionals have the capacity and dispositions to initiate actions, make decisions and choices, have the will and power to affect situations and have the ability to take stances in their contexts while influencing their development, in particular over one’s own professional life course, in particular in relation to their work practices and their professional identities (Goller & Harteis, 2014; Lasky, 2005; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). Moreover, while individuals constructs a contextual understanding of oneself, the individual take actions that she or he believes are aligned with their own understanding. Thus, professional agency is reciprocally related to professional identity (Buchanan, 2015).

2.2 Shared learning of professional knowledge

Typically, the knowledge of teachers is personal, integrated and distributed (Knight, 2002), with tacit dimension (Eraut, 2007), making it challenging to put in to words (Toom, 2012). Eraut (2007) has made a distinction between “codified knowledge” and “personal knowledge”, describing the meaning of the as what the individual brings to a situation that enables him or her to think, interact and perform”. According to him, personal knowledge includes personalised versions of codified knowledge and everyday knowledge, know-how and memories of cases and events (Eraut, 2007). Making connections between personal knowledge (focus on oneself) and codified knowledge (focus on theories) enhances more advanced ways of knowing, and connecting knowing to lived experiences encourages contextual knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1996). Hiebert, Gallimore and Stigler (2002) have argued that the knowledge of individual teachers or groups within a community is “almost always incomplete and sometimes blind and insular” (p. 7). In order to be valuable to the community, it must be shared and publicly scrutinised (Hiebert et al., 2002). Karila (1997) has observed that the success of the process of learning and professional development of early childhood educators depends greatly on the working context at the time. The essential features in teachers’ situational learning paths consist of, besides the quality of the factors and the quality of interactions, the broader context within which the limits of the learning paths materialise (Karila, 1997; see also Happonen, 2006; Happonen, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2012). In order to move from professionally “Balkanised” (Hargreaves, 1994) positions towards shared agency working, ECE practitioners require diverse practical and contextual knowledge at the individual, team and community levels.

According to Stoll, Bolam, Mahon, Wallace and Thomas (2006), individual and collective capacities are vital to embracing “the power to get involved and sustain learning over time” (p. 221). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that teaching is profoundly affected by the environment – by the culture of the workplace – and they strongly stress that successful and sustainable improvement can only be achieved by and with teachers. According to Postholm and Waage (2016), the relationships of the professional learning of educators, the culture of learning, depends also on the role of the leadership. They argued that the learning culture of a community – being brought to learn from each other – makes a difference to the job satisfaction and wellbeing of educators (Postholm & Waage, 2016). Furthermore, according to research, strong professional communities support trust in and the risk-taking of teachers’ while developing new practices; provide space to share expertise and resources; give support to professional learning and development; and support sensemaking related to policy matters (Horn, Garner, Kane, & Brasel, 2017). The success of an educational community – indicated by levels of student achievement – depends upon

the collective belief of teachers that they are able to improve the learning outcomes (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004).

Recent research has acknowledged that learning takes place especially through collaboration in social interaction and professional reflection of one's experiments (e.g. Lofthouse & Thomas, 2017; van den Berg, Ros, & Beijaard, 2015). According to Guskey (2002, 2003), the crucial point is that it is not the professional development itself, but the experience of successful implementation that changes teachers' attitudes and beliefs. In collaborative learning communities (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), educators discuss/negotiate, reflect and construct ideas, re-shape and generate practices within their working context, and also share understanding about their learning and knowledge. The knowledge construction of teachers implies both a personal cognitive process and a collective one (Kelly, 2006). Novice teachers learn from their experiences of practices, including various methods of teaching, environments, reflection and receiving ideas from colleagues (e.g. Hoekstra, Brekelmans, Beijaard, & Korthagen, 2009). Beginning teachers have valued the opportunities to work collaboratively with other teachers (Andrews, Gilbert, & Martin, 2007), while becoming involved with professional cultures (integrated) that support collegial and collaborative relationships for all teachers. Such involvements made the new teachers feel more satisfied with their teaching practices, more willing to stay in teaching and more likely to stay at the same school (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

The continuous construction of knowledge and the focus and direction of one's agency (i.e. one's intentional actions) lead to individual change (i.e. learning) and remaking of practices (Billett, 2008). At the same time, social units can provide learning opportunities, and they do by offering relations (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Brown, Collins, & Duguit, 1989). In other words, the roles of the individual and the group are vital for learning and change to happen (Marsick, Bitterman, & van der Veen 2000). The collaborative learning that takes place in a group is thought to enhance pedagogic change (e.g. Meirink, Meijer, Verloop, & Bergen, 2009). Shared knowledge and knowledge sharing has been described in several ways: as common ground (Clark & Shaefer, 1989); shared understanding (Stout, Cannon-Bowers, & Salas, 1996); and continuous learning through interaction (Sandhu, Jain, & Ahmad, 2011). Marsick et al. (2000) argue that groups need to possess a capacity to collaborate; learning is shared through communication; people need the capability and permission to think critically and act autonomously; and learning is an ongoing creative process and communities typically learn by experiences (p. 3). In particular, activities such as doing, experimenting, reflecting and learning from others alone and in interaction are suggested as ways of promoting professional learning of educators (Meirink et al., 2009). However, merely exchanging ideas for alternative instructional methods without experimentation appears to be less effective in terms of producing changes in beliefs regarding teaching and learning (Meirink, Ilmants,

Meijer, & Verloop, 2010). Thus the authors argued that the kind of “sharing” that is related to learning and change has two aspects: (i) the content of exchanges (stated above); and (ii) identifying and solving *shared* or *individual* instructional problems. Teachers’ initial expectations had an impact on the interdependency – meaning here the level of collaboration. Teams with a high level of interdependency often met teachers’ expectations, that is, a shared goal for the collaboration. In these cases the level of group cohesion was high (Meirink et al., 2010).

According to van den Bossche, Segers and Kirschner (2006), the construction of a shared comprehension of a problem starts with explicating one’s personal meaning, while the colleagues explain their own meanings for the situation and the outcome of the process – by refining, building on or modifying – each new meaning. Colleagues may also diverge in their interpretation leading to further clarification by negotiating different meanings (van den Bossche et al., 2006). As learning takes place in a social context and among the team-level beliefs about the interpersonal context – the relations among team members – learning behavior is stimulated or inhibited (van den Bossche et al., 2006). In this sense, collaborative settings contain diverse tensions: between engaging in dialogue or reframing; between exercising power and being open to individual expression; between clinging to stability and taking risks; and between commitment and expediency (e.g. Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Achinstein (2002) points out that active engagement in conflict dialogue can create a context for learning. Admittedly, despite the fact that disagreement is an integral part of social practices and thinking, confronting views that differ from one’s own is not a comfortable experience, and generally, individuals prefer information that confirms one’s own view. Put another way, dissent is often experienced as a threat and can lead to rejection (Mirza, 2013). Admittedly, the issue of confronting is not new; for example Carr and Kemmis (2005) have argued a need for becoming critical, which highlights the active engagement of educators in their own learning community (e.g. Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Curry, 2008). The authors also advocate for proactive behaviours; for example feedback and information seeking, networking and inquiring, all of which are found to predict learning, as well as promote newcomer wellbeing and work engagement (Cooper-Thomas, Paterson, Stadler, & Saks, 2014).

2.3 Shared learning of professional identity

The process of becoming and being a teacher relates to the acquisition and construction of a professional identity (e.g. Eteläpelto & Vähäsantanen, 2006; Beijaard et al., 2004; Danielewicz, 2001). The literature focuses on the importance of identity in teacher development (e.g. Olsen, 2008a, 2008b) and the effect it has on sense of purpose, self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, job-satisfaction and effectiveness

(Day, Kington, Stobart & Sammons, 2006). Becoming a teacher is deeply attached to an individual's personality, self-image, self-esteem and whatever subjective theory the teacher may hold (e.g. Kelchtermans, 2004; McLean, 1999). Various studies have also shown that pre-service teachers enter teacher education holding beliefs and images that mirror their own experiences as students and teaching models they have internalised (e.g. Lortie, 1975; Hollingsworth, 1989; see also Beijaar, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). As a consequence, their evolving teacher identities, in addition to theory and content, involve dispositions, interpretations and knowledge encompassing the personal domain, with an attendant effect on their professional practices. According to Alsup (2006), these prevailing beliefs and images are difficult, but also possible, to change through the creation of cognitive dissonance. At the same time, she also argues that this epistemic development – changing the conceptions of their teacher identity – may be hindered by an emphasis on a socially constructed normative teacher identity within teacher education (Alsup, 2006).

Overall, the professional identity of a teacher is a process of maturation emerging through one's intentions, goals and ideals which are intertwined with one's learning in initial professional education and in teaching experiences (Eteläpelto & Saarinen, 2006). Identity can also be perceived as a resource within and through which one explains, justifies and makes sense of oneself in relation to others and to the world (MacLure, 1993): it constitutes one's understanding of oneself – who one is and who other people are. In this light, we can see that identities are the ways we relate to and differentiate ourselves from both individuals and groups, which is a continuous engagement in becoming something or someone (Danielewicz, 2001). A professional identity does not refer only to being receptive to the conceptions and expectations that other people impose (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; see also Sachs, 2005). Teachers also reconstruct their context according to their “network of personal concerns, values, and aspirations against which events are judged and decisions made” (MacLure, 1993, p. 314). In short, people construct their professional identities as active agents, interpreting their experiences through their values, concepts and subjectivities [beliefs] (Billett, 2006).

Collective identity refers to having an understanding of social collectivity and identification with the group (McLaren, 2011; Woodward, 2011) and concerns the shared beliefs, values and goals regarding the members' shared interests (van Stekelenburg, 2013; see also Eteläpelto & Saarinen, 2006). “Group membership plays a role in the ways of life one may find meaningful and acceptable, and provides a sense of shared identity with other members” (McLaren, 2011, p. 156). Being a teacher includes being seen as such by oneself and by others, thus, it is an issue of acquiring and redefining an identity that is socially legitimated (Coldron & Smith, 1999, p. 712; see also Cohen, 2010). Changing the community is a difficult process of negotiating the extent to which aspects of identity formed elsewhere are expressible

within the new content, and thus, is intensely emotional (Fenton-O’Creevy, Dimitriadis, & Scobie, 2015). While working on their developing professional identities in practicums, pre-service teachers straddle the divide between academic and workplace contexts and are engaged in transitions between their current and future work roles. Fenton-O’Creevy, Brigham, Jones and Smith (2015) state that the transition through the academic milieu provides challenges to identity and gives rise to a need to negotiate multimembership and a complex career transition. Admittedly, the transition also provides important resources for the negotiation, such as: the legitimacy of their peripheral role; the support of peers, tutors and mentors; and reflective spaces (Fenton-O’Creevy et al., 2015). Indeed, developing a teacher identity requires collaborative engagement in the practices of the community that shares the common repertoire. At the same time, it is good to acknowledge that shared relations are not always harmonious and sometimes teachers may resist the embedded, implicit, prevailing practices, values and beliefs. According to Wenger (1998), resistance may reveal a greater commitment than does passive compliance or conformity (p. 77). Several academics have addressed the inter-personal and relational nature of the teacher’s identity and the teaching endeavour (e.g. Flores & Day, 2006; Kelchtermans, 2009; Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Zembylas, 2003).

Professionalism is located in a complicated nexus between policy, ideology and practice and is bound up in the discursive dynamics of professionals attempting to address or redress the dilemmas of the job within specific cultures (Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark, & Warner, 2002, p. 109). One’s self-perception and understanding are important because teaching goes beyond technical knowledge and skills (Kelchtermans, 2004); educators’ decisions regarding curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are framed within the understanding of their professional identity (Mockler, 2011). Attaining a positive professional identity is challenging; the dialectical nature of the process of induction shapes and reshapes the teaching and beliefs of the new teacher but also of context, as new members bring fresh professional ideas (e.g. Schempp, Sparks, & Templin, 1999). In the field of teaching as soon as the educator enters the working context with a formal qualification, he or she is given the the full pedagogical responsibility and is expected to handle the challenges each confronts in his or her practice (Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011). Tynjälä and Heikkinen (2011) note that the challenges they encounter in the induction phase have led educators to quit teaching or consider turnover intentions (e.g. Hong, 2010). Research also shows that supportive relationships and networks within the community are essential to teacher retention (e.g. Ingersoll, 2001). Referring to novice kindergarten teachers, Onnismaa, Tahkokallio and Kalliala (2015) argue that the induction phase in the workplace can be emotionally challenging. They state that it is challenging to maintain a professionally ambitious approach due to the unclear core tasks of ECE (e.g. Onnismaa & Kalliala, 2010; Karila, 2008). Given such circumstances, working in a

multiprofessional environment may create tensions for new teachers both in seeking to define their own professional position (e.g. Kinos, 2008) and to define their own area of professional expertise – the domain of knowledge that is debated in the field – and tasks and responsibilities (Onnismaa et al 2017; Onnismaa et al., 2015; Karila, 2008). Also, the decreased number of early childhood staff with a kindergarten teacher’s degree (Onnismaa et al., 2017, p. 6) affects the available daily peer support. These challenges underscore the importance of supporting the professional identity of novice kindergarten fresh from university while improving their job commitment during the beginning years of their careers (Onnismaa et al., 2015).

New kindergarten teachers also encounter challenges directly related to their developing and vulnerable professional identities when they enter the early childhood field. In most such settings, the staff consists of three different professional generations holding and enhancing divergent views, values and practices (Karila & Kupila, 2010). According to Lasky (2005), vulnerability can emerge in situations of high anxiety or fear, when it is common to feel powerless, betrayed or defenseless. In these situations, one may believe that she or he has no direct control over factors affect her or him and feel “forced” to act inconsistently with one’s core beliefs and values. In these kinds of situations, one may withdraw to a defensive or protective stance, which is sure to be inhibitive of learning and collaboration (Lasky, 2005). In a working context, it is not uncommon for such encounters to develop into a difficult situation, in which work-related pressures, different interpretations of work practices and diverse expertise become critical. According Karila and Kupila (2010), this hinders the development of professional identities for the new and more experienced educators, but at its best, encountering different generations of professionals may generate a shared process of learning and development of identities that leads to the empowerment of educators (p. 4). However, each generation of educators mirrors their own paths of developing professionalism, and the essential features are the shared operational culture that evolves and develops in the interaction of the community. ECEC providers are responsible for creating preconditions for developing and evaluating the operational culture (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2016). As a result, the staff with varied educational backgrounds and generational professional views face complex decisions regarding on which cultural, theoretical and research based perspectives and approaches they base their practices (Karila, 2013; see also Fonsén & Vlasov, 2017).

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) refer to shared professional processes of learning and development with the concept “social capital”, arguing that access to continuing support and collaboration is more important than individual skills and knowledge (human capital) due to the dual relationship: human capital cannot be effective in a community without social capital. Being socialised into the teamwork, while receiving assistance, support, ideas and

feedback, teachers' individual professional development and educational outcomes of the community are enhanced (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

2.4 Shared learning of professional agency

As stated previously, the sociocultural framework of learning and development focuses on processes of interaction, discourse and participation-processes of meaning making – during which a sense of agency is been constructed (e.g. Wertsch, del Rio, & Alvarez, 1995; see also Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). Among the researchers, the significance of professional agency has been recognised in relation to the context of professional learning and development of practices (Collin et al., 2017). At the same time, teacher agency also has become also an important concept in the literature on teaching and educational change (e.g. Hargreaves & Fullan 2012; Priestley et al., 2012), and is related also to professional learning and collaboration (Toom, Pyhäntö, & O'Connell Rust, 2015; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011; Edwards, 2005b; see also Robinson, 2012). The general concept of teacher agency is based on an understanding that people manifest capacity for autonomous action during their processes of sense-making (e.g. Coburn, 2004).

However, a majority of empirical studies have more often been related with subjective agency (e.g. Hitlin & Johnson, 2015), although as a phenomenon, agency describes individuals and groups of individuals capable of making choices and acting on the choices they make in order to control their lives and environments (Goller & Paloniemi, 2017).

Goller and Paloniemi (2017) express their concern about various ontological understandings of the concept of agency; accordingly, in this study agency is perceived as something individuals and collectives do – drawing upon their shared social capital – as constructed and achieved in concrete settings and under specific conditions (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015; Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015; Biesta & Tedder, 2007). Agency in particular is conceived in this study as a temporal and relational phenomenon; it occurs temporally and in relations between agents in and through the environment within which they act (e.g. Biesta, Priesley, & Robinson, 2016; Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Teacher agency is constructed of each individuals' ideals of learning for and through work (Eteläpelto & Saarinen, 2006) and is maintained and enacted through intentional engagement, professional choices, decisions and taking stances that affect one's practices and professional satisfaction (Maclellan, 2017; Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). Teaching involves making decisions about learning tasks and content, materials, timing and so forth. Teachers make decisions, based on their experience, knowledge, and understandings, which they consider to be most appropriate in the situation. The ability to accurately assess and observe children, as part

of their practice, and gain the knowledge and insight of individual development, performance and learning outcomes is one of the key characteristics of a good teacher (e.g. Biesta, 2015; Ready & Wright, 2011; Südkamp, Kaiser, & Möller, 2014). The research on teacher judgement reveals that teachers draw on multiple sources of knowledge, evidence and subjectivity when making professional judgements or decisions (e.g. Cooksey, Freebody, & Wyatt-Smith, 2007; Davison, 2004; Givvin, Stipek, Salmon, & MacGyvers, 2001). There is evidence that teachers develop stereotypes about children's characteristics, and these expectations – inferences that teachers make about future behaviour or academic performance of children, based on what they know about them (Good, 1987, p. 32) – can affect teachers' perception and judgements (e.g. Hoge & Coladarci, 1989).

Related to teachers' actions and collegial relationships, Tirri and Husu (2002) found that early childhood educators and elementary teachers experienced ethical dilemmas within three relationship dimensions: (i) teacher-parent relationships included concerns about children's development and teachers' concerns related to neglect or parental duties; (ii) teacher-colleague relationships contained concerns about colleagues' interactions with children and with other colleagues; and (iii) teachers and the broader community had concerns related to differences in educational philosophy and cultural beliefs about the ways of behaving and interacting with children. These ethical dilemmas have led teachers to negotiate between private and public interests, where the children's needs gave them courage and strength to take a stand for children when making judgements. Thus, considerations of care and responsibilities regarding relationships were central when dealing with dilemmas within relationships (Tirri & Husu, 2002). However, it is worth noting that teachers without experiences of relational agency, that is, without engagement of dispositions of others, seeking or giving support, are less likely to promote children's agency in their teaching practices (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004). Also, educators' perceptions, expectations and behaviours interact with students' beliefs, behaviours, and work habits, and their behaviour might lead children to act consistently with the expectations (e.g. Brophy & Good, 1974; Ferguson, 2003; Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006).

The presence of the following features creates a group agent: "a formal institutional organization; an established decision-making procedure or cooperative scheme; and a certain relation that enables individuals to engage in group actions based on a common interest" (Moltchanova, 2011). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) assert that the essence of professionalism is the ability to make discretionary judgements in circumstances where there is no fixed rule or piece of incontrovertible evidence for teachers. Decisional capital is acquired through structured and unstructured experiences, practice and reflection, and enhanced by drawing on the insights and experiences of colleagues (pp. 93–94). Educators exercising decisional capital with collective responsibility are willingly disposed to transparency and openness

to feedback (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). They also argue that decisional capital is sharpened when it is mediated through interaction with colleagues (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Judgement in professional practices involves personal agency, but inter-professional collaborations call for the exercise of relational agency – a capacity both to expand the object of activity or task by recognising the motives and resources that others bring to bear so that the complexity of the object of activity or task is revealed and align one’s own responses to the newly enhanced interpretations with the responses being made by the other professionals (Edwards & Daniels, 2012, p. 24; Edwards, 2010, p. 14). According to Edwards (2010), a capacity for relational agency can be learned, and describes the two mediational processes as: (i) interpretation of the object of activity is mediated by the concepts that matter for each profession; and (ii) the mutual attunements are mediated by common knowledge (p. 66). While educators share expectations and insecurity in situations where clear evidence is lacking, they are able to construct collective sensemaking, making sense of what is going on (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010) and reflect preexisting beliefs, values, practices, past experiences and current knowledge (Coburn, 2006). Hargreaves and Fullan’s (2012) concept of decisional capital can be viewed as a form of collaborative agentic capability in engaging in and sustaining changes to educators’ everyday practice. The authors state, that high yield strategies become more precise and more embedded when developed and deployed in teams constantly refining and interpreting such strategies (p. 96). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that this accumulated collective experience carries more weight than idiosyncratic experience or little experience at all.

3 METHODOLOGICAL STANCE

In this section I contemplate the methodological approaches as underlining premises that affect the study. This study utilises various methodological choices that underline the specific nature of sub-studies. The methodology of qualitative research, or procedures, can be characterised as inductive, emerging and shaped by the researcher's experience in collecting and analyzing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018p. 21). In qualitative research the researcher's adoption of strategies and data collection methods is flexible. In fact, it is not a question of adopting one strategy over another; rather, several strategies and methods are often combined within a research design (Gray, 2009). Different types of methodologies are linked and the choice of which approaches or approaches to use is not made by a chance because each methodology is suitable only for a particular situation and is a prerequisite for the methodology of the subsequent stage (Kananen, 2013).

First, by explicating the ontological and epistemological premises, I further reconcile the bases of the paradigmatic assumptions and methodological approaches of the study. While the researcher's methodological choices guide the implementation, the writing of this section follows the steps made in this study by critically reflecting the researcher's own choices and procedures. The attempt in this section is to show how the methodological selections and analyses are related to the research questions. Figure 2 presents the overall convergence of the phases within the study.

3.1 The philosophical starting points

Philosophical perspectives are understandings of the world that define the nature of the world, the individual's place in it and relationships to that world. Research approaches are based in paradigms that make different kinds of assumptions of the social world and how science should be conducted (cf. Kuhn, 1996). For this reason, paradigms have been viewed as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry" (Guba, 1990, p. 17; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The selection of research methodology depends on the paradigm that guide the researcher's activity in the following categories: beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology); the theory of knowledge informing the research (epistemology); and how knowledge may be reached (methodology).

Epistemology, as a philosophical enterprise, is concerned with the origin, nature, methods and justification of human knowledge; from a psychological and educational perspective, the focus of concern is on how the individual develops conceptions of knowledge and utilises them in developing an understanding of the world (Hofer, 2002). Epistemology, as a theory of knowledge, is concerned with what is

considered to be acceptable knowledge in a particular discipline (Bryman, 2016, p. 24). In this context, the central issue is the question whether the social world can and should be studied according to the principles and procedures of the natural sciences. Following these points, we are confronted with two main epistemological positions/assumptions: 1) *positivism (objectivism)*, a position that affirms the importance of following the natural sciences, with an ontological assumption called *realism* – the assumption of a basic split between the knowing agent and the world – a position that takes the view that apprehendable reality exists independently of our representations of it. Its epistemological assumption is called *dualism*, a view that the researcher is capable of studying the object without influencing it or being influenced by it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994); and 2) *interpretivism/constructionism*, a position that reflects the distinctiveness of humans against the natural order (e.g. Bryman, 2016, p.26), with the ontological position called *relativism*, which takes the stance that reality is apprehendable in the form of multiple mental constructions that are socially and experientially based, and elements that are often shared among individuals (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). The interpretive epistemology assumption is one of *transactional* and *subjectivist* viewpoints, according to which the researcher and the object of study are assumed to be interactively linked, and the findings are “literally created” as the study proceeds (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 11). Besides these two main epistemological positions *pragmatism* finds its place between them arguing for absolute knowledge as a worthy, though presumably unreachable, goal. Pragmatists emphasise theories of meaning (what works), with the perception that a theory of meaning may not reflect reality, but to the extent that each can, it should (Driscoll, 2005, p. 13).

Ontology is defined as the study of the nature of being (Crotty, 1998, p. 10) or, more recently, a theory of the nature of social entities (Bryman, 2016). The central point of orientation of this branch of metaphysics concerns the question of whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities having reality external to the social actors (objectivism), or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of the social actors (Bryman, 2016, p. 28). Two ontological positions exist: *objectivism*, which implies that social phenomena confront social actors as external facts beyond their reach or influence; and *constructionism*, which implies that social reality is an ongoing accomplishment of social actors, and the social world and its categories are built up and constituted in and through interactions (Bryman, 2016).

The methodological engagements of the study

This study is based on the theoretical understandings of *social constructionist* principles guiding the epistemological and ontological understanding of the world and the choices made regarding the methods within which to probe the agentic knowledge of the social interactions, experiences and dialogue. As a point of view, constructiv-

ism has gained ground in the field of developmental and cognitive psychology since the 1960s. This theory proposes that individuals mentally construct the experienced world through cognitive processes. It differs from logical positivism in its view that the world is a construction of the mind and cannot be known directly, truth is not absolute and statements should be viewed with reasonable doubt (e.g. Crotty, 1998; Fosnot, 1996; Schunk, 2016). Constructivism shares with social cognitive theory the assumption that persons, behaviours, and environments interact in triadic reciprocal causation (Schunk, 2016). Bandura (1997), however, claims that even if “the self is socially constituted, individuals are partial contributors to what they become and do” (p. 6). Several other academics (e.g. Prawat & Floden, 1994; Burr, 1995; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Terhart, 2003; Driscoll, 2005; Harré, 2010) have established a large range of positions for constructivism (e.g. cognitive, contextual, critical, dialectical, personal, social and Piagetian, just to name a few). In acknowledgement of this fact, my interest is to clarify the approach of the study and its theoretical orientation of social constructionism. The term constructivism tends to be used in relation to individual constructions of reality, which differ from social constructionism, which maintains that meaning and understandings arise from the interactions between people. In order to explicate the standpoints of this study a diagram of the two variants is, illustrating the central position of constructivism: the *individual* and *social* construction of knowledge. According to Brown (2009), these two positions do make epistemological claims. The two positions are represented within two axes (dimension between *objectivist* and *relativist* positions) constituting four quadrants that illustrate as a scheme the varying, pluralistic perspectives of the “constructivist family” (Figure 1).

As Brown (2009, p. 10) argued, the main point of Figure 1 is to situate the use of the term constructivism in an educational context, and display its range from weak to strong constructivism or between moderate to radical (Hess, 1997). Moderate constructivism maintains that “scientific theories are realistic maps or explanations of a real world”, while in contrast, radical constructivism believes that “scientists do not discover the world but impose a structure on it or in some sense ‘make’ the world” (Hess, 1997, p. 35). In other words, moderate constructivism is convergent with realism and radical constructivism is a form of antirealism. The constructivist position, known as *radical constructivism*, articulated for example by von Glasersfeld (von Glasersfeld, 1984, 1995) and Confrey (1990), rejected the transmission-of-knowledge model of learning and teaching and asserted that all knowledge is a cognitive construction of the individual; consequently, radical constructivists reject the realist assumption that the world can be known in any objective way. Due to its strict individualistic outlook, constructivism is generally considered to share positivism’s assumption of a dualist epistemology and ontology. However, certain researchers (e.g. Resnick, 1987; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Greeno, 1989; O’Loughlin, 1992,

Social	
<p><i>Social-Objectivist perspective</i></p> <p>Focuses on the social interactions in the classroom. Tends not to problematise scientific knowledge, but instead views it as ‘consensual social construct into which students are to be socialized’ (e.g. Vygotsky).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Objectivist</p> <p><i>Personal-Objectivist perspective</i></p> <p>More concerned with science education than epistemology, and tends to take scientific knowledge as given. Focuses on the learning of the individual, though social groups are considered important to the learning process. Acknowledges a debt to Piaget (e.g. Driver).</p>	<p><i>Social-Relativist perspective</i></p> <p>Views learning as created in societies or discourse communities, not by individuals or within the real world (e.g. Gergen). Emphasis on the subjectivity of the learner and the socially and historically situated and collaborative nature of knowing and learning (e.g. O’Loughlin).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Relativist</p> <p><i>Personal-Relativist perspective</i></p> <p>Places individual cognition in a central position, while acknowledging social interaction. However, learning is viewed as ‘an individual construction of others’ (e.g. von Glasersfeld).</p>
Personal	

Figure 1. Scheme for organizing the many forms of constructivism (Brown, 2009 originating from Geelan, 1997, pp. 20–22).

1993; see also Mandl, Gruber, & Renkel, 1996) have questioned both this approach and Piagetian cognitivism, arguing that learning should be considered more as an interaction between an individual and social situations. According to this situated perspective knowledge is intertwined with the context and social situations and learning is a complex social process (e.g. Cobb & Bowers, 1999; Brown & Duguid, 2001, p. 200) within which students as learners are seen as participants in cultural practices (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991; Cobb, 1990). While the radical constructivists emphasised the role of the learner’s mental activities, the researchers with a situated perspective stressed authentic activity and apprenticeship as vehicles for learning and professional development (e.g. Brown et al., 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Within the situative perspective, analysis can focus on different levels: on the individual (conceptualised as an embodied, social, tool-using agent), on a group of agents, on the artefacts of the context of an activity or on combination of these (Nersessian, 2005).

Social-relativist perspective/ “strong” constructionism (e.g. Gergen, 1994, 2015; Schwand, 2000, pp. 198–200) maintains the premise that language is embedded in social practices and knowledge and activity are intimately related, because knowledge emerges as a product of activity and purpose (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Instead of viewing language and though separate phenomena, they are seen as inseparable so that our selves become the product of language (Burr, 1995). Put simply, “social construction places the origin in social process” (Gergen, 2015, p.

30), that is, the existing world is constructed only through discourse, and words have meaning only when used in a particular context. Social constructionism doesn't maintain the idea of correspondence between representation and reality. Thus, within the constructionist tradition, the analysis of discursive practices is the cornerstone of a constructionist methodology (e.g. Osbeck, 1993). Additionally, social construction has abandoned the level of the individual and moved to the social level in its inquiries. Osbeck (1993) noted that a less extreme (weak) version of social constructionism could maintain an alternative epistemology, within which the basic concern is the rejection of relativist morality and in this way (i) enhance the pragmatic standards of usefulness to society and, (ii) generate a view of discourse as sustaining the dignity of the individual. Related to epistemology, Sayer (2000) accepted, as a realist, the weak form of social constructionism, noting that "of course knowledge and social phenomena are constructed; but that doesn't mean external phenomena (including existing material social constructions) cannot influence our interpretations" (p 91).

As stated before, this study is based on the tradition of social constructionist principles, but I stand for the weak form of social constructionism. My epistemological understanding is closer to pragmatism, emphasising the knowledge that is negotiated. However, as Guignon (1991) states, despite the fact that our practices preshape how things show up in our lives, we are nevertheless dependent on the contexts, i.e., the world, around us in order to be practical agents. Therefore, the methodological position of the study is relativist, acknowledging that social wholes are more than the sum of the individual parts, although with the view that the basic components of social wholes, such as groups and societies, are individuals (e.g. Ritzer & Gindorf, 1992). I also understand that reality exists in the objective world irrespectively of human perceptions, and by this understanding, I dismiss the ontological relativistic perception. The first basic thesis of social constructivists – individuals have such psychological skills as remembering and deciding and social propensities such as a tendency to organise our identities in a certain way – acknowledges the appropriation and privatisation by individuals from patterns of social interactions (Harré, 2010). This stance has affected my understanding related to the question of dualism. In response, I have studied early childhood educators, their shared practices and cultural experiences perceiving these phenomena as a reality constructed within the objective world. I have also come to understand their shared knowledge as a construction in their contextual environments, derived also from the unique history and relations in their practices. From teachers' storylines, accounts and dialogue, as a researcher I am constructing a one-of-a-kind representation and (pragmatist) interpretation of early childhood educators' shared professional learning and development. Related to the overall goal of the study – to understand the complex nature of educators' daily practices by which they construct their shared professional learning and development – this study was guided by interpretative practice, " a particular variant of

constructionist inquiry” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p. 342). In order to understand and interpret the socially shared and negotiated “reality” of the study, the enterprise was an ongoing process of interplay between myself as a researcher, the goal of the study and objects, keeping in mind that interpretative research is a search for local meanings (Erikson, 1986; Schwand, 1994; Hatch, 2002).

The interpretivist framework of inquiry supports the ontological assumption of multiple realities that are constructed locally and can be altered by the individual (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Guba and Lincoln (1998) have argued that constructivism adopts a hermeneutic, dialectical methodology, meaning that individual constructions can both be elicited and refined only through interaction between the researcher and actor(s). Academics (e.g. Packer, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) have viewed the researcher, interpreter and the participants as interactively linked in relation to the creation of the findings. This view maintains that constructivism adopts a transactional and subjectivist epistemology (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Using the kind of general guidelines given above, the interpretive researcher attempts to interpret or rather understand the process through which shared multiple realities emerge, are sustained and changed. Consequently, a researcher constructs a reading of these meanings, in this way offering the researcher’s construction of the constructions of the actors in the resulting study (Schwandt, 1998). The problem of the opposition of subjectivity and objectivity can be faced and overcome by accepting the hermeneutical character of existence (Schwandt, 1994, 2000). The interpretivist way of understanding utilised in this study was informed by the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer (2004). This is in opposition to interpretivist traditions, in which the interpreter remains unaffected by and external to the interpretive process. Also in the philosophical hermeneutics tradition, “sociohistorically inherited bias or prejudice is not regarded as a characteristic or attribute that an interpreter must strive to get rid of or manage in order to come to a ‘clear’ understanding” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 194). Philosophical hermeneutics maintains that human’s understandings are able to change if there is openness and sensitivity to other kind of interpretations (Gadamer, 2004; van Manen, 1997). Central to hermeneutic understanding is the notion of a hermeneutic circle, which signifies a methodological process of understanding or coming to understand the meaning of the whole of a text and coming to understand its parts: constructing meaning of the whole means making sense of the parts, and grasping the meaning of the parts depends on having some sense of the whole (Schwandt, 2001, p. 112; Crotty, 1998). Every interpretation relies on other interpretations (Schwandt, 2001).

According to Davey (2006), philosophical hermeneutics means a reflective practice, therefore it is not about the practice of analysing text per se but a way of inducing interpretative interactions that both expose to the unusual and place the assumptions of customary horizons at risk. Steinsholt and Traasdahl (2002) argue that, for Gadamer,

the task of hermeneutics is not to develop rules for what understanding is, but rather to serve as an instrument that clarifies the basis of understanding. A context-bound understanding and interpretation is not detrimental as long as the interpreter remains open to differences between one's understandings and that of others (Hoy, 1991). Schwandt (2000) notes that philosophical hermeneutics endorse the conclusion that there is never a finally correct interpretation, only negotiated comings to terms. Phenomenological research is descriptive, focusing on the experientially acquired wisdom (*paideia*) and acknowledging that, what is learned from experience extends beyond the restrictions of formalised methods (Davey, 2006). It also tends to elucidate these experiences as they appear in one's consciousness, thereby revealing the invisible (Polkinghorne, 1983; Kvale, 1996).

In this study, the philosophical hermeneutic tradition offered a methodological approach, a way to inquire about the practical knowledge of the educators. Through the process of the study, I processed my own pre-understandings, beliefs and attitudes in order to be able to be reflexive and open-minded to the idea of otherness (Hoy, 1991; Gadamer, 2004) when engaging with dialogue and interpreting the data. To begin with, I did find Gadamer's notion of prejudice (true or false) to be perplexing, though fruitful: being aware of one's own prejudices offered a way to be sensitive regarding the tensions of different kinds of understandings and meanings (Gadamer, 2004; see also Shusterman, 1991; Marshall, 2004; Crotty, 1998). In particular, it is confusing to grasp the meaning of the professional responsibility and how they approached the dilemmatic nature of the concept. There were underlying tensions between the teachers' practices and pedagogical responsibilities. During the research process, it was necessary to clarify the complex concepts and analyse their relatedness and contents, that is, how the shared constructed the learning of educators through three different studies. Hence, the methodological choices of this study are linked with the hermeneutic circle, each study lead the way to ask different questions with specific procedures. Figure 2 illustrates the hermeneutic circle and the process of the study.

3.2 The interpretive methods of the study

Interpretation is the act of clarifying, explicating or explaining the meaning of some phenomenon, whereas the terms *interpretivism*, interpretive social science, and the *interpretive turn* indicate an essential difference between the natural sciences and human sciences (Schwandt, 2001, 2007). Schwandt (2001) points out that the term interpretivism means approaches to studying social life that recognise understanding as a method of human sciences that assumes that the meaning of human action is inherent, and that the task of the researcher is to grasp that meaning (p. 134). Thus, a central goal of interpretive inquiry is to understand human mean-

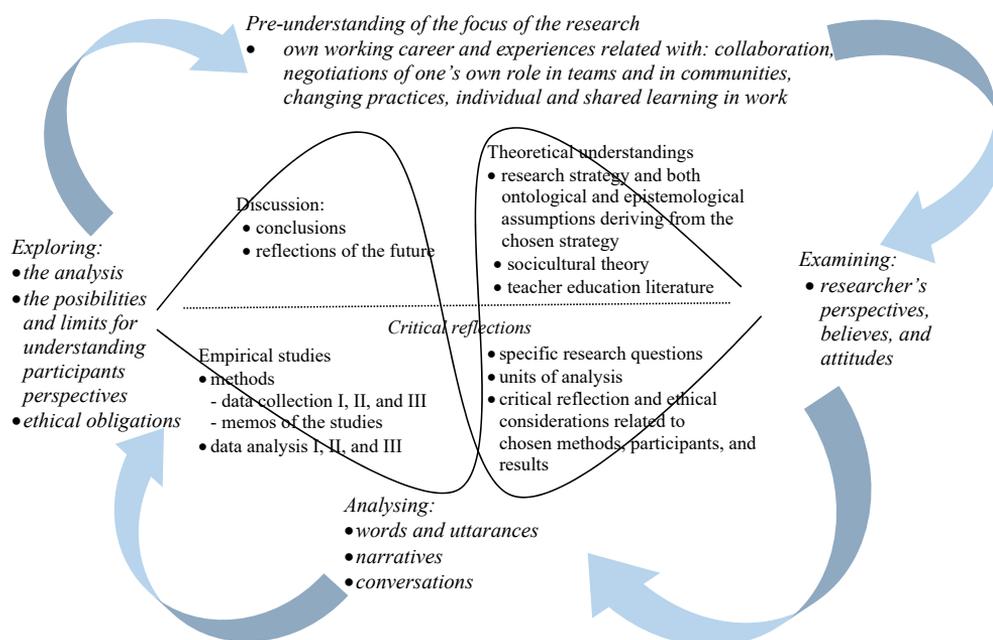


Figure 2. The hermeneutic circle and analytic process of conducting the study.

ing making and be attuned to the insight that meaning making comprises a recognition of, and sensitivity to, the ambiguities of human experiences (Schwartz-Shea, 2006). From an interpretivist perspective human understandings need to be comprehended as “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Interpretative research methods have contributed substantially to the knowledge base of teacher education (e.g. Borko, Whitcomb, & Byrnes, 2008).

Reality construction is practical activity and interpretive practice is the work of everyday life: “interpretative practice conveys both the artful and substantive aspects of this process”, referring to the whole of procedures, conditions and resources through which reality is grasped, understood, organised and represented (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p. 114). Social researchers do not stand aside from the human course of life adhering to ideas of objectivity, but instead are practitioners of the practical and moral acts that humans do while constituting the meaning of their lives (Richardson & Fowers, 2010). The hermeneutics tradition, originating from Dilthey and Weber, strongly takes the view that human action calls for interpretation because actions (including speech acts) are meaningful, and their identity and significance as actions can be made visible only by uncovering and clarifying the meaning expressed by or through those actions (Rouse, 1991). This also resonates with Denzin and Lincoln’s (2011) perspective of that qualitative research “consists of a set of interpretive practices that make the world visible” (p. 3). They also note that researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected practices striving to get a better understanding of the

phenomenon, while each practice makes the world visible in a different way (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Interpretation, as a process, is a creative enterprise by which meaning is connected to data (Brewer, 2003). According to Schwandt (2001), in hermeneutics, interpretation (understanding meaning) is a process of dialogue and listening, and in this process the meaning of a text, speech or action is revealed as it “speaks” to the interpreter situated in her or his own tradition and cultural horizon (p. 154).

Polkinghorne (1983) argues that Gadamer was not opposed to the use of methods in order to increase understanding and overcome limited perspectives; his concern was not to develop a method for the human sciences but instead he wanted to clarify the conditions under which all understanding occurs (pp. 225-228). “Gadamer maintained that no method can lead to a complete transcendence of the observer’s [interpreter’s] own understanding, and therefore an absolute truth cannot be achieved through methods” (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 228). Hermeneutics does not involve a specific guiding method but is an explication of general principles for interpretation of the text (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). In other words, interpretive social inquiry has no certain, particular program or defined procedures – it can take a number of different forms (Richardson, 2015). Hatch’s (2002) notion about constructivist researchers often adapting data analysis procedures developed by postpositivists—research and researchers as opposed to positivist epistemologies – because they share an interest in uncovering “reality” or rather realities constructed by social participants mirrors the base of the decisions made in this study. Roller and Lavrakas (2015), drawing from Krippendorff (2013), argue that qualitative researchers go back and forth with the content in order to gain a better understanding of each piece of evidence as well as its relationship to the entire context from which it was chosen, and in this way puts the analyst in a hermeneutic circle by reformulating interpretations based on new insights.

In this study a variety of interpretive practices were deployed in order to make visible the acts and beliefs of the practitioners constituting the meaning of their professional lives. Within the broad hermeneutic tradition, in order to see the patterns or phenomenon that give meaning to the text, content and thematic analysis were employed. The following sections explicate the methods in greater detail.

Content analysis and thematic analysis

Content analysis is the name for a variety of ways of textual analysis involving measures such as comparing, contrasting and categorising a corpus of data (e.g. Schwandt, 2001, 2007), which allows the researcher to test theoretical issues in order to enhance the understanding of the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The aim of the analysis is to obtain a reduced, though broad, description of the studied phenomenon through the categories or concepts describing and identifying core consistencies

and meanings; in general, the objective of categories or concepts is to construct a conceptual map (Patton, 2015; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Broadly speaking, content analysis refers to qualitative data reduction and sense-making (Patton, 2015). At the same time, it is both a qualitative and a quantitative method for conducting research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Schreier, 2014; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015), and can be used in an inductive or deductive way (Mayring, 2000; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Elo et al., 2014).

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) in particular is a method for describing the characteristics of language/text of communication in a systematic way (Schreier, 2012, 2014; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Patton, 2015). Qualitative research [and QCA] has been depicted as interpretive in three respects: 1) it is concerned with understanding non-standardised phenomena that require some degree of interpretation; 2) it is often concerned with personal or social meanings; and 3) acknowledges that different interpretations out of the same material may be equally valid. In this last respect, QCA differs from other qualitative methods because, by categorising the data, the researcher has to decide one meaning is mutually exclusive in regard to other categories and subcategories (Schreier, 2012). The particular type of approach of content analysis as chosen varies according to the aims of the study and the nature of the phenomenon being studied (Elo et al., 2014). The distinction of the approaches has been based primarily on the diverse ways the categories or concepts are derived from the text: inductively or deductively.

In *inductive or conventional content analysis* (Hsieh & Sannon, 2005), categories are derived directly and inductively from the data. In other words, new concepts, explanations, results and/or theories are generated from the data, since inductive thinking moves from the particular to the general: understanding is generated by starting with specific details while finding connections among them (Hatch, 2002). Elo et al. (2014) insist that the processes of both inductive and deductive content analysis involve three main phases: preparation, organisation and reporting of results. In their view: inductive analysis consists of open coding, creating categories and abstraction (Elo et al., 2014). Roller and Lavrakas (2015) argue that the act of analysis consists of two distinct data phases: (i) *data generation*, meaning the content selected for study is coded as producing the data; and (ii) *data analysis*, involving the categorisation and interpretation of the data. In QCA, the analysis method also can be divided into a series of smaller steps (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015; Shreier, 2014). The first phase of data generation (coding) includes examining content, determining the unit of analysis, developing unique codes, conducting the preliminary coding and choosing the code content. The second phase of data analysis (categorisation/interpretation) includes identifying categories across codes, identifying themes/patterns across categories and drawing interpretations and implications (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 235).

In *deductive or directed content analysis* (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), the researcher begins with an a priori choice of a specific question and then examines the data to find answers (Mayring, 2000; Patton, 2015; Roller & Lavras, 2015). Furthermore, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) argue that the suitable use of deductive content analysis occurs when “prior research exists about the phenomenon that is incomplete or would benefit from further description” (p. 1281). According to the authors, the goal of this approach is to validate or extend, through the outcomes of the study, a theoretical framework or theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In the deductive approach the organisation phase includes categorisation, whereby category application proceeds with previously formulated, theory-driven aspects, and the data are coded in correspondence with existing categories (Mayring, 2000; Elo et al., 2014). And although Elo and Kyngäs (2008) note that either a structured or unconstrained matrix of analysis can be used, “when using unconstrained matrix, different categories are created within its bounds, following the principles of inductive content analysis” (p. 111). This view has been explicated by Patton (2015), who note that in some cases qualitative analysis is first deductive or quasi-deductive and then inductive, depending on whether the researcher first examines the data with theory-driven concepts or applies a theoretical framework that is developed by someone else (Patton, 2015; see also Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Patton (2015) notes, that after or along the deductive phase of analysis, the researcher makes an effort to examine the data afresh in order to find undiscovered patterns and any emergent understanding (inductive analysis).

Thematic analysis (TA) is defined as a method for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) across qualitative data. However, Clarke and Braun (2014) also note that as a method, it involves not only reporting about the data but telling (interpreting) a story in relation to the research question. Despite the fact that TA is a popular and not a novel approach to qualitative data analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012), there appears to be a lack of understanding among qualitative researchers of a theme as well as a lack of a clear line between qualitative content and thematic analysis (Sandelowski & Leeman, 2012). Indeed, it is only infrequently explicitly claimed as the method used in a study in the same way that other methods are named (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and it has been used as a method without a guiding reference or claim of some other approaches. Instead it is sometimes included in the mix in order to argue that TA was used as a part analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Regardless of these shortcomings, it is an accessible, flexible and popular method, and “through focusing on meaning across a dataset TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57).

As an iterative process, TA requires more involvement and interpretation because it moves beyond counting words and focuses on identifying and describing ideas and themes within the data (Guest et al., 2012). In TA, a theme can be drawn

from existing theory (deductive coding) or from the data itself (inductive coding). Marks and Yardley (2004), however, note that codes need to be drawn from the principles that underpin the research, and the specific questions one seeks answers to. A theme – a broader pattern – represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set, and is typically broader than a code: a code captures one idea, while a theme has a central organising concept, but at the same time contains many diverse ideas or aspects attached to that concept (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Theme development requires looking actively for broader patterns of meaning across the coded data (e.g. similarity and overlap between codes). The data can be organised into a theme by raising a large or complex code to a theme (referred to as *subsumption* by Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), or by clustering similar codes (Clarke & Braun, 2014). A pattern can be viewed as referring to a descriptive finding, while a theme subsumes a more categorical or topical form and is a term that connotes and interprets the implications of the pattern (e.g. Patton, 2015). Put another way, a theme is something that is directly observable (Marks & Yardley, 2004). Having said that, in thematic analysis themes are generally abstract and may be difficult to identify. Moreover, the importance of a theme does not necessarily require quantification, but it is essential that it reveals something important related to the overall research question (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Connor, 2003). A common method for describing themes is the presentation of direct quotes from participants, as well as using tables to summarise the data among rows and columns as multiple dimensions and filled with verbatim quotes, summary statements or symbols (Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

Coding begins when the researcher has gotten acquainted with the data, at which point, codes can identify a feature of the data as interesting: codes either summarise the surface meaning (semantic codes) or delve deeper into the data in order to identify hidden meanings (latent codes), such as beliefs that underpin the semantic content (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Clarke & Braun, 2014). Coding can be done in large or small chunks, and some parts of the data won't be coded at all (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012) have explicated the phases of analysis, consisting of six successive steps: from becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and ending ultimately with producing the report. They also note that the phases of analysis involve analytic working, continuous refining and reviewing in relation to the research question and between the data, codes and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The procedures and principles of TA share similarities with other approaches using pattern-based qualitative analytic methods, but, as Clarke and Braun (2014) mention, TA is not tied to a specific theoretical framework, and it offers just a method, rather than a methodology, for qualitative research (p. 6628). Due to its flexibility, it can be used with a wide variety of re-

search questions, varying from experiences to the construction of social processes and almost any type of qualitative data. Furthermore, since it is not tied to a particular theoretical or epistemological framework, it is flexible in how it can be used to analyse and theorise data (Clarke & Braun, 2014).

3.3 Participants and contexts

The participants of these three studies were recruited with the permission of the management of early childhood municipalities in a small urban city of Southwestern Finland during the period of spring 2014 to spring 2016. Table 3 provides an overview of the participants, contexts, data sources, and analysis.

Table 3. Participants, Contexts, Data Sources, Analysis used and the Design of the studies.

Study	Participants	Context	Data sources	Qualitative analysis	Study Design
Study I	2 kindergarten teachers	preschool groups with 2 colleagues	STR-interviews	Content analysis	Case study
Study II	2 kindergarten teachers	long working experience in diverse early childhood environments	In-depth semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis	Narrative inquiry
Study III	9 early childhood educators	3 teams in three day care centres	STR-interviews	Thematic analysis	Action research

Study I

The participants were two kindergarten teachers, who worked in different day care centres. In that year the teachers worked within a child group consisting of preschoolers. Each group contained twenty children, ranging in age from six to seven years. The teachers also had two close colleagues working in the same team on a daily basis, that is, in both groups there were one trained nurse and one kindergarten teacher working together with the participating teachers. The broader day care centre as a community was included as an element of teachers' working contexts, although the video recordings were done mostly in their own teams, during their daily teaching and practices. The stimulated recall-interviews (STR) also took place in the working context. The teachers of this study participated voluntarily and the parents of the children gave their written consent while the colleagues of the teachers gave their oral consents. Also, while the focus of this study was on the participating teachers, their professional practices and judgements, the teachers' situated teaching included collaboration, dialogue and negotiation with colleagues and interaction with children during their daily practices.

Study II

The participants in the Study II were the same kindergarten teachers who participated in the Study I. Because of the primary goal of this study – to understand teachers' experiences and knowing about their shared professional identity construction with their colleagues within their contexts – the narrative approach was utilised. Due to the goal of the study, I sought out kindergarten teachers with long working experience in the early childhood field, thus, they had an extensive experience of working in multiprofessional teams. Each of the voluntarily participating teachers was still in her working life in the separate day care centres, and did not know about each other. One teacher, Maija (pseudonym), is in her late 50s, with a long working experience, of almost 40 years. As a vocational background, Maija has two years of college-level kindergarten teacher education. At the time of the study, she was working with children from three to five years old. In her workplace, they rotated their work so that teachers had opportunities in every two or three years to work with children under 5 years or with preschoolers, 6 year olds. At the time of the study, due to the small size of the children's group (14 children), Maija's team consisted of one nursery nurse. In Maija's workplace, they have chosen to set smaller child groups concerning the age group of children three to five years, and this affects the professional content of the team members. When working as a preschool teacher, the normal professional content of the team, the number of colleagues, within the group of 22–24 preschoolers, would be two kindergarten teachers and one nursery nurse. In the day care centre, where she worked, she and her colleagues had worked together for a long time. Hence, the shared routine practices were familiar to them. In once a week they were also used to plan together their teaching practices for a following week in their own team meetings. Anna (pseudonym), the other participating teacher of the study, is in her late forties, with working experience of more than 20 years. Anna's vocational background differed from Maija's; she had former schooling as a nurse and after some years' working experience, she studied for three years in university to be a kindergarten teacher. Anna is working as a preschool teacher with six-year-old children. At the time of the study, her team consisted of one nursery nurse, due to the small child group (14 children). Normally, Anna works with two other colleagues (another kindergarten teacher and nursery nurse), but the professional content of the team members may change due to the number of children per year. In Anna's workplace there is another preschool group. However, most of the planning was done in their own team meetings. Although they are used to collaborating on more a practical matters, such as staggering the working hours and negotiating about the acquisitions of materials or shared annual events for children and families, in the work places of Maija and Anne, there were no organised, collective teacher groups for professional learning goals.

Study III

The participants in this study were nine early childhood educators from three different day care centres. In response to the primary goal of the study – to understand and study the negotiated phenomenon of shared professional agency within ECE teams – the participatory action research approach was utilised. The three teams participated voluntarily. The teams differed when comprising their educational background consistency: Team I had two kindergarten teachers and one nursery nurse; Team II had two nursery nurses and one kindergarten teacher; and Team III had one nursery nurse, one kindergarten teacher and one early childhood special education teacher. Also, the working experience in the field of ECE varied among the teams: Team I had both the shortest ECE working experience and shared team-work experience (in the same team), one had two months shared team-work experience while the other two shared two years. In Team II, the working experience of ECE varied from twenty years to eight years, and their shared working experience varied from six years to three months. Team III had the longest working experience in the ECE field, and they had equal amounts of shared team-work experience, namely one year.

The Finnish early childhood education and care context

ECEC, pre-primary and basic education form an integrated whole that supports and consistently follows the child's development. Equal access to high-quality education is one of the basic principles of Finnish education: "the same educational opportunities should be available to all of its citizens despite of wealth, age, ethnic origin or where they live" (Ministry of Education and Culture & National Agency for Education, 2017, p. 6). Finnish early childhood education and care has maintained the idea of the subjective right to day-care for all children since 1996. However, under recent government this subjective right has been limited by giving municipalities the power to decide whether they want to restrict the subjective right of the child to 20 hours per week in case one of the parents in the family is unemployed, although not all municipalities have used this power. Participation in ECEC is subject to a fee depending on family income and the number of siblings. In the Finnish ECEC context primary education begins during the year a child turns seven years old. The concept "preschool" as pre-primary education in the Finnish ECEC model means the preceding year before a child enters primary education. The National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (2014) supports and directs the organisation of pre-primary education while promoting the implementation. The mandatory pre-primary-education for six-year-olds (400 hours per year) is free of charge (Basic Education Act, 628/1998). In the Finnish ECEC model, the workforce is integrated and multiprofessional, and the minimum standards for staff qualifications are regulated by law: one third of the staff must have a tertiary education (bachelor of education, master of education, bachelor of social sciences)

and two thirds of staff members (nursery nurses) have to hold a secondary-level education with a social welfare and healthcare training background (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 36/1973; Act on Qualification Requirement for Social Welfare Professionals 272/2005; Law on Qualification Requirement for Social Welfare Professionals 2005/272). As child-staff ratio, regulated by law, one staff member (nursery nurse or kindergarten teacher) is required for every four children under three, and one staff member, nurse or kindergarten teacher, for the maximum of eight children over three years old. The National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2016), guides ECEC for under six-year-olds and steers and promotes the provision, implementation and development of ECEC. Both curricula are mandatory, providing also a basis for municipalities to produce their own local curricula. The day care units may write their own specific curricula though complementing the local ones. In addition to following the national and local level curricula, the staff in ECEC units are obliged to produce individual ECEC plans for children according to the principles outlined by municipalities.

3.4 Data collection and analysis

Qualitative analysis involves activities of two kinds: first, the researcher has to develop an awareness of the nature of the data that is being examined and the ways it could be described and eventually interpreted; second, the researcher has to examine the practical options that can assist both in the phases of organisation and analysing the data. In sub-section 3.2, the interpretative methods as choices of the theoretical and methodological approaches of analysis of the study have been characterised and delineated. Accordingly, in this following section the practical options related to the data collection and implementation of analysis of the sub-studies will be presented in relation to the particular research method used in the studies. In Study I, the method used was case-study research with the data analysed using qualitative content analysis (e.g. Morgan, 1993; Mayring, 2000; Patton, 2015; Roller & Lavras, 2015) with a deductive coding scheme (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). For Study II, the research method was narrative inquiry, and in Study III, the method was participatory action research. These two studies implemented the resulting studies, for which the data were analysed by a qualitative thematic approach (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006, 2012, 2013; Clarke & Braun, 2014; Creswell, 2018).

3.4.1 Case study approach

Due to the systematic nature of the research process, we can know more about the studied phenomena than we did before, and due to the key concern of the interpretivist approach to understand a specific phenomenon from the participants' per-

spectives – termed the *emic* perspectives – qualitative case studies share with other forms of qualitative research the search for understanding and meaning (Merriam, 2014). Unfortunately, among researchers, there is no specific shared definition of a case study (Simons, 2009). Rather, case studies are variously describe as a research method, design, strategy or data collection method (Anthony & Jack, 2009; Merriam, 2014), and the in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system (Merriam, 2014). Related to the concept of a *bounded system*, Merriam (2014) suggests to view the case as a unit that the researcher can fence in; that could be an individual, a program, a group, an institution, a community or a particular policy. As a research method, the case study has been chosen in varying situations in order to promote and increase the knowledge of individual, group, organisational, social, political and related phenomena, and it has been a common research method also in education (Yin, 2014).

Study I draws from Stake’s definition that “case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. xi). Yin (2014) also emphasises the empirical nature and aim of the inquiry as an in-depth investigation within its real world context, and at the same time underlines that the boundaries between the case and context may not be clearly evident (p. 16). By the use of qualitative methods, a case study can document various perspectives of the participants and stakeholders while engaging them in the process of evaluation and can represent diverse interests and values (Simons, 2009). However, a case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of the researcher about what is to be studied (Stake, 1994, 2008). Related to researchers’ various purposes for studying cases, several researchers have specified the characteristics of the case studies. Drawing on Yin (2014) the Study I can be characterized as *descriptive*; on Robson (2002), as a *set of individual case studies*; and on Stake (1994) as *instrumental* (the case is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory).

In case studies, *the data collection phase* ranges from the unstructured to the structured and can include interviews (structured or unstructured), while data formation can range from narrative to the numeric, including field notes (Sturman, 1999). Related to data collection procedures, sampling as bounding the collection of data involves decisions about the settings (where); the participants or actors (who); the events (what); and the process (the evolving nature of events) (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In the Study I, bounding the collection was done by setting the boundaries: where, as within preschool settings; who, as participants with the same number of colleagues and children; what, as events jointly decided by videotaped daily practices with participants (the researcher decided the number of videos beforehand); the process as following by video recording the participants working in her context. The main frame of the sampling of the study was planned

beforehand in order to assure and to consider a *homogenous* sampling regarding the settings and *theory driven aspects* – such as negotiations between colleagues (e.g., Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In Study I, the data collection consisted of two phases: (i) the daily teaching practices (in-teaching and out-of-teaching situations) occurring in the context between the participants, their colleagues and children were videotaped; and (ii) the videotaped daily practices were the basis of stimulated recall interviews (STR) (Lyle, 2003; Newhouse, Lane, & Brown, 2007; Vesterinen, Toom, Patrikainen, 2010) that were conducted the day after the recorded interaction. The use of Stimulated Recall Interview (STR) inquiry has been viewed as a way to provide opportunities for teachers to observe and reflect on the complexity of the work (e.g. Newhouse et al., 2007) by presenting authentic stimuli, while the researcher seeks to respond to their thoughts concerning the original situation (Vesterinen et al., 2010). As Vesterinen et al. (2010) note, it is normal to use STR in qualitative research for the aim of describing and understanding the phenomenon being studied in a particular context. Before the participant was interviewed, she watched the video by herself, paying attention to knowledge sharing ways and situations in her social interaction. Following the day of the videotaped situation, the STR-interview was done, and it was agreed that both the participant and the researcher could stop the video for reflection or questioning what had happened in the viewed situation. The STR-interviews took place on the teachers' work places, and, in general, each interview lasted one hour. Both teachers were asked to write down their ideas notions and questions by specifying the time in the video. This procedure was done in order to both ensure the accuracy of their memory and to support their opportunities to reflect on their practices before and during the interview. The teachers gave these written documents to researcher. In these interviews, the typical questions of the researcher included “what were you thinking about during that situation?”, “What do you think is happening here?”, “What were you thinking about when you decided to do this?”, “Can you tell more about your action/decision?” The purpose of the researcher's assorted questions was to enhance the teachers' reflection in order to better understand the participants' thought processes. The goal of these kinds of inquiries in this study was the need to understand how educational practices were interpreted by the participants and how these interpretations interacted with or influenced the individual's beliefs about what knowledge is and how one comes to know (e.g. Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; Hofer, 2004a, 2004b). The videotaped material consisted of twenty recorded units, constituting a videotaped material (in-teaching and out-of-teaching situations) of 8h and 46 min, and from STR-interviews, a total of 9h 10min.

The data analysis of Study I began while writing transcripts of the STR-interviews. A coding scheme – a list of code names to be applied – can be developed by looking through the early data in order to identify the main patterns/themes

and how they will be labelled (i.e., the code) (Green & Thorogood, 2004). Or, like in this study, a deductive approach for the analysis (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1994; Neuendorf, 2002; Patton, 2015; Riazi, 2016), known also as *directed content analysis* (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) can be chosen. This means that the theoretical background related to the research topic, including theories of learning, collaboration (e.g. Eteläpelto & Lahti, 2008; Wood & Bennet, 2000) and teacher knowledge (e.g. Elbaz, 1983; Conway & Clark, 2003), was used as a broad, deductively determined coding frame (e.g. Benaquisto, 2012). In this particular phase of analysis it was useful to combine deductive and inductive coding, because the inductive coding allowed the researcher to explore the phenomenon in grater detail (e.g., Rivas, 2012). The analysis of Study I was conducted in two phases: (i) a directed approach was utilised, in which the broad categories of shared professional knowledge were identified as a loose coding frame with inductively emerging patterns; and (ii) the STR-interview data were analysed also in terms of in-teaching and out-of-teaching situations. In this study the *summative approach* (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) was utilised with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of the content; counting the frequencies of the codes is a typical procedure to see more clearly what is in the data (Morgan, 1993). In particular, the summative approach was helpful in identifying the differences related to contextual variation and transformation.

Analysis was initiated by searching for meaningful units and coding them. Using theme as a coding unit, I looked for the expression or idea (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1990), so the size of the chunk varied from a phrase to a paragraph. For example, expressions such as emotions, personal characteristics, professional values and working manners were identified. These chunks of the data were first coded with colour and marked with the time shown in the videod material, and then sorted as the preliminary themes. In and through this coding phase, the inductive interpretation of the core content was of vital importance, specifically related to the finding of sub-categories. Despite the fact that qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to determine a unit of text among several categories simultaneously (e.g. Tesch, 1990), in this study, the unit of text was assigned only to a particular category. This figuring out of *convergence* – which issues fit together – was done for the following reasons: a) viewing the internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity of the categories as important parts of the analysis (Patton, 2015); and b) multiple procedures of the analysis (categorisation as directed approach, analysis in terms of in-teaching and out-of-teaching situations and summative approach). After the data were coded, the overall consistency of the coding was checked several times going back and forth before grouping codes to categories; during this phase, one of the three main categories was collapsed, so that at the end of the analysis there were only two main categories.

3.4.2 The narrative inquiry approach

Bruner (1985) states that “narrative is concerned with the explication of human intentions in the context of action” (p. 100). A narrative research is viewed as a holistic approach examining complex and manifold perspectives and human centredness (Webster & Mertova, 2007), and because of the focus on experience and the qualities of life and education it is situated in the stream of qualitative research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Furthermore, narrative research differs from positivistic approaches due to its basic assumptions of human reality: there is neither a single absolute truth nor one correct reading or interpretation of a text (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). In spite of the fact that boundaries and definitions of narrative inquiry tend to be unclear, the technique has spread widely under the influence of postmodern thought (Xu & Connelly, 2010). Within a narrative inquiry context, narrative refers to a discourse form consisting of events and happenings that are configured into a temporal unity (Polkinghorne, 1995). Along with Xu and Connelly (2010), I think that a narrative inquiry, while beginning in practice, should aim “at practical ends of value to the practical settings studied”. Applied in this manner, narrative as a method of inquiry may generate diverse formats for teacher development (Elbaz-Luwisch & Orland-Barac, 2013, p. 102). Furthermore, diverse forms of narrative inquiry, such as teachers’ stories and their live [and careers], reveal various perspectives of teachers’ knowledge, teaching and learning beliefs and the experience of professional development in different contexts (King, 2008). For these and other reasons, several scholars have utilised narrative inquiry as an approach and method for the investigation of educational phenomena, including teaching practice (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2001), teacher knowledge (e.g. Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004), process and development of learning to teach (e.g. Doyle & Carter, 2003; Carter & Doyle 1996; Carter, 1993) and teacher identity (e.g. Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007; Søreide, 2007).

Following Bruner’s (1990) insight into investigating the meaning making of professional identity within the cultural context, in which the culture provides the repertoire of conceptual and symbolic tools within which individuals craft and perform themselves, in Study II the narrative inquiry approach was utilised. For this study, the concept of narrative is based on Vygotsky’s (1978) view of learning, which assumes that the meaningful knowledge of an individual is socially constructed through shared understanding. Also related to identity, the underlining constructivist understanding of this study is that people construct their identities through interaction in a specific context (e.g. Van Langenhove & Harré, 1993; Holland et al., 2001; Holland & Lave, 2001). Narrative inquiry can be viewed as embracing both the method and phenomena of a study, though when comprehended as a method, it can be placed under the qualitative research methodology (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2012). The methods of the study subsume a constructivist perspective (e.g. Gadamer,

2004; Vygotsky, 1978), assuming that the narratives are socially constructed from interviews highlighting the participants' interpretations to be as important as those of the researcher (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Pinnegaar and Daynes (2012) propose four "turns" in a researcher's thinking and action to indicate the changes of how fully the researcher embraces narrative inquiry: (i) a change in the research-practitioner relationship [as a process of collaboration, involving mutual storytelling (see Connelly & Clandinin, 1990)]; (ii) using the words as data; (iii) focusing towards the local and specific; and (iv) a widening in acceptance of alternative epistemologies.

People begin to construct narrative identities in late adolescent and early adulthood, and continue the construction through the adult life course (McAdams, 2008). Narrative identity is the internalised, evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make a sense and meaning into and out of his or her self (e.g. McAdams, 2008; Bauer, McAdams & Pals, 2006). To examine teacher identity, the Three Dimensional Space Narrative Structure (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was used to facilitate the study analysis. Drawing from the Deweyan view of experience as continuous and interactive (situation, continuity and interaction), Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that in an inquiry the focus – to do research into an experience – is to ask questions pointing *inward* (internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, moral dispositions), *outward* (the conditions of one's environment), *backward* and *forward* (temporality as past, present and future), and *situated within place* (specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes) (pp. 48–51). These three "commonplaces" – temporality, sociality and place – are dimensions that need to be simultaneously explored during the process of a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 436). In this study the commonplaces enhanced the researcher's gaze during the phase of analysis, though, as Connelly and Clandinin (1990) have noted, the collaborative nature of the researcher-practitioner relationship involves mutual storytelling, in which the researcher becomes a co-participant.

The data collection phase of the study was done with narrative interviews, in which the two volunteering kindergarten teachers were asked to tell their professional career stories reflecting the possible impact and nature of others, colleagues and environment to their professional identity development. Before the interviews both teachers were asked to look back on their careers and to draw a storyline with changes (dates, contexts and colleagues) in their careers. This was done in order to support their recall and reflection of their "nodal moments", meaning a new direction of life central to teaching and learning to teach (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; see also Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). The interviews were conducted in relational collaboration as one-to-one situation using video recording. As Clandinin and Connelly (1994) suggested, by asking each participant to tell her story in her own way, an attempt was made to lessen the influence of researcher. In this study the interviews were semi-structured, allowing the researcher to ask clarifying questions or more details,

so the narratives were co-constructed (see Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Specifically, during the interviews, the researcher focused on clarifying questions, negotiating meaning and shared understanding, related to the dimensions of the narrative: inward, outward, backward, forward and situated within place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The researcher asked a variety of questions, such as: Can you tell more about that? Did I understand you? Did you mean this...? What did you feel in that situation? Was there something helpful/difficult in that position? Both teachers were interviewed twice, due to the understanding of the participants that the single interview session was not sufficient. The transcriptions were mailed to the participants in case they wished to add new information or withdraw some parts of their narratives.

Data analysis began during the interview phase as a part-to-whole process reflecting the experiences of the participant, and engaging with the other hoping to achieve shared cultural understanding supporting interpretation. Both hermeneutic and pragmatist traditions propose ways in which people can advance beyond culturally internalised knowing and expand their understanding of themselves, the world and others through participation in inquiry (Polkinghorne, 2000, p. 457). Next the interviews were transcribed and analysis proceeded by back and forth reading working with one interview at a time. The narratives were analysed employing a paradigmatic and inductive type of analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995), more specifically, thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2013). According to Riessman (2008), in thematic narrative analysis, emphasis is on “the told” – the events and cognitions to which language refers (the content of speech) – in other words, the focus is on *what* is said, rather than “*how*” or “*to whom*” and for “*what purpose*” (pp. 58–59). After multiple readings the career paths of teachers were written down for the first time using also the additional data, their career stories with dates of transitions, which the teachers had written and given to the researcher. Next, in the third phase of the analysis, the data were coded descriptively (Saldaña, 2009), and analysis was developed by conceptualisation and categorisation, aiming to recognise the prevailing patterns (Braun & Clark, 2006, 2013). In this phase, fourteen preliminary codes were identified. In order to be able to handle the codes and categorisation systematically, colors and time were used in the video recordings to label the chosen units. For example code-labels such as devotion to children, valuing the profession, and educational goals were identified. Although the process of preliminary coding was systematic, it was also slow and reflexive, going back and forth with the data and writing memos about my decisions regarding the analysis. As the next step, preliminary codes were joined and grouped into broader categories in order to find the central organising concepts, or the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). At this point, I also analysed the narratives of the second teacher, comparing the similarities and differences between the two interviewees. These central concepts consisted of four shared identity themes. Eventually, the found differences between the two analyses of narratives took their place

in sub-categories, in other words in the content – that which the teachers underlined. In terms of the continuum from concrete-to-abstract and specific-to-general, the last steps of the analysis included abstracting these differences between sub-categories and between the two teachers, and presenting the data in the form of tables. In order to show an in-depth understanding of these features, the themes were constructed as storylines that emphasised the teachers' beliefs, experiences and circumstances. At the end of the analysis, in order to show the type of data that related to a particular themed concept, quotations from the data were added. Finally the results of the analysis were validated in the form of *member checking* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) together with the participating teachers.

3.4.3 Participatory action research approach

Action research is viewed as having been based in practice as the antithesis of *ivory tower research* (Munn-Giddings, 2012; see also Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg, & Monzó, 2018). There is only little agreement on a sole definition of the research methods labeled as action research (e.g. Ladkin, 2007; McTaggart, 1997) or participatory action research (PAR) (Munn-Giddings, Hart, & Ramon, 2005). Furthermore, the perceptions vary from underlining action research as a systematic process of inquiry (e.g. Stringer, 2014; Lewin, 1946) to more practical emphasis as “a common-sense approach to personal and professional development that enables practitioners to investigate and evaluate their work, and to create their own theories of practice” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005, p.1; Munn-Giddings et al., 2005). According to Baskerville (1999), action research refers to various research approaches, rather than a single method, which consists of four common characteristics: 1) an action and change orientation; 2) a problem focus; 3) an organic process involving systematic and sometimes iterative stages; and 4) collaboration among participants (p. 9). Despite the divergent views, it is regarded as a powerful methodology to improve educational processes, grounded in the values and culture of its participant-researchers, and in this way being flexible to local agency (e.g. Stringer, 2014; Somekh & Zeichner, 2009; Elliot, 1991). Besides the methodology, Somekh and Zeichner (2009) argue that action research consists of democratic values and dispositions within which oppression and nurture are challenged while sustaining social justice, because the core principle of action research is the combination of action and research that challenges the status quo, implicit routines and practices (Somek & Zeichner, 2009; see also Kemmis & Taggart, 2008). As a process of professional development, action research empowers teachers (e.g. Pine, 2009) and generally encourages teachers' agency and autonomy (Kincheloe et al., 2018; Judah & Richardson, 2006). At the same time, the realisation of action research as a form of evidence-informed practice by policy agencies has been criticised (Baumfield, Hall, & Wall, 2013). McTaggart (1997) insisted that *authentic participation* means sharing the way research is con-

ceptualised, practiced and applied. In other words, it means ownership and responsible agency both in the production of knowledge and development of practice. Thus, it gives the teachers a means to develop agency to bring about change (Somekh & Zeichner, 2009) and has the following goals: gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the context and educational practices and improving student outcomes (Mills & Butroyd, 2014; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

Action research is often chosen by insiders trying to develop their practice (e.g. Gray, 2009; Mills & Butroyd, 2014; Ado, 2013; McTaggart, 1997), though in many contexts a model exists whereby the researcher acts as a facilitator in the inquiry process working alongside practitioners who have lived experience of the phenomenon being enquired into. In such cases the researcher's role seems more like a catalyst and coordinator of the process (e.g. Munn-Giddins, 2012; Cohen et al., 2007; McTaggart, 1997). Cohen et al. (2007) note that action research can be used in a number of areas, to examine, for example, teaching methods; learning strategies; evaluative procedures; attitudes and values; continuing professional development of teachers; management and control; and administration (p. 297). Kemmis and Taggart (2000) characterise the nature of participatory action research as a form of *insider research*, in which participants can grasp six perspectives from their practices, understandings and setting: individual, social, "subjective/insider", "objective/outsider", "synchronic" perspective (how things are) and "diachronic" perspective (how they came to be or can come to be) (p.590). According to McNiff and Whitehead (2005), action research enables teachers to see their practice as *practical theorising*, that is practice (what one do) informs theory (what one thinks about what one does), and theory (what one thinks) informs practice (what one is doing) (p. 4). Several researcher (e.g. Kemmis & Taggart, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007; McNiff & Whitehead, 2005; Baskerville, 1999), in line with Lewin (1946), view the action research process as cyclical, showing that learning feeds back into practice, changing and generating new learning (Mills & Butroyd, 2014; McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). This is generally thought to comprehend a series of self-reflective cycles, such as: planning a change; acting and observing the process and consequences of the change; reflecting on former processes and consequences; re-planning and so forth (Kemmis & Taggart, 2008, p. 276). In this research, the participatory action research approach was utilised, consisting of three early childhood educator teams voluntarily participating and researching their own, and shared, collaborative practices in the daily working context. The researcher of the study acted as a facilitator and coordinator, and as Baumfield et al. (2013) highlighted, in partnership supporting the educator-researchers to develop a professional discourse about their shared agency. The process of acquiring knowledge through research cycles was as much for the benefit of the researcher as it was for the participants. After the study the participants and the re-

searcher met and discussed the individual and shared outcomes of the team discussions affecting their shared agentic work.

The data collection phase of the study started after three early childhood educator teams were recruited to participate with informed consent. Informed by the literature of action research (e.g. Gray, 2009; Pine, 2009; Kemmis & Taggart, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007), a practical plan regarding the procedures of data collection was made. Practical decisions involved also ethical, prudential and methodological considerations (e.g. Hammersley, 2009), because the role of the researcher in action research is a challenging one: it entails trying to ensure that the researcher will have the least possible impact on the way educators act and share their work and agency in daily practice, to ensure their authentic participation. Thus, the participants were told about the goal of the study, but equally importantly, were asked about and negotiated with concerning their professional needs and stances for studying their own ways of working. They were told that the data collection would be done from the videotaped team discussions, and the basis of these discussions would be the earlier videotaped material. Each educator was asked to consider beforehand which parts of their daily teaching situations they would like to have videotaped, that is, in order to be able to reflect the actions of each based on the videotaped situations. The video recordings were done by colleagues, using the directions given by individual educators. Participants were asked to tape as many different videos of their daily actions as they felt necessary and particularly useful to reflect upon. The directions regarding the length of the videotaped material were set to the time limits from 45 minutes to one hour. This was done to ensure that each participant would be able to select and raise a discussion and questions out of one's own working. Before the team discussion, the educator was also asked to watch the videotape beforehand and to reflect on one's own actions, the working context while raising questions and remarks and reflections upon it. These questions and reflections would be dealt with in team discussions with the aid of re-watching the video. It was agreed that the participant who was videotaped would start the discussion and also take care of the video (pausing). In the discussion phase all the participants were encouraged to speak aloud and to engage with their views and reflections related to the initiated issue. Hence, the study's cyclical process and data collection emphasised the negotiated action and reflection in which participants' actions are shaped by the actions of the other people around them. The participants orient and respond, both to their circumstances and to each other (e.g., Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009; Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014; Swim & Isik-Ercan, 2013). As PAR is characterized as a form of empowering insider research, the external researcher served as a facilitator, in case it became necessary to clarify the questions. The data collection phase in this study was ongoing through one semester (from autumn to spring), primarily to ensure the reflective, cyclical nature of action research.

The data analysis of the study started by transcribing the videotapes of team discussions to text and replacing participants' names with pseudonyms. Transcripts were read multiple times, and at the same time, the first memos were written. The verbatim transcripts of the team discussions were first analysed using an iterative two-stage process with several phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2013, 2006). In the first stage and in the first phase, the transcribed text of each team was coded using inductive coding and, following Marks and Yardley (2004) – codes need to be drawn from the principles that underpin the research – the focus of the analysis was on finding the dispositional features of participants' shared agency. The coding took place in two cycles, first by giving descriptive terms that summarised the chosen content, and then by pattern coding – codes were compared and contrasted – in order to generate the theme with sub-themes. During the analysis, the researcher went back and forth between the data and the codes by constantly comparing the data to the codes and to the themes, which was done in order to ensure that the themes were exhaustive, internally consistent and mutually exclusive (Braun & Clark, 2013, 2006). The constant comparison (e.g. Lichtman, 2013), in the form of an *analytic induction* (Silverman, 2006), took place within several levels: (i) comparison within a single team discussion; (ii) comparison between discussions within the same team; and (iii) comparison of discussions from different groups.

The codings were done across the data, and at this point, the data and the codes constituting the theme were reviewed for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Braun & Clark, 2013, 2006). After the first phase the data were analysed deductively by integrating the themes into a larger theoretical framework by drawing from Biesta and Tedder's (2007) ecological understanding of agency and by following Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) notion of temporality. To be more specific, the focus of the analysis was to find answers to the question: How did colleagues respond to the dispositions, and how were the dispositions and responses related to temporality? In order to be able to see the larger view of the analysis, the data were also organised by frequencies, as quantitative data should be seen as a step towards better informed and better focused qualitative data collection (Mills & Butroyd, 2014, p. 124). The quantitative examination was especially helpful when the focus of analysis shifted from within-cases examination to the second stage of the analysis, that is, cross-case analysis in which the three teams were compared in order to synthesise interpretations. From the start of the analysis till the end, generating the overall findings, continuous memos were written about the researcher's decisions and the iterative understanding of the process of the analysis.

3.5 Research ethics and trustworthiness

Official permission for the study was requested from the municipality administration, and a more practical permission to conduct a study was discussed with leaders of the day care centres. The sub-studies followed both the ethical standards for scientific research maintained in the following institutions: University of Turku; the ethical principles of research in the domain of humanities and the social and behavioural sciences and proposals for ethical review, informed by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Ethics (2009); and responsible conduct of research and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct in Finland by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012). From the beginning of the research, due to the nature of this study, I faced the questions of identifiability, confidentiality and privacy concerning individual cases and complex relations in teaching and involving both personal and sensitive issues. First of all, *informed consent* forms were obtained from all the study participant, all of whom took part voluntarily. Related to Sub-study I, parental consents were also obtained from the parents of the preschool children because the data were gathered using video recording from the daily practices of the teachers. In this study, the researcher also obtained oral consents from the colleagues of the teachers. *Confidentiality* of the participants was ensured by the use of pseudonyms. As a routine measure, I removed personal identifiers such as names and addresses by replacing them with ID codes (date and time code from the videotapes).

As a small scale study, it was difficult to write in a way that the educators would not be identifiable. This was particularly the case when some information of the teams in Sub-study III was made public in the paper, although the information was not used unnecessarily. However, uncertainty arose when I considered the consequences and possibilities, such as protecting participants from embarrassment, which is more challenging to ensure when the findings are released. These considerations related particularly to Sub-study III, though confidentiality was utilised. Respecting the research participants and their work has been an important ethical consideration: how to write in an honest way from the vulnerable experiences or about the results of the analysis that showed negative effects. As a researcher I have been given a chance to share the perspectives, emotions, understandings and professional contexts of the participants; in other words, I have been trusted. Overall, a researcher has to keep up with ethical conduct, be sure to critically reflect the phenomenon studied and be truthful – to participants, public and oneself. Being truthful and critical, as a concrete practice, means studying and writing respectfully about study participants, though as a requirement of a research ethics, a researcher has to pursue scientific quality with one's results and studies.

The relation of a researcher between the subject being researched and the ensuing interpretations is an issue that often debated in qualitative research. In such

cases, attention has been paid to the complexity of the role of the researcher as observer and her or his contextual understanding, particularly in ethnographic research (e.g. Angrosino & Mays De Pérez, 2000). However, the self is always present, and thus, many researchers have argued against the myth of value-free scientific inquiry, demanding researcher(s) acknowledge one's own professional, political and personal interests. I acknowledge that the subjectivity of my educational background and dispositions as a kindergarten teacher and as a researcher constitutes possible researcher bias (Maxwell, 2013). The ways of coping with bias vary: for some it can mean a deliberate effort to explicate one's prejudices and assumptions, and for others it is approached through introspection and analysis (Norris, 1997).

In this study, my subjectivity as the researcher neither should nor can be excluded; the awareness and experiences of the researcher are viewed as an element of importance that are needed in understanding the phenomenon under study. How I write is a reflection of my interpretation and inherited cultural ways of understanding that I bring to the research. As conducting a study is always about making judgements, choosing a narrative or interviews not only are of important but which may confirm one's own ideas. For these reasons, academics and scholars encourage researchers to seek out full, pluralised and also troublesome voices, to avoid just simply echoing hegemonic discourses and knowledge claims (Mazzei, 2009; MacLure, 2009). Of course, accomplishing this, is a balancing act, and the researcher shapes the voices by her or his own decisions. Brinkman and Kvale (2015) speak about reflexive objectivity in qualitative study as striving for objectivity regarding one's subjectivity, stating also that one can only make informed judgements on the basis of one's "pre-judices", which enable oneself to understand something. These biases and prejudices are reflected within an ongoing hermeneutic approach by raising the awareness of one's own dispositions. Also, the communicative validation (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015), as done in this study, can be utilised as a relevant partner for a conversation about the correct interpretation.

However, as van Manen (2016) note, there is also a need to discuss any past experiences that might shape the interpretations. The understanding of my past may be seen as an insider's view, an important part of the interpretation process, which I have processed through reflexive writing during the study. I have to also admit that, as a researcher, having a membership role in a setting increases the likelihood of interview access. In a similar manner, the researchers' own special expertise in selecting her or his own research topics may be viewed as an advantage (Adler & Adler, 2011). Qualitative researchers employ diverse techniques in order to support the trustworthiness of the study, that is, trustworthiness is taken as a quality of the study that reflects on assessments of its results as having been appropriately collected, analysed, and reported (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Within the field of qualitative research, researchers have challenged the quantitative criteria for trustworthiness

through the use of more appropriate qualitative concepts as: credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Despite the enforcement of such concepts, there has been much debate but little agreement about the criteria or aspects by which qualitative research can be judged (Hammersley, 2007; Dixon-Woods, Shaw, Agarwal, & Smith, 2004). Guba and Lincoln (2005) admit that there is no sole or precise way to measure the quality due to the diversity of qualitative research. However, I will address the quality of the study by using the contested terms due to the view that reliability, falsifiability and objectivity are rhetorical strategies fitting only one model of science, that is, “experimental, hypothesis-testing and so forth” (Mishler, 1990, p. 420). This decision resonates also with Creswell and Miller’s (2000) suggestion that the researcher’s choice of quality procedures is guided by two perspectives: the lens through which the studies are argued to bear quality and, what is equally important, the researcher’s paradigm assumptions. Therefore, following Creswell and Miller (2000) and in order to more clearly show the pursued lenses with procedures, Table 4 summarises these decisions through the sub-studies.

Table 4. The various lenses used to enhance trustworthiness of the study

<i>Paradigmatic assumption/Lens</i>	<i>Postpositivist or systematic paradigm</i>	<i>Constructivist paradigm</i>	<i>Critical paradigm</i>
Lens of the researcher	Triangulation • Sub-study II	Disconfirming evidence	Researcher reflexivity • Sub-studies I, II and III
Lens of study participants	Member checking • Sub-studies I and II	Prolonged engagement • Sub-study III	Collaboration • Sub-study III as participatory action research
Lens of people external to the study	The audit trail • Sub-study III with external auditor	Thick, rich description • Sub-studies I and II	Peer debriefing • Sub-studies I, II and III

Credibility or truth value refers to the confidence of the researcher related to data and analysis addressing the focus of the research and accurate interpretation of the meaning of the data. In other words, this gives an answer to the question: Do the results reflect the experience of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to the cited authors, it is the responsibility of the researcher to enhance trustworthiness and authenticity so that the results can be found to reliable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It should be admitted, though, that Maxwell (2013) has noted that the strategies or procedures primarily operate by testing the credibility of conclusions, not verifying them. Creswell (1998) listed eight verification procedures as discussed in the qualitative research literature, consisting of the following: triangulation; negative

case analysis; prolonged engagement; peer review or debriefing; clarifying researcher bias; member checks; rich, thick description; and external audits. Creswell (1998) suggested, that at least two of these should be present in any given study. As mentioned before, *member checks* (see Table 4) as respondent validation were utilized in this study. In a member check, the researcher may have participants review the raw data or, alternatively, participants are given feedback of the study. Member checking is also one procedure for the researcher to critically evaluate and *triangulate* his or her observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, Hammersley (1992) argued against the tendency to define verification, assuming that participants would judge the analysis to be correct. In Sub-studies I and II, the participants were both given the raw data and asked to review and comment on the drafts of the study, and these were done in face-to-face discussions with the individual teachers. Within Sub-study III I met the participants as a team. In my view, the member checking was first of all an ethical way to conduct a study, and despite the opposite views, I felt these discussions to have been an important opportunity to ask questions and solicit critical feedback of my own interpretations.

Prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) refers both to building trust with participants, but also to taking extended time with participants in order to gain a better understanding of behaviour, values and social relationships in a social context (Lundy, 2008). In a qualitative inquiry, data collection also involves persistent observation referring to the focus of the researcher on the characteristics relevant to the scope of the study, which brings depth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the data collection of the Sub-study III, the three teams and their contexts became familiar due to the full semester length of the process. Because I was studying their work intimately with them through videotapes and discussions, their practices, relations and discourses extended my understanding of their cultural ways of working. This might be viewed as a risk to the analysis, but fortunately the same expression became evident from the videotaped data.

Confirmability, in parallel with objectivity, is concerned with providing proof that the data and interpretations are not merely inventions of the researcher. In order to achieve objectivity the focus should be removed from the researcher to the data, where the interest lies in the confirmability of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). The strategies to ensure conformability include the following: (i) triangulation; (ii), practicing reflexivity; and (iii) the confirmability audit. In Sub-study III an *audit trail* (see Table 4) was conducted with an external auditor in order to ensure and establish visibility, comprehensibility, and acceptability (Akkerman, Admiraal, Brekelmans, & Oost, 2008). During the study, from the data gathering until the finished report, I wrote reflective memos, which were needed in the auditing process. On the basis of the reviewed data (consisting of videos, Excel tables, transcriptions and memos about my reflections, procedures and decisions), the auditor concluded that the deci-

sions regarding analysis were understandable and consistent with the evidence and reasoning displayed. Creswell and Miller (2000) argued that the researcher should incorporate three lenses through which to view the procedures for trustworthiness: of the self (the researcher), of the participants and of the external readers of the final research report. On this basis and, particularly in Sub-study I applied all these lenses in order to enhance the trust within my interpretations (see Table 4). One of the lenses is *peer review* or *debriefing*, which functions as an external check of the research process. In the process of debriefing, the researcher confides in trusted and knowledgeable colleague[s] and in this way is able to use them as a sounding board towards her or his reflections, questioning and ideas (Schwandt, 2007). The role of the peer debriefer is to ask hard questions about methods, meanings and interpretation (Creswell, 1998).

Dependability, or *consistency*, means that a researcher wishes an outsider be able to concur, if given the collected data, that the results make sense and are consistent and dependable (Merriam, 2014). This means that the processes followed within the study should be reported in as much detail as possible. In other words, dependability includes all the methodological understandings that guide the researcher's actions and decisions during the data gathering and analysis. In the section above, I have reported about my philosophical underpinnings, methods and decisions related to the sub-studies.

Trustworthiness also includes the question of *transferability*, referring to the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other settings or groups (e.g., Schwandt, 2007). Although qualitative researchers are not concerned with inter-study replication, they are concerned with corroborating findings over time across similar situations. The goal is to provide such depth and detail description that the reader may generalise findings to other context; however, the qualitative researcher cannot specify whether the findings are generalisable to other contexts. That depends upon the degree of similarity between the contexts. Therefore the researcher "can only provide only the thick description necessary to enable in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possible" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Merriam (2014) agrees that in qualitative studies, the most common understanding of transferability is in the form of user generalisability, referring to the decision made by the person who reads the study, whether the results can be applied to another situation. Through these sub-studies and also through these pages in this background, I have tried to give as thick a description and detailed account of the processes and decisions of the study as possible, including also the stated theoretical understandings. *Thick description* refers to a rich and thorough description of the participants, researched context, and the experiences observed. Creswell and Miller's (2000) described the additional purpose of thick description as an attempt to invite the

reader closer into the narrative in order to increase coherence but also to evoke feelings and a sense of connection with the participants in the study. In this research, and particularly in Sub-study II, the teachers' narratives were highlighted with thick description, in an effort not to phrase but involve the reader to feel the connection and understand the experiences constructing the two teachers shared identities. Following Mishler (1990), concrete quotes – models of research practice – also have been displayed.

The study contains limitations that should be mentioned, of which the obvious one is the limited size. The analyses of the sub-studies are first of all based upon a small number of samples, though these are studied with an in-depth grasp. The main disadvantage of qualitative research, which also concerns this study, is that the findings cannot be generalised to wider populations holding the same level of certainty as quantitative procedures. Furthermore, as has been stated before, a qualitative researcher is not an objective scientist making observations. Indeed, "... constructivist researchers ... share the belief that a politics of liberation must always begin with the perspectives ... of those individuals ... who have been oppressed by the ... ideological, economic, and political forces ..." (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 575). According to Karila (2016), a multiprofessional and highly trained staff is presented as one of the characteristic features of Finnish early childhood education, but the problematic situations – related both to the utilisation of acquired education and the realisation of multiprofessional practices – surface in the studies that address questions about the staff's possibilities for professional development and well-being at work. The consistency of the research findings since the 2000s supports the view that the problems are related to the obscurities of professional roles, responsibilities, and obligations of the staff. For these reasons, despite the problem of generalisability, this study offers an in-depth examination of professional work and learning in the context of ECE, and imagines that these experiences of the practitioners could be connected more generally to the questions of professional learning and development in ECEC.

4 THE FINDINGS OF THE THREE STUDIES

In this chapter the sub-studies are presented. The former chapters consisted of information about the contexts, participants, methods and data analysis, so these three overviews focus on presenting the condensed results of the studies. Therefore, this chapter is a sounding board for the following and final chapter, which concludes the study, presents its implications and shows its limitations and strengths.

4.1 Study I

Melasalmi, A., & Husu, J. (2016). The content and implementation of shared professional knowledge in early childhood education. *Early Years: An International Research Journal*, 36(4), 426–439. DOI:10.1080/09575146.2016.1149692

For several years, collaborative learning has been a researched agenda in the domain of learning and instruction. However, diverse forms of workplace learning remain an under-researched area in the professional development of early childhood educators. Furthermore, in Finnish early childhood education, an increasing emphasis on multiprofessional collaboration exists, while the differences and dilemmas between professional discourses and different versions of professional knowledge have been emphasised. More recently, it has also been argued that supporting educators' individual and collective learning is considered a vital prerequisite for communities to change and enhance improvement, and partially, this improvement depends on team learning, which consists of shared knowledge and negotiations. With these points in mind, the aim of this study was first of all to clarify what constitutes the shared professional knowledge of early childhood teachers, and secondly, to present how this knowledge is implemented in early childhood practice. With a case study research strategy, the first sub-study utilised videotaped stimulated recall interview data of the two kindergarten teachers teaching practices in their daily contexts.

The results are divided into two sections: (i) professional self; and (ii) professional tasks, both embedded and implemented within the shared practices of early childhood educators. *Professional self* was divided into two broad sub-categories explaining the process of continuous learning to teach as a deeply personal entity, consisting of emotions, personal characteristics and values, which are inexorably linked to teachers' identity and being. This knowledge of professional self emerged most often during the practices in the in-teaching context (situations with children) when the teachers focused their attention to the nature of interactions with children. During the action in the out-of-teaching context (professional interactions without children, i.e. multiprofessional team meetings), some emotions and questions arose, connected in particular to situations where the teachers felt that the nature of interac-

tion and the shared understanding failed or raised questions. Teachers' professional values were related to both personal working manners, and to intersubjectivity in the educator team. Intersubjectivity appeared in the teachers' accounts as joint practices, which were based on pedagogical values and the needs of the children. In the out-of-teaching context, child-centred pedagogy and caring appeared to be the values maintained, however the shared base of pedagogical values was elusive and challenging to make evident. Shared participation, explication of values, and questions regarding teamwork were emphasised by one teacher, though the other one particularly stated that interdependency can become an unpleasant barrier when one should share or bring up subjects that challenge the team.

Professional tasks, and its subcategories – knowledge of professional tasks and negotiation of professional tasks – shows the teachers' shared knowledge as an interplay between external and internal forces in the two contexts of the study. In intensive teaching situations the nature of collaboration and shared knowledge with colleagues appeared to be intertwined and implicit. The decision-sharing with colleagues occurred mostly in problematic situations. Teachers' observations on children and the knowledge of a child's academic abilities were at the core of professional tasks, affecting decision-making, teaching outcomes and evaluation. The learning of teachers was mostly connected to their teaching, especially concerning the ways how children reacted and learned. They negotiated their professional tasks with colleagues, and the knowledge they shared concerned of shared roles, responsibilities and agency. In the in-teaching context (interactional teaching situations with children and colleagues), agreed working routines were treated as implicit, embedded agreements, and were emphasised to be followed effectively. In contrast, in the out-of-teaching context (multiprofessional team meetings), the main focus was on the practical dimensions of shared future daily work: jointly planned teaching and caring focused on children's learning. The teachers reported that sharing feedback of one's own work or a colleague's way of teaching is important, but done infrequently. At the same time, the views of teachers differed as the other teacher stated that cultural habits hinder critical feedback, since colleagues are cautious not to offend each other and want to keep up a positive working atmosphere.

To sum up, professional knowledge was mainly shared in team meetings, mostly in the form of practical negotiations through discussions, and the outcome was a joint commitment creating interdependency. Despite close interdependency, there were also feelings of uncertainty related to professional decisions and values. It is known that teaching decisions can be challenged, thus, creating vulnerability. However, the uncertainty can facilitate reflection and reorganisation of beliefs, values and conceptions. Teacher learning, which enhanced professional development, was situated within the practice and focused on children's learning. These learning situations appeared to remain implicit in the team, and in this way opportunities to

facilitate a shared child-oriented perspective were wasted. Furthermore, if critical reflection is perceived infrequently and is challenging in its nature, the opportunities for questioning and changing views and practices and strengthening shared professional learning and development may remain low. This sub-study gave insights into the characteristics of professional knowledge sharing and implementation. The findings emphasise that in early childhood teacher education we need to develop pedagogical, reflective practices and skills. For in-service teacher development, we need to enhance more holistic perspectives in order to support the professional learning of teachers.

4.2 Study II

Melasalmi, A., & Husu, J. A narrative examination of early childhood teachers' shared identities in teamwork. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education* (In press, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2017.1389786>).

Despite the contested definition of teacher identity, it has been generally viewed that teachers' identity is not a stable entity but evolving, and even a complex of shifting, occasional identities, constructed in response to contexts, within social relations and discourses. Recently the professional identity of teachers has been under focus, particularly because it has been related to such factors as collaboration, quality of teaching and professional preparation of teachers. As noted, the professional development of early childhood teachers mostly takes place in relationships and is based on shared knowledge, practices and values. In response, through diverse knowledge bases and controversies, educators reach answers, and through the ways they respond to them, shape their individual and collective practices. The research literature shows that early childhood teachers are often surprised by the challenges in collegial collaboration. It has also been noted that in order to improve early childhood education, research should also be done about how teachers are affected by their participation. Therefore the study aims to clarify how the two early childhood teachers' work on their shared identities influences their professional beliefs and practices. By studying the two "cases" of two kindergarten teachers, within a narrative inquiry approach, the study produced in-depth interview data of the teachers' professional pathways and experiences of their constructed and negotiated professional identity development.

The main results of thematic analysis are presented, focusing solely on the emerged themes of the teachers' shared identities, namely the forms of: shared commitment; shared professional tasks; shared feedback; and shared agency. *Shared commitment*, which the two teachers reported, appeared as a multidimensional involvement and attachment to the professional values (e.g. devotion to children, engagement with their work community), professional styles (i.e., self-conception as a teacher) and pedagogical approaches. However, their contextually bound ex-

periences led the teachers to address their commitment regarding their educational practices from different perspectives: the other teacher emphasised occupational and ethical consideration for her colleagues, but above all for children, underlining that her occupational and ethical integrity was due to her experienced conflict and struggle; the other teacher emphasised more her commitment to involving colleagues and community, highlighting shared organizational commitment, particularly after facing a role conflict due to the context transition. *Shared tasks* consisted of: (i) shared efficacy experiences; (ii) distribution of tasks; and (iii) a collective atmosphere. The teachers reported their work was based on trust and its effects on the collective atmosphere of the team, though their views differed, as the other teacher referred to power struggles in task competition. In particular, the hard experiences with shared efficacy beliefs let the other teacher focus on the role and influence of her colleagues on working conditions and her image as a skillful teacher. The tensions in professional tasks were highlighted by the other teachers due to the experienced problems in shared educational responsibilities. Thus it became evident that their efficacy and self-perceptions as autonomous educators constructing their identities as shared were negotiated actively with their colleagues, and these negotiations showed in their educational practices as tensions in professional tasks or power struggles. *Shared feedback* appeared as a social tool, which was powerful to deconstruct the positions and shared identities of the teachers and the teams. It consisted of such features as: (i) sources of feedback; (ii) experiences of feedback; and (iii) challenges of feedback. Both teachers reported that the collegial feedback regarding the teaching of each is low. One of the two teachers pointed out that the challenge of professional feedback is that the given amount of straight or critical feedback is low, because people tend to stay in the area of niceness. The other teacher stated that it is hard to give critical feedback due to the worries of hurting the feelings of one's colleague, though both teachers mentioned the professional responsibility to intervene if needed. Furthermore, shared positive feedback was perceived as important, as one of the teachers reported that it supports the shared commitment and willingness to change. Feedback affecting the teachers' identities and practices was identified as needed, though the need of the teachers differed regarding these elements: lack of collegial reflection on teaching and lack of individual feedback. *Shared agency* consists of number of shared identity features, such as: (i) participation; (ii) negotiation and decision making; and (iii) team cohesion. Both teachers maintained that the team influenced how they positioned themselves as professional agents, though their emphasis varied slightly. One of the teachers underlined the importance of dialogue and negotiation skills and stated that team's interrelationships have the power to prevent or restrict agentic participation, thereby affecting one's professional identity. In particular she called attention to the need for self-confidence and communication skills. The other teacher gave prominence to importance of kindness in relations and

striving to share understanding. According to her, the feeling of belonging produces participation, thus shared agency showed in her practices as compliance with the team. As for the other teacher, shared agency showed in her practices as compliance with personal demands within the team.

To sum up, the results indicated the ways in which the features of shared identity affected the two teachers' identification with and positioning in their work: they both reported successful experiences, but also challenges as they tried to identify with the roles and subject positions available to them. The results also indicated that the teachers as novices felt challenges in participating in the early childhood field and desired to be accepted as full agents. Thus, it seems essential during teacher education to cultivate and support the reflective capability of pre-service teachers. As for agency, according to the literature, action research is a feasible vehicle for engaging in agency in teacher education. As for teacher educators, we should also examine our practices and employ similar methods used in action research in order to provide insights into the learning practices of pre-service teachers.

4.3 Study III

Melasalmi, A., & Husu, J. Shared professional agency in early childhood education: An in-depth study of three teams. Submitted to *Teaching and Teacher Education* (Revised and resubmitted).

During recent decades the growing complexity of teaching, educational reforms and redesigned, prescribed curriculums have in many ways changed the role and the work of teachers internationally. The increased expectancies of teaching outcomes and accountability with regimes of testing pressures and growing obligations of scripted performativity have decreased teachers' authority, autonomy and gradually, agency. Recently the role and responsibility of kindergarten teachers in "teacher leadership" has been emphasized particularly in Finland. This role illuminates the need for professional support and guidance to improve and support shared teaching practices and outcomes. Consequently, pedagogical knowledge, contextual and collegial support and engagement are framed and emphasised as important and desirable for the shared professional development of educators in early childhood education. However, research has shown that in early childhood education educators may find it difficult to articulate their pedagogical actions concerning how they support children's learning and their tendency to focus more on children's behaviour than re-

flect on their own pedagogical practices and interactions. While research on agency per se exists, teacher agency has been the focus of little explicit research, and in early childhood education, research has focused on staff characteristics and the work environment. In order to gain knowledge of the vital features that enhance shared agentic professional development, the aim of this sub-study is to focus on early childhood educators' perceptions and understandings of their shared agency in their team work, with a particular focus on the educators' joint actions by means of their environment. By studying the three early childhood educator teams within a participatory action research approach, the longitudinal data through thematic analysis shows differences between the participating teams and in their shared agency. Here, I report the main findings in two sections: (i) the features that constructed the teams' shared agency; and (ii) the various forms and levels of the teams' shared agency.

The features of the shared agency of the teams were first of all negotiated through their dispositions, which emerged within personal, professional and structural patterns. These three dispositions centred on agency in diverse ways and moulded the teams' general agentic view and interest as a specific kind of shared, collective orientation. In other words, the teams hold different kinds of shared orientation of understanding about their work. The analysis showed that when the colleagues responded to their team member's personal notions of one another's work, there were differences among the teams in how they engaged. This relational engagement appeared in the form of: withdrawal, compliance and (agentic) engagement. Furthermore, while negotiating their agentic behaviour their attention was focused on time dimensions as being past, present or future, which directed their relational engagement. Agentic dispositions emphasising the present and future were essential for planning and involvement, whereas the past featured more in structural issues related to agentic identities and ways of being and behaving.

The forms and levels of the teams shared agency as a result of a cross-case analysis presents the three teams as forming a certain kind of agentic "space" – mirroring their navigation in a unique relational space – which contained their habits, practices, pedagogy, knowledge and discourses. This dynamic, relational capacity of their shared agency varied from low to high levels among the teams.

To sum up, the results indicated that an educator's mindset towards teaching is affected by team-work through shared practices and discourses. These discourses, a basis of shared agency, revealed the teams' ways of interacting, valuing and thinking as accepted instantiations of particular types of people. The finding of high levels of shared agency demonstrated that teams with a strong sense of agency found more attributes related to their success or failures in themselves than in external factors. The results inform the vital role of leaders in enhancing agentic engagement, particularly that of being being aware of the history in the person/team. As high-level teams enhance the capacity to focus more critically on their pedagogical practices,

the capacity for contextually sensitive and critical reflection in professional contexts is essential. The aim of collective learning and commitment should not be confused with a demand for or intention to favour homogenisation, but instead differences and debate should be viewed as a basis for improvement. Furthermore, as the teams with high levels of agency focused more on mirroring the children's agency, emotions and understandings, i.e. learning, the study argues that enhancing shared agency supports the growth of the community as a professional learning community.

5 DISCUSSION

The theoretical aim of this study was to engage in and contribute to a wide and controversial understanding of shared professional learning and development of early childhood educators. The more practical objectives of the study were to examine how this socially shared work and learning affect educators' practices in areas of professional knowledge, identity and agency. In this dissertation, the phenomena of interdependent individual and shared professional development is studied twice in the daily contexts of early childhood educators' team work and once on the individual level through a narrative approach. The individual career experiences shaping the professional teacher identities and active teaching in teams were studied from three perspectives: (i) the shared knowledge construction and implementation; (ii) the constitution of shared professional identities and its effects towards professional practices and beliefs; and (iii) the manifestation of the dispositional, relational and temporal features of shared agency in early childhood team work and the ways in which these features characterise the teams.

The research revealed that the educators constructed their individual identities, knowledge and agencies continuously in their daily work by engaging in complex, socially shared and mediated teaching and caring. By negotiating their work, values and responsibilities in their relationships – the professional-knowledge landscapes (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009) – they were required to respond to the practical and theoretical questions shaping their working culture and agentic teaching outcomes, their positional relationships and their individual and shared learning. Additionally, the study illustrates that the nature of participation plays a crucial role in how an educator identifies and positions her or himself in interaction with others within a specific context. These relational interactions shaped the interdependency in each team and also implicitly guided their professional vision, habits and practices. Through the study, the shared professional learning of educators showed its embedded, situated nature as rising from the individual's practices. Reflecting and sharing one's learning explicitly, thus becoming aware of its importance, appeared challenging amidst the hectic daily work. Besides collegial engagement, the culture of the community – its structures, norms, and regulations – influenced how educators as team perceived their contextual being and learning, which guided their actions as more or less powerful agents. Putting it simply, teachers with a strong sense of agency found more attributes for their success or failures in themselves than in external factors (Marshall & Drummond, 2006).

In Finland, research on ECE during 1995–2015 has increased particularly in terms of studies on pedagogical research, children and groups of children and research that relates to learning evaluations (Alasuutari & Raittila, 2017). More recently, there

has been research articles on ECE related to variety of areas, such as: *induction phase* (Onnismaa, Tahkokallio, Reunamo, & Lipponen, 2017; Onnismaa, Tahkokallio, Lipponen, & Merivirta, 2016; Onnismaa, Tahkokallio, & Kalliala, 2015); *early childhood special education* (Pihlaja & Neitola, 2017; Viljamaa & Takala, 2017); *the values related to the curriculum and pre-school* (Einarsdottir, Puroila, Johansson, Broström, & Emilson, 2015; Puroila & Haho, 2017); *the leadership of ECE* (Halttunen, 2016; Keski-Rauska, Fonsén, Aronen, & Riekkola, 2016; Heikka, Halttunen, & Waniganayake, 2016; Hujala et al., 2016); *perspectives and understandings of ECE educators related to their work* (Keränen, Juutinen, Estola, 2017; Paananen, & Tammi, 2017; Rönkä, Turja, Malinen, Tammelin, & Kekkonen, 2017; Vlasov, Hujala, Essary, & Lenskava, 2016; Williams, Sheridan, Harju-Luukkainen, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2015); *pedagogical documentation and/or the quality of ECE* (Kajamies, Mattinen, Kaurila, Lehtonen, 2016; Kalliala & Pramling Samuelsson, 2014; Paananen & Lipponen, 2016); *policy discourses* (Karila, Eerola, Alasuutari, Kuukka, & Siippanen, 2017; Paananen, Lipponen, Kumpulainen, 2015; Paananen, Kumpulainen, & Lipponen, 2015); *and children and their development* (Kalliala, 2014; Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2016; Veijalainen, Reunamo, & Alijoki, 2017).

In relation to professional identities of kindergarten teachers Karila and Kupila (2010) addressed this issue as an evolving process that occurs in ECE communities during a teacher's career, thus extending their examination of professional identities held by professionals from different generations. Amongst other finding, they concluded that different occupational groups are insufficiently aware of one's professional core and expertise. They also argued that the practical know-how formed by experiences is enormously appreciated within the working cultures of ECE communities. (Karila & Kupila, 2010.) Ukkonen-Mikkola and Turtiainen (2016) addressed work-based learning at the boundaries of teacher education and work. They stated that a common ECE orientation of the organisations and commitment of the actors was facilitated when they worked together to reach their shared objective, which is to support students' professionalism (Ukkonen-Mikkola & Turtiainen, 2016). Furthermore, Rantavuori, Kupila and Karila (2017) studied the relational expertise of the professionals working at the boundaries, specifically focusing on the transition phase from preschool to primary school. They concluded that joint planning sessions that enable the construction of common knowledge are a vital element in the relational expertise learning process. They stated that lack of joint planning and evaluation prevents reflective talk (Rantavuori et al., 2017). Hence, while condensing the results of the study, and simultaneously comparing what is known in ECE, it is important to note that the study's findings share some similarities and expands upon the results reported in previous research.

Altogether, this dissertation argues that the shared professional workplace learning, i.e. professional development of early childhood educators, consists of a

vital capacity for constructing professional learning communities. In this study educators experienced challenges, tensions and even struggles when constructing their professional identities, learning, and agency in teams. Teachers' complex work includes various relationships in their *professional-knowledge landscapes*, living within tensions (Clandinin, et al., 2009). However, the tensions and dilemmas in their professional-knowledge landscapes are viewed as neither inherently bad nor good, but are cracks and conflicts that can create a context for learning, thus enhancing the renewal of communities (Achinstein, 2002; De Lima, 2001). The readiness to overcome these barriers does not depend solely on the individual, but upon the state of mind that reflects, questions, gives and asks critical feedback and discusses the hindering issues, and which should be developed and supported both in the learning communities of educators, and in the teacher education. To address these points, this chapter is divided into three sections to more clearly focus on the diverse implications of the study, also reflecting the more general perspective of early childhood education and care. Directions for future research will be discussed.

5.1 Implications for early childhood teachers' professional learning and development

The first research aim of this study was to study the shared professional knowledge of early childhood teachers in their daily practices. The research revealed that professional learning as shared knowledge took the more private and implicit form of learning known as "*knowledge-in-practice*" (Cohran-Smith & Lyttle, 1999). In particular, teachers gained professional knowledge of the ways children learned and how interaction with children succeeded. At the same time, the knowledge sharing with colleagues from one's learning remained largely teachers' own "property". This learning from practice appears to be dependent on the opportunities in the form of time to reflect on one's actions. However, in the hectic daily teaching schedule, these moments with colleagues withered away as the situations changed to the next complex moment. Early childhood educators who regularly reflect on the what, why, and how of their practice and how this new understanding and knowledge can be used to enhance their practices achieve the best outcomes for children (MacNaughton, 2003). Professional learning and development should be enhanced by supporting educators in learning how to talk and share their knowledge of experiences. Once they have achieved this skill, they can then generalise their practical ideas into conceptual labels, allowing more conscious application: in other words, by building bridges from concrete to abstract (research-based) knowledge (Riley & Roach, 2006). Hiebert et al. (2002) argue that one way to move from the practical to the abstract is first to analyse the daily lessons, and second move what is learned into another context and share the results. This sharing with another context in early childhood education

is possible but requires deliberate collaboration and recourses, such as time. Related to the hectic settings of teaching and taking care, the amount of collegial feedback was low, thus, the “*knowledge-of-practice*” (Cohran-Smith & Lytle, 1999), the intentional investigation of one’s own and collegially shared contextual practices, remained low. During shared teaching practices, the implicit awareness of colleagues and plans guided the teachers’ focus in the form of situational understanding. In team discussions and in shared teaching practices with colleagues, a brief possibility for professional learning appeared in situations where the routine was broken, raising questions and emotional tension. These results resemble the notions of Clandinin et al. (2009) of tensions and cracks as lost opportunities, if we are thought to erase, write over and silence the felt tensions in order to maintain a smooth social harmony.

The study I showed that teacher learning was situated in practice, in-teaching context, and remained predominantly implicit due to the fact that in the multiprofessional team, in out-of-teaching context, the planning of practices were emphasised. This kind of routinised planning culture, weakens shared evaluation of pedagogy, preventing reflection, and thus, learning and innovation (cf. Hiebert et al., 2002) in teams and at the community level. Overall, the results of Sub-study I suggest that there is a need to explicate, de-privatise, reflect on and study the daily practices, but more than just reflecting, the shared feedback and learning should be supported. Due to the hectic work conditions, the opportunities and time to engage and study the practice and share the results in a network or different context by using diverse methods (teacher research, video-enhanced reflection, writing a learning journal) should be cultivated, arranged and offered to the teams by the leaders of the day care centers.

The second research aim of the study was to gain a holistic understanding of the negotiated and, thus, shared identities of early childhood teachers. The notion of tension arising within lost opportunities to share reflection and possible professional learning from frictions and cracks resonates with the results of Sub-study II, namely referring to the shared professional identity of early childhood teachers. The research literature shows that teachers are often surprised by the challenges they face in adult collaboration in establishing roles and relationships (Recchia & Beck, 2014; Madrid & Dunn-Kenney, 2010; Souto-Manning, Cahnmann-Taylor, Dice, & Wooten, 2008). In the current study it became clear that when early childhood teachers are fully accepted as participants, the necessary components of professional identity development – belief in oneself as a competent and effective teacher, a commitment and capability to negotiate one’s professional values and beliefs – was supported. Thus, the results underscore the meaning of the culture of teaching as having an important impact on the quality of collaboration and shared learning. The study also shows that personal and professional environments have effects that are both positive and negative, and this interplay between the private, subjective and public realms is a vital

core of educators within which they balance. In this study it became evident that the being forced to swim across the status quo – those teaching practices that are contradictory to the teacher’s existing philosophies and inconsistent with their professional identities – was an exhausting experience generating difficulties and conflicts and frustration that were hard to handle. The teachers needed the shared discourse and collaboration to transform the existing habits and practices in order to be able to imagine positive futures. It has been stated that a strong sense of professional identity is of vital importance to a teacher’s performance, commitment and also retention (Day, Elliot, & Kington, 2005; see also Alsup, 2006).

One of the challenges towards shared professional development was the small amount of critical professional feedback and reflection. In order to grow as teachers and enhance their professional identities, teachers need support and feedback from their colleagues. A teachers’ professional identity is constructed within a dialogue between his/her inner self and external reality. Moreover, the engagement of their colleagues in active dialogic interplay remained in the level of “niceness” in order to avoid disagreements or conflict. However, the task of giving feedback requires a person to tell to how she/he is professionally experiencing the actions of the receiver, and thus, the understanding of the receiver may be different from the feedback that has been given (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1996). The understanding of one’s professional identity is important for individuals, children and ECE communities because it regulates one’s professional actions. Furthermore, *group processes*, including sharing information, discussion of errors and problems and seeking feedback are collaborative activities, enabling team learning (Edmondson & Roloff, 2012). Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth (2001) state that the maintenance of a *pseudocommunity* – “acting as if we all we agree” – pivots on the suppression of conflict and paves the way for the illusion of consensus (p. 20). They argue that the implicit rules of a pseudocommunity force avoidance of the underlying tensions and disagreements (Grossman et al., 2001).

Besides the lack of feedback and the experiences of professional struggles related to participation and engagement, one teacher had feelings of rejection, and the other teacher felt critical surveillance on the part of the leader of the day care centre. The loss of purpose and well-being – connected to a positive sense of professional identity – may weaken the ability to manage in the emotionally complex and vulnerable contexts of teaching (Day, 2012b). Moreover, perceiving critical surveillance increases the urge towards self-protection within teams constructing communication, with the effect of limiting learning (Edmondson & Roloff, 2012). Teachers also negotiated about their professional tasks, responsibilities, values and self-efficacy beliefs. These negotiations affected the type of future the teams sought to achieve, and which, once created, are resistant to change (Bandura, 1997). Furthermore, according to Bandura (1997), the processes activated by shared efficacy

beliefs affect how well team members work together and how much they accomplish collectively.

Overall, the results of Sub-studies I and II suggest that the challenges and struggles within the individual's evolving professional identity were related to the culture of the broader learning community and the culture of the team. In particular, the avoidance of giving feedback prevents both individual and shared learning. Regarding the implications, first of all, new educators should be supported to pro-actively seek and also give professional feedback, in this way taking part in and constructing the social learning processes of the community. Second, more focus and effort should be paid to relational team work, particularly to the social processes that affect shared outcomes, engagement and work well-being. This could be done by supporting the educators' awareness and ability to participate in a dialogue. Dialogical feedback can direct and support learning, but it has to be focused on tasks, processes and actions rather than individual's personality (Hu & Choo, 2016). Accordingly, the research literature on effective professional development highlights the connection between educators' perceptions about how coherent their professional development experiences were for teacher learning and implementation (e.g. Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallegher, 2007). By using a shared pedagogical evaluation of learning environments, of the team and community, this could offer a basis of discussion and change. However, it should be emphasised that the purpose of process of communicative evaluation is to seek the common or shared good through revelation and anticipation with the aim of establishing communication and partnership. Thus, it does not judge or arrange it into a specific order (Niemi, 1996). According The National Core Curriculum for ECE (2016), evaluation of ECE practices should be done regularly and on one's own initiative. Within the evaluation process of shared pedagogical work practices, the quality of ECE is enhanced, its strengths can be identified and the needs for development can be highlighted, thus innovating further practices (The National Core Curriculum for ECE, 2016, p. 60). However, the evaluation tools used in ECE lack conformity (Mikkola, Repo, Vlasov, Paananen, & Mikkola, 2017). Furthermore, some of the models used by the ECE organizing party are based on quality control systems used in the fields of business and economic; thus, they lack the tools needed to evaluate the content of ECE (Mikkola et al., 2017, p. 37).

The third research aim of the study was to identify the characteristics of shared agency that affect team work. While Sub-study II showed the team members negotiated and shared issues that affected teachers' professional identities and shared learning, Sub-study III showed that team members shared a certain kind of negotiated space towards the future, producing a certain kind of shared agency. This resonates with previous research, which reported that, for groups holding similar goals and experiences, distinct patterns of noting have evolved (e.g. Jacobs, Lamb, & Philipp, 2010). Yet, it is also acknowledged that the ability to learn from one's own or shared

teaching is dependent on one's ability to notice (Star & Strickland, 2008). Noticing is an intentional act that requires metacognition and intentional engagement (Mason, 2011). In order to make complex decisions how to respond to diverse situations during teaching, educators need to make sense of events (Sherin, Jacobs, & Philipp, 2011). Teams with high agency focused more critically on their pedagogical practices, and on the nature of their emotional interactions with children, in other words, children's learning and development. Collaboration appears to be vital for teachers as change agents (van der Heijden, Geldens, Beijaard, & Popeijus, 2015). However, Lord (1994) stressed that a critical stance – more than just sharing ideas or collegial support – is necessary for transforming practice. But being critical and less polite has been found to be difficult for teachers and early childhood educators (Sims & Waningayake, 2015; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). For example Hargreaves (2003) has argued that collective learning should not be confused with homogenisation, but rather differences and debate should be treated as a basis for change and improvement.

Within these results the study shares the view in which the professional development of early childhood educators is conceptualised as a learning process embedded within the working context continuing throughout the career (e.g. Putnam & Borko, 2000). As mentioned before regarding the more private nature of teachers' [educators] professional learning, this study argues that by critically and collectively reflecting upon one's own daily experiences and the underlying implicit dispositions (e.g. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Watts & Lawson, 2009), educators could utilise these as shared learning experiences engaging their colleagues to actively stimulate their reflection (Parsons & Stephenson, 2005). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) pointed out that local joint knowledge construction involves thoughtful critiquing of the research generated by others, both inside and outside of the contexts of practice (p. 2). In order to be a true professional learning community and to change practices demands time and courage to reflect and de-privatise one's actions, but it also demands the knowledge to distinguish between simple and critical reflection (Watts & Lawson, 2009) and a willingness of the community to inquire into a shared problem of practices (Schnellert, Butler, & Higginson, 2008).

Overall, drawing from the results, Sub-study III suggests two implications. First, in order to achieve a high level of shared agency in teams, the team members should be able to focus on and evaluate their own and shared work. In order to be able to change the pedagogical practices and underlying values, educator teams should focus on the aspects of their shared engagement. Do they merely comply with or extend (critically) each other's dispositions. Do their views and values mirror the routinised history of the team or community, or do they look to the future in order to learn and change. The use of video-enhanced reflection may offer a valuable device for teams to rigorously reflect on and evaluate the shared practices and

complex features (various dispositions, temporality and relationality) shaping their agentic space. Second, the leaders of day care centres: (i) should generate a learning community where the cultural structures and norms are reshaped to be supportive of the local knowledge construction within the relations: and (ii) in order to be able to support the shared professional agency of the teams and enhance the collaborative working of the community, the leaders should also be aware of the history in person and the shared history of the team.

Directions for future research

Educators should be supported to take a collaborative inquiry stance and do research from their own community, practices and outcomes in order to acquire knowledge-from-practice. By following the social-constructivist theory of learning, which views professional learning as a social process and knowledge as a social construction, this dissertation argues that the knowledge creation in early childhood education requires not only the professional learning of educators, but also shared, collective learning processes within their professional communities. Learning to change or improve practices requires the engagement of educators. By studying their own work educators could be better empowered to act as change agents, identify issues in their community that affect their learning and well-being and to act for change and improvement in the profession. Within this approach, learning includes reflection and critical investigation, analysis with interpretation and reorganisation of knowledge. This approach to teacher research could be enhanced by collaboration among university researches as facilitators of the project. Because such longitudinal action research implements studies in the form of spiral ongoing action and research, on the same settings or groups over an extended period, such research systematically studies changes over time.

Described by Osborn and McNess (2005), the externally imposed requirements are mediated by the understandings, motivation and capacity of teachers in different contexts, and therefore the required change is unlikely to be achieved by directives and regulations alone. Genuine reform needs to engage and also challenge educators' own values so that they become part of the reform process (Osborn & McNess, 2005, p. 522; Meirink et al., 2009). This is particularly the case now, when the new binding National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2016) requires educators to view and change their practices from wide perspectives. These include, pedagogical and shared teacher leadership and acting as a learning community appreciating children's own active agency. As a result, the early childhood researchers have a task of studying the ideals of the new curriculum implemented at local levels where educators transform them into practices. Admittedly, changing the practices of any system is challenging, and the dispositions, beliefs and implicit cultural routines are mirrored through the actions and decisions educators

make. To truly internalise the new understanding of learning takes time and demands shared values, ideas and collaboration between educators.

Furthermore, the globally increased emphasis on accountability, performativity, evaluation and assessment (e.g. Ball 2003; Ball & Olmedo, 2013) has changed the emphasis from the notion of the “good teacher” to a new assigned social identity with the accent on teacher competencies (Woods & Jeffrey, 2003). Within early childhood education, the element of accountability and its intensification with mounting expectations on the child’s academic performance and testing, affects teachers’ work and identities, creating feelings of incompetence, which imply a fear of not being a good-enough teacher (Madrid & Dunn Kenney, 2010). As Day (2002) argued, “the persisting effect is to erode teachers’ autonomy and challenge teachers’ individual and collective professional and personal identities” (p. 678). These global changes have appeared in a rather short timeframe, and as Paananen (2017) argues, “intensification measures together with the individualistic rights discourse, have substantially challenged the social justice agenda of early childhood education in Finland” (p. 1).

Taken together, there is a need to understand and study the complexities of early childhood education and care (ECEC), especially now under the new and binding requirements of National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care. Regarding the results of this study, it is important to investigate how the staff and the leaders respond to the binding expectancies of the Curriculum, related particularly to: shared professional learning and development of educators; and shared pedagogical development of the community culture. However, as stated above, the staff needs support, such as evaluation materials, and awareness of team processes and how these relate to shared professional development. These could be enhanced by in-service learning with close liason between training and practice in order to embed them into daily ECE practices. Thus, the effectiveness of the kind of targeted practices should also be considered as important topics to study. The term effectiveness refers to understanding that something is working well and producing the intended results. Furthermore, it is also important to examine how the policy changes are brought to practice in diverse municipalities, and in various forms of ECEC (early childhood education in day care centres, day care in private families, around-the-clock-care). In short, we need to understand and find ways how the Finnish ECEC, as part of the child’s growth and development path, can offer equal opportunities to children.

5.2 Implications for early childhood teacher education

As presented, the first research aim of the Sub-study I was to study the shared professional knowledge of early childhood teachers in their daily practices: to investigate the nature and implementation of the shared professional knowledge of early childhood teachers in their daily practices. First, the results showed that joint prac-

tices, beliefs, values and teaching decisions were elusive to put into words, causing feelings of uncertainty. According to Kelchtermans (2009), educator's decisions can be challenged, thus, bringing an element of vulnerability, which is often mediated by the sociocultural context around them (e.g. Kelchtermans, 1996; Lasky, 2005). On the other hand, Jordan and McDaniel (2014) state that uncertainty can support teacher learning by enhancing the reorganisation of beliefs, values and conceptions. Professional growth is a complex phenomenon, generally defined as a change in behaviours, attitudes, and values (Wang, Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2014). From the angle of teacher education, the repeated challenge is to find a way to support pre-service teachers (PTs) to find meaningful connections between practice and theory. It is widely known that pre-service teachers enter teacher education with prior knowledge and beliefs (e.g. Levin, Hammer, & Coffey, 2009; Lortie, 1975), which often unconsciously shape their classroom practice (Levin, He, & Allen, 2013) and influence the way they construct new knowledge (Kagan, 1992). Not infrequently, PTs only reluctantly face pedagogies that challenge their prior beliefs and knowledge (Korthagen & Kessels, 2001) and encourage them to reshape understandings (Leijen, et al., 2015) and reluctant to use reflection to develop their personal and professional qualities (e.g. Clark & Byrnes, 2015). However, PTs' educational journey is a process during which it can be challenging to discern the practices and values enacted unconsciously in daily teaching. Furthermore, systematic reflection is difficult for many pre-service teachers (e.g. Hatton & Smith, 1995). Loughran (2002) recommended "the value of reflection as a meaningful way of approaching learning about teaching" (p. 33), and as a starting point he argued for the importance of the identification of a problem (a puzzling or perplexing situation). It has been posited that an essential feature to fostering early childhood educators' knowledge, skills and dispositions is that they must be given the tools for the practice of reflective thinking (e.g. Leijen & Sööt, 2016; Marzano, Boogren, Heflebower, Kanold-McIntyre, & Pickering, 2012; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Overall, the results of Sub-study I suggest that in order to support the reflective skills of PTs to explicitly explore the knowledge and beliefs they hold, teacher educators should examine how they approach this activity: is it a subject that has been created by the learners (cf. Loughran, 2002)? Furthermore, as Moran (2007) argues, reflective practice shared through the analysis of classroom records and teaching practices may have the collective result of scaffolding the PTs to attempt more complex tasks due to the shared knowledge, decisions to act and responsibility to proceed with the collective (p. 420). Thus, in teacher education, enhancing PTs' relational planning, teaching and reflection with an inquiring stance could enhance the PTs' level of reflectivity, practices, and participation.

The second research aim of the study was to gain a holistic understanding of the negotiated and, thus, shared identities of early childhood teachers. Evident

in Sub-study II was the teachers' desire to engage and participate as full agents, but it was evident as well that they needed colleagues in order to reach their ideals, well-being and a sense of being effective teachers. In other words, they negotiated repeatedly about their socially legitimated professional identity(ies) (e.g. Col-dron & Smith, 1999). This process of professional identity formation begins during pre-service teacher education (Walkington, 2005) and involves both individual and community-level issues to consider (e.g. Bianchini & Cavazos, 2007). In this study the dynamic-shifting process of changing conceptions of oneself, that is, learning about oneself as a teacher, having a certain kind of pedagogical identity in and between professional trajectories, relates to understanding that these negotiations could be enhanced with an understanding of history in person (Holland & Lave, 2001; Wenger, 1998; see also Zembylas, 2003). As this construction of shared identities continues and takes place in early childhood teams, the temporal understandings should be shared within the relationship with PTs and the mentoring teacher. Walkington (2005) argues the need to move beyond a supervision of performance and socialisation during practicums as a reaction to changes in thinking about the role experienced teachers play, from supervising to mentoring, with an emphasis on developing a long-term professional identity. She also suggests that supervising/mentoring teachers "are not always provided with the support they need to provide more than a functionalist approach" (p. 56) (see also Turnbull, 2005). Besides the issues of mentoring, the research literature highlights several pedagogical tools, such as reflective writing, action research, the use of videotaping as a stimulus to reflection and collaborative reflection (e.g. Cattley, 2007; Maclean & White, 2007; Moran, 2007; Bullough et al., 2003; Estola, 2003) to be used in support of PTs' developing professional identities. Hence, the development of identity as professional learning should be enhanced in initial teacher education by supporting PTs to take a stance of prolonged inquiry of one's identity development using guided reflection with pedagogical tools. The purpose of this would be to support their reflective space (Fenton-O'Creavy et al., 2015), as supported by teacher educators and peers. Altogether, by taking notice of Walkington's (2005) criticism as arguing for a closer liaison between universities and the context of the practicums, it could be suggested that: (i) within liaison, it would be possible, without focusing solely on competences, to further develop the shared standards and understandings of the ways of supporting PTs' well-being and learning of one's developing identity; and (ii) the use of various pedagogical tools, both the mentors' (including the team) and the PTs' collaborative inquiry stances could be supported, as there is research evidence that collaborative inquiry promotes reflection skills and a collegial attitude towards sharing problems from daily teaching (e.g. Hagevik, Audeniz, & Rowell, 2012).

The third research aim of the study was to identify the characteristics of shared agency as it affects team-work. Sub-study III showed that educators with

a high level of agency were able to critically and jointly learn from and shape their professional actions. The essential feature from which shared agency emerged was that of the educators' relational involvements and interactions. Agency refers to acts done intentionally (Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015; Bandura, 1997). While acting consciously, one's actions are volitional, self-regulated and more or less goal-oriented, and beliefs of personal efficacy constitute the basis of agency – if people believe they have no power to produce results, they will not attempt to make things happen (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). According to Buchanan (2015), professional agency is reciprocally related to professional identity, i.e. while constructing a contextual understanding of oneself, one takes actions that are believed to align with one's understanding. Consequently, it is vitally important to enhance PTs' emerging professional agency, that is, perceiving oneself as able to act intentionally, make judgements and reflect on the outcomes of professional actions. However, it is also important to bear in mind that people do not lead their lives in isolation, instead they work together, and their shared beliefs in their capabilities to produce outcomes collectively compose a vital component of collective agency (Bandura, 1997). This collective and relational component is an important factor that affects PTs' sense of professional agency (Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). Lipponen and Kumpulainen (2011) emphasised the importance of create interactional spaces in order to enhance PTs' ability for transformative agency. Teachers should perceive, decode and make sense of the semiotic configurations of their workplaces in order to be able to navigate and rely on their professional abilities (Kostogritz & Peeler, 2007). Furthermore, Toom, Pietarinen, Soini and Pyhältö (2017) state that practices allowing PTs to practice and experiment with their professional agency with peer students and teacher educators from the start of their studies are likely to promote their sense of professional agency in the professional community later on in their careers (p. 133). Altogether, the results of Sub-study III showed that educators' individual and shared dispositions, engagement and temporal perspectives created a relational agentic space that mirrors the agentic level of the continuous meaning-making processes of the team. Considering PTs' professional agentic development, the study suggest, consistently with Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of a community of practice, that teacher educators should provide opportunities and tools for PTs to connect research and practice together with in-service educators during practicums. With an inquiring stance, PTs could: be informed and transform their prevailing beliefs, developed during their apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975); transform their participation in communities of practice due to the collegial meaning making; and share the results with peers and educators in teacher education. These agentic experiences, through community partnerships, would also better equip PTs to address the needs of diverse children (e.g. Kennedy & Heineke, 2014; McDonald et al., 2011).

Directions for future research

In recent years, Finnish educational early childhood research has been growing in numbers, focusing mostly on daily practices in day care centres and above all on pedagogy, child development, learning and action (Alasuutari & Raittila, 2017). Moreover, Alasuutari and Raittila (2017) note that the research related to questions of collaboration was modestly represented. In Finnish early childhood education, Onnismaa et al. (2015) have argued that the overall situation in the field of the ECEC has complicated the field-based studies, particularly in terms of PTs' socialisation process into the working culture (p. 206). Having said that, under the new National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2016), the shared pedagogical practices and learning of all community members are emphasised, hence, this is one aspect of shared professional learning and development that should be studied. Viewing the results of the study, and bearing in mind the research evidence of the Finnish ECE field, particularly in relation to challenges of the identity development of new teachers, this study suggests that there is a need to support and explore the reflective abilities of the PTs. Taking such an approach would connect their subjective theories and shared knowledge of practice with their practicum supervisors, as well as promote the study of the capabilities of their teacher educators to support reflective practices in teacher education. As stated by Oberhuemer (2015), an under-researched element in the professional preparation of early childhood PTs has been workplace learning and mentoring practices, as the prevailing focus has been between university campuses and compulsory schools. Thus, there is a growing awareness regarding the small amount of what is known about the learned in the field (Bullough, et al., 2003). Related to learning environment within the practicum Turnbull's (2005) findings "highlight a need for ongoing professional development for associate teachers in order to reflect on their role and to enhance their supervisory skills" (p. 207). As Gelfuso and Dennis (2014) have pointed out, it is important for teacher educators to identify and understand the factors that have an impact on pre-service teachers' reflective practices and find ways to support them. All told, the process of reflection is challenging to facilitate (Gelfuso & Dennis, 2014). Also, besides paying attention to how PTs reflect, teacher educators should focus attention on what PTs reflect on, why they reflect and what transformative learning they have experienced (Liu, 2015).

As stated above, PTs enter teacher education with their prior beliefs, and besides those regarding teaching, they may hold deficit beliefs about students with social backgrounds divergent from his or her own and, thus, viewing them as less capable (Bryan & Atwater, 2002). It is relevant to consider the accumulated knowledge about the differences between novices' and expert teachers' abilities to interpret classroom events, the noticing (perception) and sense-making (interpretation). There is research evidence that the perceptions of educators related to their relationships with children predict children's school engagement and performance (Roorda, Spilt,

& Koomen, 2017). Wolff, Jarodzka and Boshuizen (2017) found that novices report what they see, while experts extend their reporting beyond what is seen, which contributes to the facilitation of learning. They suggest that teacher education could support novice teachers to observe and analyse videos of children's interactional problems by taking expert interpretations into account, thereby giving the novice teachers exposure to experts' thinking (Wolff et al., 2017). In addition, Hiebert, Morris, Berk and Jansen (2007) report that teaching expertise includes planning to learn from teaching (one's own teaching and the teaching of others) and revising practice based on the data collected (pp. 49–50). Thus, they suggest that, in teacher education, the participants focus on and analyse children's learning from their own practice and its impact upon children's development. In this way, PTs could be supported to continuously learn from their own and shared practices.

Bringing it all together and bearing in mind the Finnish early childhood research (e.g. Lipponen et al., 2017; Onnismaa et al., 2017; Onnismaa et al., 2015; Karila & Kupila, 2010; Onnismaa & Kalliala, 2010; Karila, 2008; Kinos, 2008), I suggest that forging a stronger connection between early childhood teacher education and practice as situated in community partnerships might construct a more supportive link between preparation and authentic practice that now exists (e.g. O'Connell Rust, 2010). The suggestions made in this study provide possibilities for early childhood teacher educators to re-consider strategies and ways they could employ in order to support their PTs in developing their conception of teaching, teacher identity and agency in our complex world.

5.3 Implications for policy and practice

This dissertation has focused on the shared professional and educational practices and learning of early childhood educators. It is generally acknowledged that the professional knowledge and development of ECE educators is essential in order to achieve quality ECE outcomes (e.g. Belsky, Vandell, Clarke-Stewart, McCartney, & Owen, 2007; Broekhuizen, Mokrova, Burchinal, & Garret-Peters, 2016; Manning et al., 2017; Seo & Moon, 2013). However, ECE is also social and cultural phenomenon. Hence, as a social organization, ECE is also tied to ideological, political and economic perspectives. Recently, changes have been implemented within Finnish ECE and those have had several effects. The administrative reform in 2013, in which ECE was transferred from social and welfare sector to be a part of the Finnish education system, and the creation of the first binding National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2016) are factors that changed the interpretations related to the duties of ECEC. Now, ECE is viewed first of all as a right of each child and as a first phase of an individual's learning path. Furthermore, the National Core Curriculum is directed by the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (2015),

which emphasises that ECE is a systematic and goal-directed integrated unit of education, teaching and care, particularly its underlining pedagogy. The public discussion related to these reforms have been adversarial and riddled with contradictions, echoing the history of the Finnish ECE and its professional (e.g. Kinos, 1997, 2008) and ideological struggles (e.g. Puroila & Kinnunen, 2017).

One example of economic and political perspectives is the change that occurred through the 2016 Act on Early Childhood Education and Care concerning the subjective right of a child to ECEC. Thus, the municipalities were given the opportunity to decide whether they wanted to limit a child's subjective right to be a maximum of 20 hours per week if a child's parent(s) was unemployed (Puroila & Kinnunen, 2017). Alasuutari, Hautala, Karila, Lammi-Taskula and Repo (2015) note that this decision differs from the approach used in several European countries, and it can be viewed as narrowing the Finnish ideal of universal educational services, which is that every child should have the same opportunities to obtain these services. Thus, in enacting this decision the government made a child's subjective right for ECE dependent upon the place of residence, because not all municipalities used this opportunity. Moreover, in 2016 the municipalities were given the opportunity to increase the adult-child ratio groups consisting of children over the age of 3 (Puroila & Kinnunen, 2017). As Alasuutari et al. (2015) noted, one can ask if these decisions facilitate the universal ideal of educational services.

At the moment, professional struggles have created diverse views in the field of ECE. The historical foundation of this professional dissent can be traced back until to the 1970's, when, due to enactment of the Act on Children's Day Care (367/1973), two different kind of educational routes were allowed. At that time, social services workers were given the right to work in a professional position as kindergarten teachers (e.g. Kinos & Palonen, 2013). In the 1990's, the training of social services workers was transferred under the University of Applied Sciences and the amount of occupational training in the field of social services increased (Alila et al., 2014) leading to the situation in which a vast majority of the ECE staff has a vocational background in the fields of social services or welfare (e.g. Onnismaa et al., 2017). Onnismaa and Tahkokallio (2017) argued that the perspectives of welfare administration and the interests of union's have been emphasised when making decisions about the occupational structure of ECE staff and future occupational training needs. The public discussion related to the second phase of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (2015) continues, especially with regard to clarifying the professional tasks and responsibilities and reforming professional profiles (Karila, Kosonen and Järvenkallas, 2017). From the perspectives of the present study, it is important to clarify the clarification of professional tasks and responsibilities of the multiprofessional ECE staff. This is further elaborated upon the following section.

The results of the present study relate to the current public discussion from several perspectives. The need to clarify the professional tasks and responsibilities was apparent in the findings from Study I and Study II. In particular, it appeared difficult to explicate the shared professional responsibilities. While everything is shared in the multiprofessional teams, the main pedagogical responsibility rests upon teachers. The concept of pedagogical responsibility appeared as challenging to even put into words. However, the idea of leading the pedagogical planning, including actions, was evident to the teachers, but it was expressed more implicitly by highlighting their professional responsibility and vulnerability rather than their status. It can be stressful to justify teacher's professional duties, such as writing the ECEC plans of children and not playing an equally role in daily maintenance, such as cleaning. It is known that the instability or conflicting interpretations of ones' own and shared responsibilities may cause strain, which could impact job-satisfaction and stress (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). The teachers emphasised that it was important for them to be able to reflect on their own teaching with another teacher because it relates to their professional knowledge and duties, as well as their learning and further development. The teachers acknowledged that it was important for them to share their pedagogical questions and understandings; doing so supports their feelings of being engaged in meaningful work and being able to concentrate on and enhance and enhance their basic tasks (e.g. Ylitapio-Mäntylä, Uusautti, & Määttä, 2012).

In particular sharing the professional questions and collaborative development is important to novice ECE teachers when they face the realities and responsibilities of their practice (Jokinen, Markkanen, Teerikorpi, Heikkinen, & Tynjälä, 2012), especially during the phase of vulnerable professional identity development (e.g. Bloomfield, 2010). Initial teacher education serves as a basic level for the development of teacher learning and competence; therefore the following years are regarded as vital for further professional development (e.g. Feiman-Nemser, 2001). As the teachers in Study I asserted, being able to discuss and reflect upon their practice and receiving pedagogical feedback is essential for professional development. Research indicates that a high level of staff training level is positively associated with supporting children's well-being and learning outcomes because it facilitates a more stimulating environment and ensures high-quality pedagogical practices (OECD, 2017). By highlighting the important part of pedagogy in professional learning, this study supports Karila, Kosonen and Järvenkallas' (2017) proposition that at least 40% of multiprofessional staff should be university-based, pedagogically educated ECE teachers. This view is also in line with The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2016), in which pedagogical expertise is expressed as being a prerequisite for the pedagogically unity of ECEC.

Study II indicated that the early childhood practices are negotiated and considered through prevailing power relations that are constructed in the team. The different perspectives may culminate as tensions between one's personal pedagogical ideals and the embedded ways of the multiprofessional community. Holland et al. (2001) argued that the self [of the educator] is "embedded in social practice, and is itself, a kind of social practice" (p. 28). The power struggles over the realms of conflicting interpretations decreased the teachers' sense of self-efficacy, which is an internalized evaluation of self (Bandura, 1997), and limited the teachers' agency, participation and level of engagement. Indeed, an individual it is more likely to give up when encountering difficulties if his/her actions are believed to be incongruent with his/her identity (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). The notion of power play is connected to the observations reported by Karila and Kupila (2010) regarding the conflicting understandings and concepts of the ECE practices and goals held by different generations of educators. Thus, in this respect, the self-evaluation and team evaluation emphasised in *The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care* (2016) might both unpack the pedagogical tensions and strengthen the professional identity and agentic "voice" of novice teachers in the cultural realms of ECE interpretations.

Study III revealed that the shared agency of early childhood educators is an important part of sustaining and developing quality ECE. The engagement and interplay between individual and collective reflection and negotiation within the team indicated that group dialogue played an important role to play in assisting educators in identifying and thinking about their beliefs and pedagogy. As previously mentioned, it is challenging for early childhood educators to reflect on and articulate about the beliefs and educational theories underpinning their practice (Stephen, 2010; Wood & Bennett, 2000). Furthermore, it is challenging for educators who have an intuitive way of approaching their teaching to express their teaching intentions, pedagogical instructions and behaviors (Stephen, 2010). Focus on learning and in particular, on reflective dialogue requires educators to express their teaching and to collaborate in order to improve these practices (e.g. Katz & Earl, 2010). Furthermore, as Moss (2010) argued, the profession cannot be looked upon as providing an objective true body of knowledge. Rather, to be professional means having the capability to construct knowledge from diverse sources while also being aware of paradigmatic plurality and understanding that knowledge is always partial; it holds a particular perspective and is situated in a specific time (Moss, 2010, p. 15). Professional discussion and collaborative learning takes time and requires space in which educators can engage in dialogue. By increasing the adult-child ratio, policymakers increased the complexities of everyday practices in ECE. This had an impact on the development of aspects of the familiar daily practices of ECE and the professional learning of ECE educators.

5.4 Concluding thoughts and remarks

These concluding remarks more clearly address the practical concerns related to the professional learning of early childhood educators. Based on the aforementioned historical background and the demands placed by policymakers, this multiprofessional working context as a community, faces new pedagogical and learning expectations. The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (2016) emphasises that educators' self-evaluation of their professional development is an essential part of evaluating the quality of ECE. Both goal-directed and systematic self-evaluation have been characterized as being essential for sustaining and developing the quality of ECEC. Furthermore, the nature of interaction between children and staff, the atmosphere in the team, pedagogical practices, the content of practice and learning environments are identified as being areas for staff evaluation (The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2016, p. 60.) These new expectations, both targeted in an effort to support the professional learning of ECE educators and to enhance the quality of ECE outcomes, are placed on the fragmented professional field of ECE. Fragmented, that is, when the different forms of ECE (ECEC centres, family day care, or another forms of ECEC such as club and play activities) are being considered from the perspective of professional knowledge and learning. Thus, the study's results can raise several concerns about the professional learning communities of ECE.

The first concern relates to the nature of multiprofessional working and learning cultures of ECE communities. As Study I indicated, the teachers' shared learning appeared to be situational; the individual learning was situated in practice and remained mostly implicit. From this perspective, the emphasis of learning communities being at the heart of the culture of activities (The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education, 2016, p.29) can be challenging, especially the learning community viewed as the level of day care centre, or more precisely, as a collective capacity or capital of ECE community. Emerging models of professional learning generally perceive that meaningful changes in practices are supported by engaging educators collaboratively in situated inquiry-based activities, and by critically examining their every-day practices (e.g. Horn & Little, 2010; Schnellert, Butler, & Higginson, 2008). In order to flourish in their hectic daily practices, this kind of goal-oriented, time consuming effort requires shared willingness, trust and leadership that support organizational conditions conducive to shared learning (e.g. Van Driel et al., 2012). Inconsistent policy decisions, such as increased child-staff ratio, have increased the complexities within daily ECE practices; however, there is research acknowledging that child-staff ratios are one of the key quality indicators in ECEC (e.g. Burchinal et al., 2000). The child-staff ratio in relation to factors, such as group size, has been associated with higher quality experiences for children,

such as an increase in the amount of individualized interplay between children and adults (e.g. Howes & Hamilton, 1993). Furthermore, because the understanding of children's needs has shifted, children are considered to be social, active agents and, so taking their perspectives requires educators to change and align the dispositions and understandings with children's interests and life worlds (Lipponen et al., 2017).

However, research indicates that, to a large extent, educators' beliefs or "implicit theories" about teaching, including instructions, might have been shaped largely by values and experiences which have been culturally shared (e.g. Lortie, 1975). It has also been reported that educators' beliefs about teaching tend to change slowly (Pajares, 1992). This inclination might prevent their willingness to use new teaching practices that enhance the development of intra- and interpersonal processes (Khader, 2012). According to Khader (2012), even though teachers' beliefs may change, their practices often do not; the lack of professional development and administrative support is one factor that is partially responsible for this lack of congruence between teachers' beliefs and practices. Furthermore, these culturally shared beliefs often guide the decisions of educators, and may have an effect on many practices, such as the degree of autonomy of children (Stipek, Givvin, Salmon, & MacGyvers, 2001).

In The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2016), pedagogy and pedagogical methods are emphasised, and it is noted that educators should also be able to give pedagogical justifications for all the methods they apply (p. 28). In this situation, educators are required to exert their agency in practice, study their own beliefs and practices and discuss and reflect upon their actions. In other words, their meaning-making involves learning, and the quality of it is an integral part of their own development as educators. Thus, a paradigm shift has occurred in both the curriculum and practices of ECE. According to Zeichner (1983), the inquiry-oriented paradigm emphasises the development of educators' capacity for reflective action in the contexts in which teaching is carried out. This shift raises the question: How is this inquiry-oriented ECE enhanced in the practices? Are the educators supported collectively at the community level to study their teaching practice and their underlying values as an ongoing process? Are they given resources (such as time and space for both in-teaching practices, such as interactional situations with children and colleagues, and out-of-teaching contexts, such as multiprofessional team meetings for planning and discussion)? Are they motivated, autonomous professionals or merely deliverers of the curriculum? How are educators supported in their efforts to explicate and share their practical learning and embedded routines in the teams and among different teams?

The second concern relates to the question of how educators' professional identities and agencies as knowledgeable professionals are sustained and enhanced in everyday practices, particularly in terms of influencing their own development over the course of their careers. What I try to underline is that educators should be

able to participate, in addition to community-based situated learning, also to organised in-service learning, in order to update one's profound knowledge and expertise. Although collaboration with action and learning is a highly endorsed feature of continuing professional development, Clement and Vanderberge (2000) noted that it should be balanced by combining autonomy and collegiality, thus, providing educators access to personalised in-service training. The personalised individual development plans are tools that educators can use to verify their on-going professional competencies, skills and learning. Eskelinen & Hjelt (2017) noted that this practice varies in ECE. However, in primary education more and more teachers have this done (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017:2). Furthermore, these plans are connected to unit level development planning and to the strategic planning done by municipalities. Because municipalities in Finland have an extensive autonomy, using this strategic planning materials is voluntary (Johnson, Laukkanen, Lehmusvaara, & Rinkinen, 2016). Hence, "verifying" one's competencies and further planning could enhance educators' professional identities, which can be challenged in cases of educational change (e.g. Beijaard et al., 2004). Indeed, teacher satisfaction is an important determinant of occupational success, teacher retention (e.g. Ingersoll, 2001, Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011), burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009) and job stress (Klassen, Usher, & Bong, 2010). Moreover, Klassen et al. (2010) highlighted the importance of collective motivation as a source of individual job satisfaction. Thus, clarifying the professional responsibilities and the shared and individual learning goals, leaders of day care centres could enhance collaborative and individual learning, collective and individual motivation and community's collective capacity to effect change (see also Postholm & Waege, 2016).

The third concern relates to the second one, namely as equality and quality of the in-service training. Should the professional learning of educators' be strategically planned, based on surveys of educational training needs? Furthermore, could this be organised collaboratively in regional networks? If it will be possible to complement an individual's educational degree, then the regional collaboration with universities could be an on-going and fruitful effort. However, in order to be able to offer educators the tools they need to update professional competence, the system of educational degrees (qualifications) and curricula of universities should be evaluated and updated. In short, in order to provide children with equal opportunities to attend quality ECEC, it is necessary to provide equal opportunities for educators to up-date their professional knowledge and skills. It is known, that embedding what has been learnt outside of working contexts into the instructional daily practices is challenging (e.g. Knight et al., 2006), and therefore, there needs to be further innovation supporting this transition from individual learning to community knowledge and quality practices.

The fourth and last concern focuses on the learning of pre-service teachers and shared learning of the community. Walkington (2005) suggested that it is im-

portant to move beyond a supervision of performance, to mentoring, which would require a shift in the role that experienced teachers play during practicums (see also Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014; Hoffman et al., 2015). However, Walkington (2005) also explicated the need to support the expert supervising/mentoring teachers by establishing close liaisons between universities and the context of those practicums. Reflective skills and collegial attitudes towards sharing problems from daily teaching could be better supported by enhancing inquiry-based learning between a supervising/mentoring teacher and a pre-service teacher. This kind of process may also enhance the participation of pre-service student as engaged agents. However, reforming the learning community might be challenging; for example, the pressure to change can cause internal tensions and the resources to enact that change might be scarce. From my perspective, this change also means a change within teacher education. Unless close liaisons are established between universities and ECE contexts – within practicums and in-service training – the paradigmatic reform would only be cosmetic or rhetorical, placing new demands for teachers to adopt new concepts. In particular, as previously mentioned, the internal culture and the quality of a day care centre are relational and dependent on the daily practices, values, beliefs, and understandings held and acted upon by the staff. Social interaction between adults and children consists of a combination of various interpretations, which, in the context of hectic daily practices, can be more or less routinely followed. Routines are important, they are usually implicit. They are more elusive to put into words. By embracing professional learning and reflection and by changing practices, multiprofessional communities can improve their pedagogical practices and avoid prescribed curricula. These communities can establish liaisons between pre-service teachers working with in-service teachers as their mentors, rather than as supervisors, thereby encouraging an inquiry stance within collaborative professional learning. These types of communities foster professional shared agency and engage the participation of everyone involved.

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